

The Landscape in Art After Landscape Painting:

Junk as a Cultural Commodity, The Wasteland as a Future Quarry

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Abstract

Dedicated to a greater understanding of nature and the human condition *The Landscape in Art After Landscape Painting* is centred around a disciplinary critique of the value placed on nature perpetuated by outdated tropes presented within landscape painting. Engaging with the contemporary discourse of the natural world, the landscape is used in this thesis as a vehicle to understand how we relate to and interact with nature in a contemporary sense. The research undertaken collaborates the discourse of landscape painting, junk as a cultural commodity, and ecocriticism. Ecocriticism involves a close analysis of the language associated with ‘nature’—aiming to dismantle problematic ideologies including its oversimplification as an entity in opposition to man. This also includes the critique of unconstrained individualism heavily adopted within Modernism. To contend with this outdated dogma, this thesis explores the writing of four key figures: Jeffrey Deitch, Timothy Morton, Donna Haraway and Lea Vergine. Each philosopher has their own significant role to play in understanding the paradoxical characteristics of nature in contemporary history. Concepts introduced by these figures include ‘post-natural nature’, ‘ecomimesis’, the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, Chthulucene entropy and refuse.

It is the poetic use of junk, trash, refuse and the wasteland which arises as the common thread in elaborating my hypothesis of nature. The inherent presence of trash in the landscape stands for another marker in dissolving nostalgic ideologies of object and subject. Trash moves beyond ideology to stand for inclusion. Junk as a cultural commodity in art becomes an actant for cultural critique, with the power to reflect current philosophies of thought including kinship and interconnectivity. Born from this hypothesis is a personal fascination with waste, plastic in particular, as a transformative painterly medium. By transforming plastic into objects found in the landscape I am able to utilise a man-made material as a platform to challenge old ideas regarding the natural world including misrepresented sentiments of ‘wilderness’ and the ‘pristine’.

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Nature yields no dividends; it contains the entire economy of every species. Nature needs no home; it is home. We can have no deficit of nature; we are nature, even when we are unaware of this nature. With this understanding that humans belong in this world, discernment of the beautiful and the good can emerge from human minds networked within the community of life, not human minds peering in from outside.

— George Haskell

Introduction

My practice is led by an inquiry—a long and unending search for a paradoxical answer to the question ‘*what is nature*’? This question originally came to me along with a sense of mourning. Since I can remember, I have witnessed the loss of natural habitat to suburban land development. The decimation of forests and wetlands to make way for bitumen, steel and concrete became an inescapable constant. Every day I yearn for tall gums, stretches of untouched grassland and the chorus of cicadas. Instead, I am greeted by the cool mildew cast by the shadow of high rises, the vast expanse of suburbia and the caustic gas oozing from the one-billion cars on earth. In a long search for resolve and consolation for the eradication of ‘nature’, I am reminded of the words of Bill Gammage: “*there was no wilderness*”¹. In some way these four words have brought me solace; they release me from the grip of devastation and propel me to a greater understanding for the need to explore the contemporary landscape and to dispel my own romantic idealisation of nature. Rather than grieve the loss of habitat and ecology, I am able to revel in a landscape that encapsulates the flux of living and nonliving things, artificiality, the organic and the symbiotic codependency of humans and nature. By focusing on the interaction of these subjects, there is a potential to generate new contemporary landscapes.

In this thesis, I use the phrase ‘After Landscape Painting’ this is not stating that painting no longer exists, nor that it is no longer valid. However it is merely an extension of American art theorist Arthur Danto’s treatise “*The End of Art*”²— meaning art, nor painting ceases to exist, but new forms of art, including landscape painting emerges and surpasses outdated representations and traditions³. This argument also includes the return of art making to what Danto describes as “ a more stable, more happy period of artistic endeavour where the basic needs to which art has always been responsive may again be met,”⁴—in the case of this thesis that endeavour is the pursuit of nature’s truths.

¹ Gammage, Bill. *The Biggest Estate on Earth : How Aborigines Made Australia*, 2012, Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2.

² Arthur C. Danto: "The End of Art" published in a collection of essays entitled *The Death of Art*, ed. by Berel Lang, New York, 1984, 31.

³ Danto, Arthur C, Gregg Horowitz, and Tom Huhn. 1998. *The Wake of Art: Essays: Criticism, Philosophy and the Ends of Taste*. Australia: G+B Arts Int’l. from *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 80.

⁴ Danto, Arthur C. 2005. *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 80.

In order to understand the contemporary landscape it is essential to explore the changing philosophical discourse of nature. The evolution of philosophical thought in regards to nature has recently shifted from the division of man and nature, to one that absorbs both humans and artificiality and nurtures thoughts of kinship and compassion. The first chapter of this thesis will discuss the theory involved in dismantling problematic dogma associated with nature and natural landscapes, which had largely dominated art history, often resulting in their oversimplification and implied existence as one in opposition to man. Known as Ecocriticism, these theories centre around the critique of romantic sentiments through both language and aesthetics. In particular, this involves the synthesis of art history, ecology and philosophy. Focusing on unpacking sentimentality and nostalgia for the natural landscape theories of ‘*Post-Natural Nature*’⁵ and ‘*Ecomimesis*’⁶ are introduced. Seeking the answers to nature’s truths American critic Jeffrey Deitch and theorist Timothy Morton introduce virtual reality and the wasteland as evolutionary new landscapes that reflect the current epoch of human development in the Anthropocene⁷. In an attempt to expand on these theories a cautionary tale is told by philosopher Donna Haraway, who suggests that there is a fatal flaw in accepting what many historians would call the Anthropocene. Unlike Deitch and Morton, Haraway refuses to accept the capitalist/fatalist destruction of nature, as a natural phenomenon⁸. Alternatively Haraway suggests that the inability to separate capitalist, patriarchal ideology from philosophical thought and art making remains a roadblock to acknowledging other ways of thinking about the nonhuman, outside of the typical separatist viewpoint. Instead she offers

⁵ Post-natural nature is a term used by Deitch that refers to an environment that may no longer be possible to describe as natural. This is due to the intervention of aggressive land development, as well as the environments formed within virtual reality.

⁶ Derived from the words ‘ecology’ meaning the relationships between organisms and ‘mimesis’ meaning copy. As defined by Timothy Morton, ecomimesis is an acknowledgment of the act of making art, or literature by an author as an act of natural phenomenon. See Morton, Timothy, 2009, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Defined by scientists Paul J. Crutzen, Will Steffen and John R. McNeil, the Anthropocene is suggested to be the current epoch of Earth’s history defined by the geological impact humans have had on the Earth since industrialisation, making humans a “geophysical force” of their own. The premise of the Anthropocene is widely refuted by scientists, historians and philosophers. See Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. 2007. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature.” *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 36 (8): 614–21. [https://doi.org/10.1579/0044-7447\(2007\)36\[614:taahno\]2.0.co;2](https://doi.org/10.1579/0044-7447(2007)36[614:taahno]2.0.co;2).

⁸ Haraway, Donna Jeanne, 2016, *Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene* / Donna J. Haraway. *Experimental Futures*, 39.

a solution through the embrace of kinship and compassion in the '*Chthulucene*'⁹ and the role of the '*Artist-Scientist*'¹⁰ to foster a positive future on Earth. To reaffirm the role of art in this critique Italian critic Lea Vergine recounts how artists have historically interacted with trash in order to reflect the philosophical relationship between man, the landscape and nature. The conversation established between Deitch, Morton, Haraway and Vergine ultimately cultivates new ways of understanding the landscape in art after landscape painting.

Chapter 2 endeavours to highlight the role artists play in dismantling outdated concepts of the 'natural' by reflecting on the chaotic patterns of war, globalisation and capitalisation. The first section of this chapter pares colonial artist Eugene Von Guérard with contemporary Australian philosopher Bill Gammage. In the analysis of Guérard's work Gammage highlights two things; 1. the relentless romanticisation of nature and ecology for the intent to subjugate and exploit for capital gain, and 2. Guérard's practice stands as proof that the Australian Landscape was a cultivated landscape pre-colonisation—his work also acts as marker for understanding the relationship shared between nature and man symbiotically for time immemorial. The final two segments of Chapter 2 focus on the artistic practice of Mario Merz and Robert Smithson. In order to challenge the traditions of landscape painting both artists profess to the inadequacies of painting in truly representing contemporary landscapes and philosophies of nature and culture. Instead, the introduction of space beyond the gallery to include '*nonsites*'¹¹, '*entropic-sites*'¹² and '*poor*'¹³ material would be key to uncovering new ways to represent a truly contemporary landscape in art. This chapter firmly establishes junk and the wasteland as devices for artists to critique the canons of art making and the institutions that perpetuate them, and presents a true reflection of the landscapes of postwar Europe and the US.

⁹ The *Chthulucene* is a term devised by Haraway – a derivative of the Greek word *Chthulu*, meaning tentacular or many arms/legs. The *Chthulucene* revises the Anthropocene through an optimistic lens where humans have the ability to see beyond the negative connotations of extinction and exploitation and extend their abilities or, metaphorical tentacles, to find new ways to relate to nature and work with it into the future.

¹⁰ Defined by Haraway the Artist-Scientist adopts a practice of making by artists which combines both artistic and scientific pursuits to analyse, reflect and take positive action against the negative outcomes of the Anthropocene.

¹¹ Defined by Smithson the 'nonsite' was an area from which organic materials were collected as the 'site', while the indoor placement of the materials is the 'nonsite'.

¹² Similarly Smithson defines an 'entropic-site' as a site which emulates the chaotic nature of industry, capitalism and nature.

¹³ In this instance the 'poor' material refers to the use of junk, refuse and detritus adopted by the 1960's Italian movement *Arte Povera* translated as Poor Art.

Continuing an inquiry into artistic practice Chapter 3 looks to contemporary artists Janet Laurence, Julie Mehretu and Marian Tubbs. Not much has changed with the turn of the 20th Century to the 21st – war, capitalisation and industry are unshakable trends that diminish the natural world. An overwhelming sense of grief cloaks the practice of many artists, including Laurence and Tubbs, when they represent the landscape in their art. The disappearance of forests, estuaries and reefs consumes Laurence’s practice, in which *wunderkammers*¹⁴ no longer symbolise treasure-troves, but rather coffins or mausoleums for the already or soon to be extinct. The disappearance of ‘natural environments’ as we understand them often dictate an artist’s practice when living on the edge of global ecological disaster—the rise of global sea levels and temperatures leading to mass extinction. Refreshingly artists like Mehretu and Tubbs offer a critique of this bleak view in the embrace of new representations, including the marriage of abstraction and representation, as well as the mixing of material qualities such as the virtual, the synthetic and the organic. They are careful not to surrender to nostalgia, nor to the idealisation of certain landscapes that insight romantic pursuits. Instead, they are happy to foster a symbiotic kinship with the varied landscapes that exist.

Paradoxically, I am faced with a selfish nostalgia for untouched ‘natural’ landscapes. The memory of these environments are etched into my mind, yet I find the poetic meeting of synthetic and organic things in the landscape just as significant and meaningful. My practice then, is bred from nostalgia and optimism nurtured by the freedom of artistic expression, the dismantling of Modernist idealisation and the philosophical discourse of nature. How, then, will I find my way? Chapter 4 is the culmination of my theoretical and practical research. It is in this chapter that my practice recognises and establishes the potential of plastic as an artistic medium that echoes the current state of the discourse on nature – the intermingled flux of synthetic and organic matter and life. As plastic is found abundantly in all contemporary landscapes, sourcing plastic is simple. Plastic becomes synonymous with nature—like flowers in the spring, plastic is abundant and gathers wherever there is life.

¹⁴ Translated from German to mean Cabinet of Curiosities traditionally housing objects and specimens of natural history.

Chapter 1

The Landscape in Art After Landscape Painting

Landscape painting pointed to the flexibility of the human mind, for artists are always altering their ideas about their environment to suit the philosophical and psychological needs of the day. Their temperaments, and their skills, provide a unique record, partly poetic, partly scientific, of the way in which we see the world around us.¹⁵

— Bo Jeffares

Historian Bo Jeffares expresses the importance of landscape painting through its ability to reveal the trajectory of thought regarding the physical and philosophical relationship shared between man and nature. However in an age where a landscape may be real, virtual, natural, synthetic, industrial or a combination of all at once, representing the landscape in painterly traditions can seem futile; not only due to its physical limitations, but the limitations of painting to truly act as a copy. Not only this, but when Danto advocated for the end of art history in 1984, he encouraged art to surpass its Modernist preoccupation as solely “the object of its own theoretical consciousness”¹⁶. Contrary to Modernist preoccupation Suzi Gablik suggests Danto wished for art to enter “a new realm that is characterised by non-patriarchal, non-Eurocentric ideals”¹⁷.

Through a close analysis and criticism of language regarding nature and ecology, known as Ecocriticism, this chapter attempts to reveal new philosophical challenges to Modernist idealisations of individualism including Deitch’s definition of ‘Post-Natural Nature’ in his curatorial essay *After Nature*, as well as Morton’s theories on Romantic Irony and Ecomimesis in *Ecology Without*

¹⁵ Jeffares, Bo, 1979, *Landscape Painting*, Oxford, UK: Phaidon Press Limited, 5.

¹⁶ Arthur C. Danto: "The End of Art" published in a collection of essays entitled *The Death of Art*, ed. by Berel Lang, New York, 1984, 31.

¹⁷ Gablik, Suzi. 2002. *The Reenchantment of Art*. London: Thames And Hudson, 168.

Nature: Reframing Environmental Aesthetics. Additionally, Haraway suggests solutions to acquiring a greater understanding of ecology by embracing empathy, kinship and the ‘Artist-Scientist’ in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Finally, Vergine, curator of *TRASH from Junk to Art*, considers the potency of trash as an artistic medium and mirror of the landscape. Overall, this chapter aims to harness the poetic and philosophical extension of man’s place in the landscape by exploring his or her relationship with nature through mediums beyond the canons of paint and into trash.

1.1 Artificial Nature & Ecomimesis: A Contemporary discourse of the ‘Natural’

The evolution of philosophical thought in regards to nature can largely be traced through the history of landscape painting. Until the 21st Century, paintings of the landscape were a reflection of a world entrenched in religious dogma. From Lorenzetti to Malevich, representing the landscape was dedicated to the Sublime¹⁸ forces underlying nature’s existence. However, in an increasingly synthetic world the Sublime qualities of a landscape no longer rest in the power of God-like natural forces, but instead, in the advancements of technology and capital expansion. As American curator and critic Deitch suggests in his curatorial essay *After Nature*, the impact of virtual reality and technology on the landscape reveals a new and evermore turbulent relationship between man and nature—one that blurs the lines between synthetic, organic, human and nonhuman. Collating a dozen seminal artists, including Robert Smithson, Jeff Koons, Liz Larner and Ashley Bikerton, whom identified as Postmodernists, the 1990 exhibition aimed to;

*Demonstrate the problems caused by changes in the relationship between man and nature, which lead to his [or her] isolation. It examines the changes brought upon our conscience by the conversion of the natural environment into the artificial and the changes that derive from developments in science and computers, all while a consumerist culture is developing.*¹⁹

¹⁸ In this instance I use the word ‘Sublime’ in reference to Kantian and Burckian aesthetics. The Sublime being something beyond comprehension and beyond measurement.

¹⁹ Deitch, Jeffery. 1990. “Artificial Nature.” Deitch.Com. 1990. <http://www.deitch.com/about/curatorial/artificial-nature>.

Deitch acknowledges that nature and art ‘have always been seen as functions which are inextricably bound’²⁰. Nature being the ‘nutritive force’ of ‘ultimate inspiration’ that stimulates artists seeking to imitate, improve or interpret it. In turn, this art acts as a reflection of the philosophical and psychological understanding of nature at the time²¹. With the advent of advanced genetics, artificial intelligence and vigorous real estate development, Deitch questions the ability of artists of the 20th Century to reflect on nature, as mans’ relationship to the ‘natural’ landscape dissolves through the beginning of consumerist culture and artificiality. He believes that the Postmodern artist confronts a “Post-Natural Nature”²², whereby “to immerse oneself in nature today is to uncover layers of chaotic exploration and man-made improvements”²³. Deitch suggests that “a truly contemporary artist might be better advised to seek truth in nature in a strip mine or in the visitors centre of a game reserve”²⁴, rather than a national park or the depths of the Amazon. Deitch argues that what humans had known to be nature, or the natural, is something lost—what is left is something highly contrived, synthesised, and anthropomorphised.

In order to see a glimpse of what Deitch may consider an exemplar of contemporary landscape, he suggests that nature exists within new models – for example, in virtual reality, or within the mildew of human excess—the wasteland. Deitch understands that the wasteland presents itself as a fusion of both organic and artificial matter; scooped, piled, squished, and buried together to reveal the truths that nature is strictly bound alongside man and matter. Moreover, the Postmodern condition becomes a departure from Modernist principals (including individualism and divinity) as the artist may dismiss object/subject dichotomies, while accepting new and expansive ways of thinking about and representing nature. This includes the acknowledgement of a new epoch developing in Earth’s history known as the Anthropocene. The anthropomorphising of Earth’s geology, including the manipulation of land and sea mass to suit human enterprise, has led scientists, historians, philosophers, and artists alike to speculate the defining qualities of this period in time, which either stands to reestablish an opposition to nature or reaffirm man’s place on Earth as no different to the geological traces left behind by dinosaurs of the Mesozoic. Suddenly, we see the expansion of the Postmodern into the Post-Natural, not in discounting nature’s existence, but where we begin to acknowledge our symbiotic relationship to all things on Earth.

²⁰ Deitch, Jeffrey. 1990. *Artificial Nature*. Athens: Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, 45.

²¹ Deitch, *Artificial Nature*, 45.

²² Deitch, *Artificial Nature*, 76.

²³ Deitch, *Artificial Nature*, 71.

²⁴ Deitch, *Artificial Nature*, 71.

To establish a concrete understanding of how to dissolve the prejudices between the human and nonhuman, contemporary American philosopher Timothy Morton speaks of the paradoxes of nature as defined by aesthetics and language in *Ecology Without Nature: Reframing Environmental Aesthetics*. Morton seeks to reveal the problems associated with traditional literary and visual representations of nature as they stand for “road blocks”²⁵ to progressive thinking about ecology²⁶. Morton, like Deitch, suggests that the preservation of the so-called ‘natural’ prevents a recognition of the true form of nature. To have a properly ecological view— we must relinquish the idea of ‘nature’ or the ‘natural’ once and for all and accept human expansion, habitat destruction and human extinction as part of a larger ecological system. For Morton, language is considered insufficient to describe nature, as it prescribes sets of values to certain objects that include or seclude particular things, whereas nature rejects prejudice, and places the same value on everything found within it; grass, trees, sky, lightbulb, veneers, toast, tyres.²⁷ This metonymic list of things, Morton argues, exemplifies how nature is, in fact, a “transcendental term in a material mask”²⁸—as just when it brings us into proximity as one thing “nature reestablishes a comfortable distance between “us” and “them”²⁹, and through language, we only discover “how nature always slips out of reach in the very act of grasping it”³⁰. In an attempt to escape from this paradoxical conundrum, Morton suggests we have to acknowledge that literature and art have not yet departed from Romanticism, and therefore, in turn, Modernism, but remains entrenched in such canons. However, Morton suggests that Romanticism now stands to correct dualistic oppositions in hindsight;

The function of Romantic irony is to show how far the narrator, who is thought to sit sideways to his or her narrative, is actually dissolved in it, part of it, indistinguishable from it.

Essentially Romanticism, as well as Modernism aimed to correct the idealisation of nature through the evocation of sensation as opposed to representation—which resulted in the understanding that nature is an abstraction via personal representation. Artist Reneè Magrite (b.1898) painting *The*

²⁵ Morton, Timothy, 2009, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 14.

²⁶ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 14.

²⁷ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 14.

²⁸ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 14.

²⁹ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 14.

³⁰ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 19.

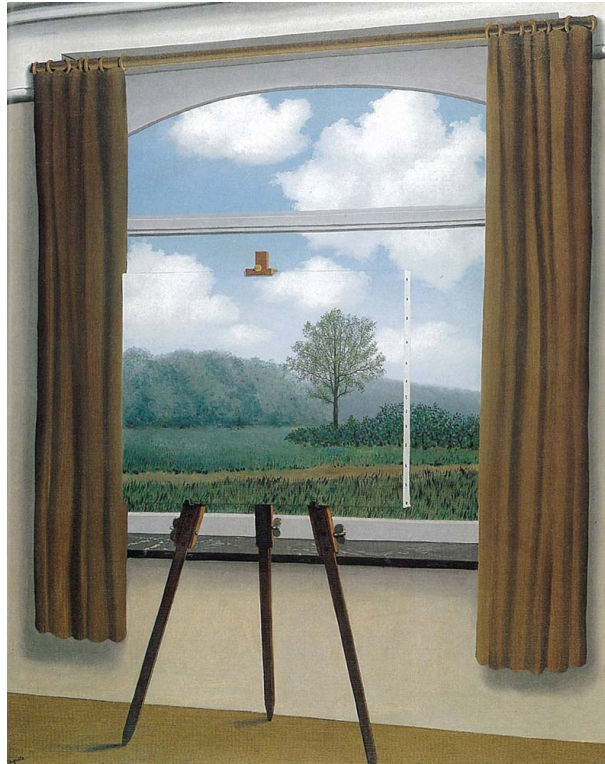


Fig. 1 Reneè Magrite, *The Human Condition*, 1935, oil on canvas, 100 x 81cm

Human Condition in 1935 [Figure 1] acknowledged painting as a subjective task involved in the ecology of nature including the existence of man and our incessant urge to replicate nature in art.

To reconcile this with contemporary thought, Morton acknowledges the importance of art as; “above all else, for it is in art that the fantasies we have about nature take shape and dissolve”³¹. Morton professes; “thus is born the special realms of art and nature, the new secular churches in which subject and object can be remarried.”³² Morton suggests that in creating art we find a place where the subject and object can join together poetically to reveal only that both belong to each-other and are one-in-the-same to nature within ecological systems. This insight is what Morton defines as “Ecomimesis”³³ where the act of man painting becomes intangible from any other action found in nature, like that of a bee collecting honey, or a bower bird constructing a nest. Morton translates ecomimesis loosely as the imitation of life, of organisms, of everything, in order to piece together a new understanding of our ecology and our contemporary landscape. He professes that “Ecomimesis wants us to forget or lay aside the subject-object dualism,”³⁴ and bathe in our dark

³¹ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 1.

³² Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 22.

³³ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 151.

³⁴ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 151.

ecology, which includes both synthetic and organic matter. Morton acknowledges the recurrent Romantic fantasy we indulge in when regarding nature, but does so only to specify our implicit immersion into it. As for creating art, it may be no different to an act of making trash where nature and Morton is concerned.

Morton's marries Ecocriticism with art and aesthetics to highlight that the very act of representing the landscape is an act of nature itself, and by establishing this understanding, or by coming face-to-face with it, artists finally make a departure from outdated dualisms. This means embracing all that is different and similar to man: order, chaos, synthetic, organic, diamonds, toxic waste. Morton also accepts global extinction as apart of this process; "we choose this poisoned ground. We will be equal to this senseless actuality"³⁵. Morton moves beyond Romantic sentiment to reduce any relationship with nature as a mere reflection of ecology. This means, to truly accept nature for what it is, we must wholeheartedly accept the decimation of forests and the eradication of species, including human life, on Earth. Although this concept may seem refreshingly existentialist Morton's theories seem to release any human endeavour—including the pursuit of a greater understanding of ecology for the sustainability of ecosystems—from meaning or importance. Sentimentality is rejected to the point of fruitless disregard for anything other than human expansion. Morton simultaneously emancipates nature from dogma and yet condemns, dismembers and dissolves nature with paternalistic pro-capitalist anti-sentiments, which seems to have brought us to this place before. So, what for the alternative?

1.2 Sympoiesis & Compassionate Trash: The Artist-Scientist & Junk with Meaning

In opposition to Morton, Haraway believes that it is the fatalism practiced by Morton, and those who accept the term Anthropocene, who remain as obstacles to progressive thinking. Haraway suggests that by accepting capitalist exploitation as an act absorbed into ecology re-impregnates contemporary thought with patriarchal, capitalist polarities. And in doing so the Anthropocene is essentially s Modernist term. In her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Haraway suggests that in order to break free from this pattern of paternalist subjugation we must accept new ways of seeing and representing nature beyond masculinity and eurocentrism³⁶, and into symbiosis and kinship. To extrapolate on concepts of the Anthropocence and the inadequacy of

³⁵ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 151.

³⁶ Haraway, D. (2018). Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble", 5/9/14. [online] Vimeo. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/97663518> [Accessed 1 May 2018].

patriarchal thought, Haraway uses the culmination of research of SF – String Figures, Science Fact, Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, Speculative Feminism, and So Far.³⁷ As well as the particular relationships formed in biology and sociology, which contradict concepts of the Anthropocene to contemplate new and more appropriate titles including the Capitalocene and the Chthulucene³⁸. Haraway defines these terms as follows. *The Capitalocene*: a landscape sculpted by Capitalist colonisation of non-European nations, previously and currently practiced. And *nurturing a future practice of The Chthulucene*: a landscape nurtured by the progress of knowledge and kinship between human, animal, and the artificial. The *Chthulucene* refers to “Tentacular Thinking,”³⁹ asking us to reimagine our current paradigm through the connections we have with other species rather than the differences, or in other words thinking rhizomatically through connections, not the connected. Anthropologist Devin Proctor deduces that thinking this way turns us away from the concept of bounded individualism—the crux of Haraway’s rejection of the label *Anthropocene*⁴⁰ rather than ignoring the multitudes of life on Earth, which are neglected in arguments supporting the Anthropocene. Haraway points out that the Anthropocene hubristically⁴¹ frames recent history as “a tragic story with only one real actor, one real world-maker, the hero... All others in the prick tale are props, ground, plot space, or prey”⁴². Instead, Haraway argues that nothing has ever happened due to humans alone: “Man plus tool does not make history”⁴³. As a remedy to this thinking championed by Morton, she offers the *Chthulucene*: an era “made up of ongoing multi-species stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet”⁴⁴. Proctor implies that, for Haraway, ‘humans are no longer the protagonists/antagonists of historical

³⁷ Haraway, *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble*

³⁸ As defined by Donna Haraway in *Staying With The Trouble*, the *Capitalocene* is an alternative term used by scientists and historians to describe earths’ current epoch where the current geological period is categorised by the influence of capitalism on a global scale. Similarly, the *Chthulucene* is a term devised by Haraway – a derivative of the Greek word *Chthulu*, meaning tentacular or many arms/legs. The *Chthulucene* revises the Anthropocene through an optimistic lens where humans have the ability to see beyond the negative connotations of extinction and exploitation and extend their abilities or, metaphorical tentacles, to find new ways to relate to nature and work with it into the future.

³⁹ Haraway, Donna Jeanne, 2016, *Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene* / Donna J. Haraway. *Experimental Futures*, 32.

⁴⁰ Proctor, Devin, 2017, *Book Review: Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* by Donna J. Haraway. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 90. 877-882. 10.1353/anq.2017.0054.

⁴¹ Derived from Hubris meaning extreme pride foreshadowed by disaster

⁴² Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 39.

⁴³ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 49.

⁴⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 55.

narrative; rather, they are among the many creatures with and of the earth, collectively responsible for the trajectory of history'.⁴⁵

Haraway concludes that artists hold the key to obtaining a true philosophical understanding of the contemporary landscape, such as the Chthulucene. She appoints this task to the 'Art-Scientists'⁴⁶— what she describes as particular practices adopted by artists which analyse, reflect and take positive action against the negative outcomes of the Anthropocene. Art-Scientists embody the positive results of kinship and symbiosis between the human and nonhuman. The Artist-Scientist Expands from her Cyborgian interrogation—"why should our bodies end at the skin"⁴⁷—challenging the post-human, now incorporating much more than humanity and technoscience⁴⁸ and instead suggesting; we are now 'post-post-human'⁴⁹ in our engagement with our companion species. We are compost (com-post): "ontologically heterogenous partners becom[ing] who and what they are in material-semiotic worlding"⁵⁰ all but "critters interpenetrat[ing] one another, loop[ing] around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another"⁵¹. She calls this process *sympoi-esis*, meaning "making-with."⁵² Having made the case that we 'sympoietically' become-with other species in a biological sense, Haraway turns to possibilities of engagement in multispecies becoming-with by combining projects of science and art. By rejoicing in our reality as "Children of Compost," we rebel against Modernist principals of nature, including the Anthropocene. It is this embrace of figurative and literal compost or waste that brings me closer to acknowledging waste and the wasteland as a truly contemporary landscape. By using waste in my practice and combining it with a knowledge of chemistry I adopt the role of Haraway's Artist-Scientist.

⁴⁵ Proctor, *Book Review: Staying with the Trouble*.

⁴⁶ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 102.

⁴⁷ Haraway, Donna Jeanne, 1991, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women : The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association, 178.

⁴⁸ Technoscience refers to the strong interactions in contemporary scientific research and development (R&D) between that which traditionally was separated into science (theoretical) and technology (practical), especially by philosophers.

⁴⁹ Proctor, Devin. (2017). Book Review: *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* by Donna J. Haraway. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 90. 877-882. 10.1353/anq.2017.0054.

⁵⁰ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 13.

⁵¹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 58.

⁵² Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 58.

Ironically, meaningful artworks endeavouring to reflect on the contemporary landscape commonly emerge as depictions of industry and artificiality which are – more so than a pristine lake – true reflections of the artists vision of nature. From the seminal exhibition TRASH from Junk to Art, Critic Lea Vergine presents an insightful history and criticism of the use of waste within art. Housed in the Palazzo Delle Alberi, Trento, Italy, the exhibition brings together generations of artists that utilise refuse within their practice. Vergine aims to establish a visual timeline and evolution of the use of junk as art. Including works by Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Rauchenberg, Mario Merz, and Sarah Lucas, the exhibition brings together key historical, philosophical and contemporary artists whom have used and developed an understanding of trash as art including the importance of refuse as a material. Beginning with Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, Picasso and the futurists, Vergine states that artists used waste as an “avant-garde tool”⁵³ as affective materials with equal worth to traditional media in creating aesthetic value⁵⁴, and that “such initiatives were a protest and provocation”⁵⁵ of traditions of the 20th Century art making. Vergine confirms that in the 1960s junk and refuse was given enormous gravity by the Italian art movement Arte Povera. Characters such as Mario Merz and Giovanni Anselmo belong to a collective of artists dedicated to critiquing the system of values in art but also, and more importantly, the plight of humanity and nature amidst capitalism. Using the juxtaposition of synthetic and natural material such as straw, lettuce, concrete, and neon, Vergine describes the Povera’s as using waste material “ironically, with nostalgia and to criticise society, particularly consumerism”⁵⁶ and the consumption of the landscape. This sense of irony continued through to the 1990s, with artists like Sarah Lucas, when the use of waste material no longer riled the art world but instead, after Danto’s *The End of Art*, were considered common place. Yet, as Vergine confirms, the 90s;

*...with rather more sarcastic tone, have not only claimed the poetic right to use objects past their sell-by date and destined for the rubbish-bin, but still more significantly they use trash almost apotropically, as an exorcism of our ulcerous, end-of-century sense of unease*⁵⁷

⁵³ Vergine, Lea. 1997. *TRASH From Junk To Art*. Milan: Museo di Arte Contemporanea di Trento e Roverto, 21.

⁵⁴ Vergine, *TRASH From Junk To Art*, 21.

⁵⁵ Vergine, *ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁶ Vergine, *TRASH From Junk To Art*, 21.

⁵⁷ Vergine *ibid.*, 21.

Specifically in this case, and in the current state of environmental degradation, the common thread for artists using junk now becomes, as Guido Viale from *A Throwaway World* states; ‘a mirror of the spirit’⁵⁸ of society, as our waste becomes our lived environment. We see then, as Vergine observes, a “mixture of wistful parody, elegy, social invective, deciduous wit, of bleak grace and magic”⁵⁹ — which fixes on the fear of the impending consequences of the consumerist culture. Vergine’s analysis of junk in practice has contextualised the use of waste as a valid medium in art making. Not only this but her research locates my practice within a history of artist using refuse to critique canons of art, as well as ponder on the philosophical discourse of nature.

As Jeffareys, Deitch, Morton, Haraway, and Vergine would suggest, the evolution of Earth’s landscapes largely dictate contemporary philosophies of nature. These ideologies are then reflected in the representation of landscape in art. What happens when the canons of landscape painting become null and void in truly representing the landscape? New ideologies present themselves in the form of kinship, flux and symbiosis. Beyond outdated principals of landscape painting, new materials and ways of making become relevant and valued, including the use of waste and refuse to evoke a true copy or mirror of the world around us.

Chapter 2

Patterns of Entropy

Through the analysis of works by Australian-German artist Eugene Von Guérard, Italian artist Mario Merz, and American artist Robert Smithson, we can start to unpack the motives that see the evolutionary shift in representations of the landscape from traditional painting into an extended exploration of representation and materiality. This shift is caused by the philosophical rearranging of thought in regard to the polarity of man and nature, but also due to the critique of colonial and capitalist canons that maintain a persistent grasp on painting. Throughout this chapter a dialogue between the shifting philosophical ideas about art and nature will be established with each artist in order to understand their contribution to new representations of the landscape; this includes the

⁵⁸ Quoted Guido Viale *TRASH From Junk To Art*, 22.

⁵⁹ Vergine, *TRASH From Junk To Art*, 25.

examination of works through an ecocritical lens, which stands to reveal the trajectory of artistic conventions of the landscape in art after landscape painting.

2.1 Eugene Von Guérard and Bill Gammage: New Critical Thought Incited by Old Works.



Fig. 2 Eugene Von Guérard , Crater of Mount Eccles, West from Mount Napier 1858, ink and watercolour, 28.1 × 48.6 cm

Guérard (b. 1811) dedicated his life and practice to representing nature. Born in Vienna and settling in Australia in 1852, Guérard already understood the complex nature of expansive capitalist globalisation and its effect on the landscape⁶⁰. As a product of patriarchal tropes of art history—being the son of the royal court artist of the Auersberg Palace—as well as a white settler in Australia, Guérard embodied the patriarchal principals art now wishes to depart from. Guérard acts as an entry point for considering the evolution of philosophical thought associated with nature and

⁶⁰ Pullin, Ruth, *ugene Von Guérard : Nature Revealed, 2011*, Guérard, Eugen Von, Varcoe-Cocks, Michael, Clegg, Humphrey, National Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery, National Gallery of Australia, and Australian National Gallery, EMelbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 10.

art, specifically in Australia. This entails the analysis of Guérard's practice paired with the research of Australian historian Bill Gammage. It was Guérard's precise documentation of the natural landscape, reflected in his lithograph *Crater of Mount Eccles, West of Victoria*, 1859 [Figure 2], which captured the attention of Gammage in his analysis of the Australian landscape. The lithograph is among a series featured in the album, *Eugene von Guérard's Australian Landscapes (1866-68)*⁶¹, which was later pigmented with watercolour, depicting numerous species of eucalypt and gum trees, as well as native grasses precisely drawn with finite detail. The panorama of Mt Eccles, unbeknownst to Guérard, revealed a complex choreography of land management by the indigenous Gunditjmara people⁶²; The regimentation of trees evenly spaced in the lithograph formed channels to the water's edge of the old volcanic crater used as a trap for prey⁶³, and the tall straight gums allude to the sculpting of trees by man-made fire to keep them from littering the grass beneath. From Guérard's piece Gammage has drawn evidence to conclude that the cultivation of the landscape by Indigenous Australians was extensive and dismantling to the concept 'terra incognita', but most importantly in dissolving the notion of 'wilderness' associated with the Australian landscape. Instead, works such as Guérard's establishes an understanding that the Australian continent was until 1770 the 'biggest cultivated estate on earth'⁶⁴. Inasmuch, Guérard was recording a landscape that was in transition, in flux, and competing against industry and capital changes rather than being unspoiled or rogue. To reinforce his arguments Gammage uses accounts from both explorers, topographers and artists from 1770 to 1889 to compare with his own contemporary photographs of the Australian landscape. Unsurprisingly, *Crater of Mt Eccles* reflects accounts made by several colonists;

Robert Dawson, Port Stephens, 1788;

*Truly beautiful : It was thinly studded with single trees, as if planted for ornament..It is impossible therefore to pass through such a country.. without being perpetually reminded of a gentleman's park or grounds*⁶⁵

⁶¹ Pullin, *Eugene Von Guérard : Nature Revealed*, 11.

⁶² Pullin, *Eugene Von Guérard : Nature Revealed*, 11.

⁶³ Pullin, *Eugene Von Guérard : Nature Revealed*, 11.

⁶⁴ Gammage, Bill. *The Biggest Estate on Earth : How Aborigines Made Australia*, 2012, Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2.

⁶⁵ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, 7.

James Cook, 1st of May 1770;

*The trees are at such a distance from one another that the whole country or at least a great part of it might be cultivated without being obliged to cut down a single tree*⁶⁶

Gammage acknowledges the role of colonial art as a manner of documentation, ramification, and colonization, as it intentionally secludes and erases ‘the other’⁶⁷. In the analysis of Guérard’s work Gammage highlights two things; 1. The relentless idealisation of nature and ecology for the intent to subjugate and exploit for capital gain and 2. *Crater of Mt Eccles* stands for proof in understanding the Australian Landscape as a cultivated pre-white colonisation, and in turn a marker for understanding the relationship shared between nature and man as symbiotic for time immemorable.

Guérard joins a list of artists, including Augustus Earl, Ferdinand Bauer and Black Johnny Kangatong, whom dedicated their practice to the study of the Australian landscape and whose images now stand for a correction of history in regard to nature and the landscape. This correction included the inevitable flux of nature in relation to capital/colonial industry. Similarly, Gammage’s critique of the colonial image illuminates the complexities of understanding nature and its existence as a concept rather than a concrete entity. Gammage’s critique of *Crater of Mount Eccles* highlights that nature and the landscape has always been subjugated to the flux of industry and human intervention either symbiotically or destructively.

2.2 Mario Merz: Fibonacci as a Symbol for Symbiosis

Almost a century after Guérard’s pursuit to replicate the Australian landscape, Italian artist Merz (b. 1925) began his pursuit in understanding man’s relationship with nature through an art practice based on experimentation with materials in post-war Italy. Merz understood the ramifications of global-capital expansion through war, as a young man Merz was confronted by World War II, jailed in 1945 for joining the anti-fascist group *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Liberty)⁶⁸, Merz spent several months in the Turin prison. Following his time in prison, Merz developed his understanding

⁶⁶ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, 7.

⁶⁷ In phenomenology, the terms ‘the Other’ and the ‘Constitutive Other’ identify the other human being, in his and her differences from the Self, as being a cumulative, constituting factor in a person’s self-image; as acknowledgement of being real; hence, the Other is dissimilar to and the opposite of the Self, of Us, and of the Same. See "The Other", *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Third Edition, (1999) p. 620.

⁶⁸ Celant, Germano. 1989. *Mario Merz*. New York, Milan: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 282.

and lifelong fascination with nature and Fibonacci. The Fibonacci sequence is the sequential addition of numbers to make the next—0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55. Merz interpreted the numerical sequence – identified by the Pisan mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci in 1202 —as the emblem of the dynamics associated with growth processes in the organic world⁶⁹. For Merz Fibonacci would become a symbol that he would relentlessly use to measure the connection of nature in relation to man and vice-versa. *Leaf (Foglia)*, 1952 [Figure 3], which establishes Merz’s preoccupation with nature and his developing ideas concerned with Fibonacci. The 95x140cm board is thick with rich earthy oil paint. The broad aggressive strokes sculpt a leaf central to the composition across the whole canvas. The geometric composition is segmented into 13; the 8th



Fig. 3 Mario Merz, *Leaf (Foglia)*, 1952, oil on canvas, 95 x 140 cm

number in the Fibonacci sequence, revealing Merz’s preoccupation with thoughts of organic patterns. The subdued reds, yellows, blues and browns of the leaf are dark and muted, reminiscent of a landscape afflicted by war. *Leaf* is seen to be part of a series following the influence of American art on postwar Europe. Merz was particularly inspired by Jackson Pollock and his vigorous making and expenditure of material. Merz's exposure to the American Modernists correlated with his interest and criticism of capitalism. Merz’s obvious frustration in the limitations of oil painting to reflect a post-war landscape, however, led him to depart from painting and become more conscious of the materials around him. The American influence would drive Merz to break away from painting and begin experimenting with material and installation to reflect a better understanding of man’s philosophical relationship to nature.

⁶⁹ Merz Foundation. 2018. “Mario Merz | Fondazione Merz.” [Fondazionemerz.Org. Fondazione Merz. 2018. http://fondazionemerz.org/en/mario-merz/.](http://fondazionemerz.org/en/mario-merz/)

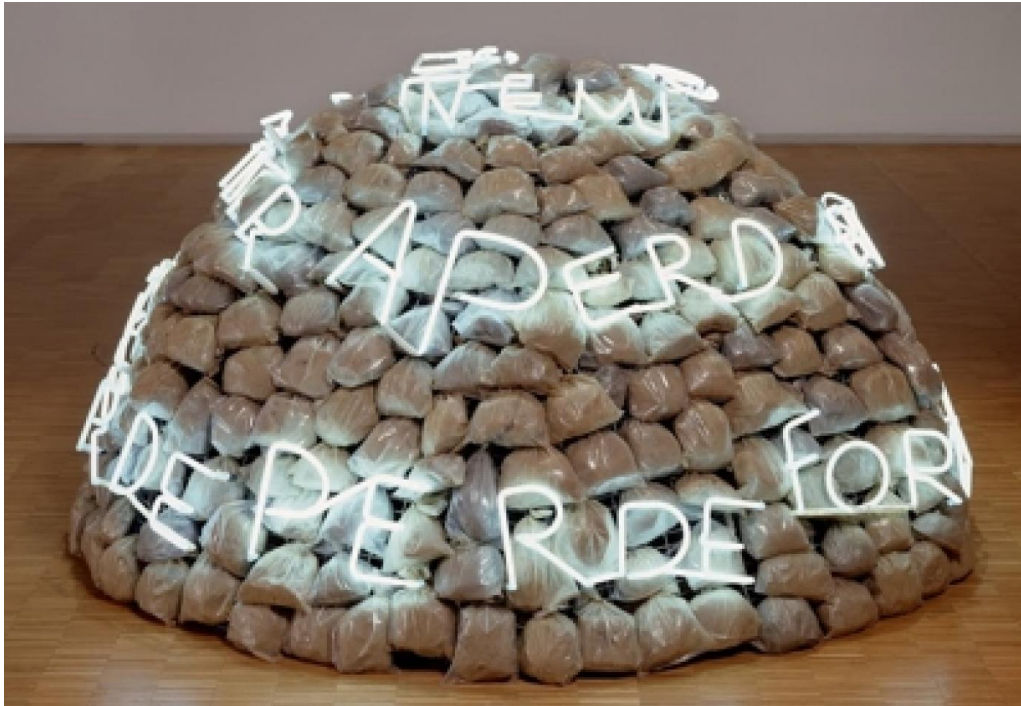


Fig. 4 Mario Merz, *Igloo di Giap*, 1968, neon, sand, plastic, 120 x 200 cm

In 1967, Merz joined Giovanni Anselmo, Jannis Kounellis, Giuseppe Penone, Giulio Paolini, Gilberto Zorio, Alighiero Boetti and Michaelangelo Pistoletto to form the group Arte Povera. Arte Povera would formulate an anti-elitist aesthetic for what Germano Celant defines as; 1. “a defiance of the de-humanising aspects of the industrialisation and consumer capitalism then emerging in northern Italy”⁷⁰, 2. “embrace an art of humble materials drawn from everyday life and the organic world,”⁷¹. *Igloo di Giap*, 1968 [Figure 4], exhibited in the first Arte Povera show in Bologna, presented a culmination of Merz’s ideas influence by the movement. Emerging from the gallery floor, the igloo was composed of thirty-six bags of clay attached to a metal armature. Tracing the form of the igloo in neon were the words “If The Enemy Masses His Forces, He Loses Ground: If He Scatters, He loses Strength” famously written by Vietnamese military strategist General Vo Nguyen Giap. *Igloo di Giap* was presented in critique of globalised politics and the capitalist occupation of small nations such as Vietnam. Merz was attempting to create an installation that reflected the destruction of warfare synonymous his contemporary landscape. In addition, we see the emergence of several of Merz’s symbols, which he continues to use as signifiers for representing the post-war landscape; neon as fire, clay the earth, and igloo the home. For Merz the igloo was a metaphorical form reflecting the belief that art is transitory “yet inexorably bound to the earth,

⁷⁰ Celant, *Mario Merz*, 282.

⁷¹ Celant, *Mario Merz*, 282.

specifically its local environment.”⁷² Merz defines the Igloo as the artist’s home as a global nomad: “constantly in motion, at home everywhere, in touch with both nature and culture.”⁷³ Each material was chosen for being synonymous with Merz’s surroundings; they were abundant and often discarded and freely available. Merz’s sensitivity to material allowed him to harness a practice that reflected a truly accurate depiction of the environment that surrounded him—it is this material sensitivity I adopt in an attempt to reflect a contemporary sense of the landscape around me. Characters such as Merz belong to a collective of artists dedicated to critiquing the system of values in art but also, and more importantly, the plight of humanity and nature amidst capitalism.

2.3 Robert Smithson: Geology as Entropy

American artist Smithson (b. 1938) understood the intimate relationship man shared with nature. Intrigued by the natural sciences⁷⁴, Smithson had a preemptive grasp on notions such as ecomemisis and dismantling nature through language and ecology long before Morton. Like Merz, Smithson was affected by war witnessing the rapid terraforming⁷⁵ of landscapes in post-war America. Since 1965, Smithson had travelled globally with his wife Nancy Holt and other artists, including Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, in search for post-industrial and culturally specific sites⁷⁶. These trips would culminate in his discovery of landscapes of the most contemporary kind—*Entropic-sites*, *Non-sites* and *Earthworks*. His ‘nonsites’ and ‘earthworks’ were made from materials collected on treks into non-urban environments; incorporating maps, bins and mirrors with organic materials such as rock and earth. Each composition created a dialogue between outdoors and indoors, natural and synthetic, ruminating in time, site, vision, nature and culture.

In contrast, Smithson’s ‘entropic-site’ emphasised the chaotic characteristics of humanity and nature. Smithson was fascinated by concepts of duality and entropy as synonymous with the human condition and life on Earth; dualism: as the opposition of things, and entropy: a thermodynamic

⁷² Celant, *Mario Merz*, 282.

⁷³ Celant, *Mario Merz*, 282.

⁷⁴ Smithson, Robert, Robert C. Hobbs, 1982. *Robert Smithson: Retrospective*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Herbert F. Johnson Museum Of Art, 103.

⁷⁵ From the word terraform; to alter the environment in order to make capable of supporting life. This may include capitalist expansion on earth.

⁷⁶ Smithson, *Robert Smithson: Retrospective*, 105.

system that is considered to be a measure of disorder, chaos and disaster⁷⁷. Attracted to industrial wastelands, rock quarries and fringe landscapes, his works of the late 1960s broke conventional notions of sculpture and typical associations with the quieted natural environment⁷⁸. *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969 [Figure 5] was performed and recorded in Rome, Italy, in conjunction with a



Fig. 5 Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969, Film still of recording: Bernd and Hilla Becher / Robert Smithson. Porto: Museu Serralves

Smithson-first solo exhibition at Fabio Sargentini's L'Attico Gallery⁷⁹. Smithson had a truck pour molten asphalt over the edge of an abandoned gravel quarry near the city⁸⁰. The black asphalt resembled lava slowly oozing down the soft slope, dramatically engulfing the earth below. This synthetic geological interaction is characteristic of the industrialised landscape of the 60s, but also, the asphalt drip characterises a materialization of formlessness abstraction popular of American painting at the time.

⁷⁷ Merriam Webster. 2019. "Definition of ENTROPY." Merriam-Webster.Com. Merriam Webster. 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entropy>.

⁷⁸ Fiori, Bob. 1993. "RUNDOWN." Documentary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1M3HoZpXBc>.

⁷⁹ Smithson, *Robert Smithson: Retrospective*, 103.

⁸⁰ Smithson, *Robert Smithson: Retrospective*, 103.

According to art Historian Robert Hobbs “the work emphasised the “entropic” aspects of roadbuilding” as well as parodying the act of Abstract Expressionist drip painting popularised by Pollock. Accessory to this, Smithson formulates an understanding of the idealisation of certain natural environments over others to suggest, just as Deitch;

“The scenic ideals that surround even our national parks are carriers of a nostalgia for heavenly bliss and eternal calmness.... parks are idealisations of nature, but nature in fact is not a condition of the ideal”⁸¹.

Art critic Lawrence Alloway suggests that Smithson "explicitly aligns geological change with the process of thought...landscape, then becomes analogous to the human condition or at least of our communications"⁸². *Asphalt Rundown* is a reaction to the ‘new spatial concepts originating in the US in the 50s. This included the inauguration of ‘superhighways’, which initiated a Sublime scale of geological movement, exposing the earth in new ways, but also generating new landscapes that we experience through transport. In such works, Smithson had already begun to identify an understanding of the Anthropocene at least 20 years before its scientific fruition ⁸³. Moving beyond an understanding of the Anthropocene Smithson saw geological parallels between the existence of men and dinosaurs;

if we consider the earth in terms of geologic time we end up with what we call geological entropy, for everything is gradually wearing down. It is evolutionary, but it is not evolutionary in terms of any idealism, it may be that human beings are just different from dinosaur rather than better, they almost seem to be the same thing.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Holt, Nancy, Philip Leider, and Robert Smithson. 1979. *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*. New York, Ny: New York Univ. Pr.

⁸² Holt, Nancy, Philip Leider, and Robert Smithson. 1979. *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*. New York, Ny: New York Univ. Pr.

⁸³ Smithson, Robert, Robert Carleton Hobbs, and Animation-Recherche-Confrontation (Museum. 1982. *Robert Smithson: Retrospective*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Herbert F. Johnson Museum Of Art. p13

⁸⁴ Fiori, Bob. 1993. “RUNDOWN.” Documentary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1M3HoZpXBc>.

According to Hobbs, such entropic-sites called to mind “this out-out-of-date future”⁸⁵. Often these sites were “post-industrial”⁸⁶, unused and unwanted space. For Smithson they resembled a break from past canons to dismantle any social or political values that continue through art via the institution of the gallery. Likewise, *Asphalt Rundown* synthesises the contact of synthetic and organic material in order to symbolise a true representation of a post-modern, post-industrial landscape. Smithson seamlessly echoes Mortons ideas of Ecomimesis by accepting the chaotic characteristics of geology and ecology, as well as embodying Haraway’s tentacular thinking about nature, professing that; “nature does not proceed in a straight line, it is rather a sprawling development.”⁸⁷

Through the exploration of Guérard, Merz and Smithson’s practice, we can start to unpack the motives that see the shift in representations of the landscape from painting into an extended exploration of representation and materiality. This shift sees the acknowledgement of junk and industry as formidable examples of natural landscapes. In order to move forward to align our beliefs with the landscape in contemporary art, we make a leap to a more feminised and compassionate future of art making.

⁸⁵ Smithson, Robert, Robert Carleton Hobbs, and Animation-Recherche-Confrontation (Museum. 1982. *Robert Smithson: Retrospective*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Herbert F. Johnson Museum Of Art.14

⁸⁶ Smithson, *Smithson: Retrospective*, 14.

⁸⁷ Holt, Nancy, Philip Leider, and Robert Smithson. 1979. *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*. New York, Ny: New York Univ. Pr.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Landscapes in Practice

Artists Janet Laurence, Julie Mehretu and Marian Tubbs continue the work of Smithson and Merz, their curiosity is driven by a practice led by the observation of living and non-living things amongst the flux of an ever-changing 21st Century landscape. From the depleted gum tree forests of regional Australia, to the volatile streets of Manhattan and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch off the coast of California, artists such as these are inspired by new landscapes that arise from the collision of philosophical and scientific information regarding the human and non-human. Each artists nurtures new representations of nature and new philosophical perspectives of art making after landscape painting to reflect inclusivity and difference.

3.1 Janet Laurence: The Problem with Mourning



Fig. 6 Janet Laurence, *The Matter of Masters*, 2017, raw pigment materials, glass and perspex

In January 2019, Laurence (b. 1947) exhibited *After Nature*, a survey show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, featuring a collection of seminal works including *The Matter of Masters* and *Deep Breathing - Resurrecting the Reef* and *Theatre of Trees*. Named after W.G Sebald's book-length poem, *After Nature* traces the history and development of the artist's practice and theoretical discourse into contemporary nature and the environment. The awareness of symbiosis between

human and nonhuman underpins Laurence's practice, as she expresses her concern for environmental degradation by creating work that she hopes will inspire empathy⁸⁸. Laurence states: "there is something very satisfying about making art that is also about regenerating and caring for nature...demanding that we shift our focus from a human-centered perspective" and move towards a kinship with the landscape and its inhabitants⁸⁹.

The Matter of Masters, 2017 [Figure 6], is a collection of objects, including plant and mineral matter, used to make pigments by the Dutch Masters. Collected in a contemporary wunderkammer made of acrylic and glass, Laurence composes flora and fauna by colour. Just as the canvas serves as a window in painting, Laurence's use of glass establishes visibility through display and thus 'establishes a place to create meaning between objects'⁹⁰. Laurence's aim is to reveal the interconnectedness of material, matter, and the Master. In looking to the Dutch Golden Age, Laurence critiques the tropes that we long ago assumed separated man from nature, and reestablishes a clear link between paintings about humanity and the need for nature to provide the materials to do so. In doing so she also acknowledges an understanding of the ecological action of making art and an extension of nature.

Similarly, Laurence addresses nature's codependency on man to survive. *Deep Breathing - Resurrecting the Reef* [Figure 7] is an installation conceived for the global initiative *Artists 4 Paris Climate*, 2015. The installation is comprised much like *The Matter of Modern Masters*: specimens are arranged in transparent shelves embalmed in muslin cloth skins resembling funeral blankets. Laurence aims to illuminate the erasure of particular ecosystems, such as the barrier reef, and incite guilt that drives us to restore and resurrect ecosystems that are of aesthetic value. The anthropomorphising of natural objects by Laurence demands a shift of focus from a human-centered perspective⁹¹ to a wider multi-species approach. Her art encourages awareness, empathy, and action, and wholeheartedly embraces Haraway's Art-Scientist practice. Laurence's practice can be seen as an ecomimetic act, in that it is an extension of nature itself—that humans find the need to mourn and repair habitat, however she may not be aware of it. Art critic John McDonald refers to

⁸⁸ Kent, Rachel, 2019, *After Nature: Janet Laurence*, Mca.Com.Au. MCA Australia. 2019. <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/after-nature-janet-laurence/>.

⁸⁹ Kent, Rachel. 2019. "After Nature: Janet Laurence." Mca.Com.Au. MCA Australia. 2019. <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/after-nature-janet-laurence/>.

⁹⁰ Art Gallery Of NSW, 2017, Artist Janet Laurence on 'The Matter of the Masters,' YouTube Video. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb_UdrvLVVY.

⁹¹ Kent, *After Nature: Janet Laurence*

Laurence as “an artist of the Anthropocene age”⁹² and, indeed, she is. Laurence’s museological display may be too mournful to trigger philosophical thought. Rather than arouse intrigue for new landscapes and forms of representation we are left with a heavy heart filled with grief and a sense of inevitable doom.



Fig. 7 Janet Laurence, *Deep Breathing - Ressurecting the Reef*, 2015, video, coral, shell, gladd, muslin cloth and glass

3.2 Julie Mehretu: Dismantling anti-sentiment in Abstraction

Born in Ethiopia in 1970, Mehretu began the first seven years of her life in an environment afflicted by terror, famine and genocide. In 1977 Mehretu and her family fled Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to settle in Michigan, USA. Known for her exploration of complex global geopolitical concerns amidst conflict and revolution, Since the late 1990s, Mehretu began employing architectural drawings, terrain maps and construction blueprints as both formal and conceptual tools within her abstract lexicon. Generating an intricate visual vocabulary compellingly rooted in social, historical and geographic commentary: global population shifts, mobilised armies, urban mapping and structural planning⁹³. Similar to Smithson’s motif in entropic geology, Mehretu stated:

⁹² Janet Laurence: *After Nature* Accessed 14.05.19 <https://www.johnmcdonald.net.au/2019/janet-laurence-after-nature-2/>

⁹³ Tomkins, Calvin, 2010, *Big Art, Big Money*, The New Yorker. February 22, 2010. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/03/29/big-art-big-money>.

I think architecture reflects the machinations of politics, and that's why I am interested in it as a metaphor for those institutions. I don't think of architectural language as just a metaphor about space. It's about space, but about spaces of power, about the ideas of power⁹⁴.



Fig. 8 Julie Mehretu, *Mural*, 2010, acrylic and silica on canvas, 7 x 25m

As in her *Mural* [Figure 8] for The Goldman Sachs building in Manhattan, New York, the mural stands seven meters high and twenty-five meters in length⁹⁵. Mehretu's kaleidoscopic visual lexicon fuses painting and drawing, abstraction and figuration, precision and pandemonium, and the gestural and the mathematical, while simultaneously referencing and expanding the epic grandeur of the Futurists, the geometric abstraction of Malevich and the heroic gestures of the Abstract Expressionists. *Mural* echoes the velocity and chaos of the landscape, which lay beyond the window of the foyer and the multinational corporate organisation that operates on all 44 floors above. This chaotic shift between abstraction and representation is described by artist and writer Tacita Dean as 'Third Space'⁹⁶; Mehretu operated between representation and abstraction,

⁹⁴ Mehretu, Julie, *Tracing the Universe of Julie Mehretu*, 2006 *A Choral Text* in exh. cat. Castille, Julie Mehretu, 29.

⁹⁵ Tomkins, *Big Art, Big Money*.

⁹⁶ Mehretu, Julie, Marian Goodman, White Cube (Gallery, and Tacita Dean. 2013. *Liminal Squared*. New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 23.

highlighting what complex nuances of experiencing the global capital landscape from inside rather than out can generate. As critic Calvin Tomkins suggests: “with such informed inspirations, Mehretu is able to successfully reconcile many of the approaches of the past century’s artists, uniting physical and sensual expressiveness and socially relevant reflection”⁹⁷. Rather than a depart from painting, Mehretu highjacks white male tropes to dismantle, maim, and stand for a new collective of information and understanding. Turning anti-sentimental canons on their head, Mehretu’s practice exemplifies a new feminine ethos of representing landscape.

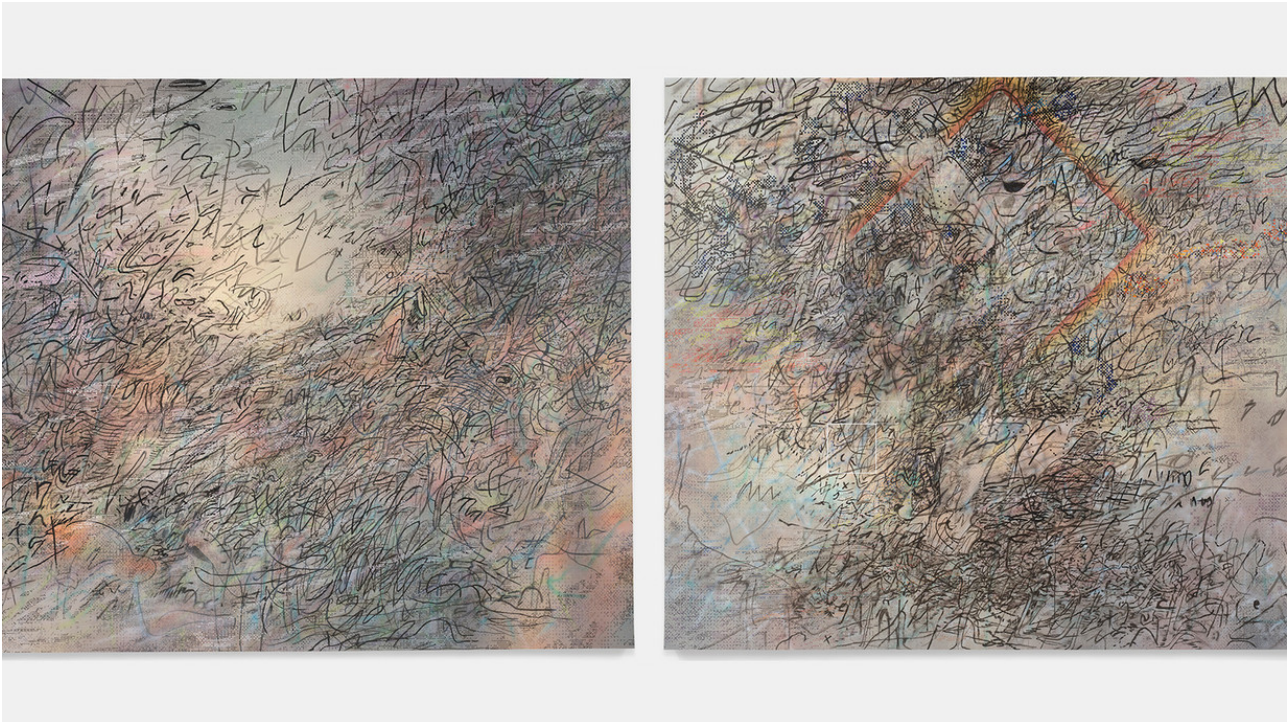


Fig. 9 Julie Mehretu, *HOWL, eon (I, II)*, 2017, ink and acrylic on canvas, 823 × 975.4 cm

This disruption of traditional Abstraction is continued in her work *HOWL, eon (I, II)*, 2017 [Figure 9], the largest installation work ever presented at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Dwarfing the stairs and the Hass atrium where the two 27 x 32ft canvases stretch from floor to ceiling⁹⁸, *HOWL* presents the viewer with a metaphorical oculus: a window into a complex volatile landscape of contemporary America. Reminiscent of Cy Twombly, hundreds of childlike marks flood the canvases, overlaying a cacophony of linear measurements and stencil point prints of iconic American landscapes. *HOWL* is dedicated to the violent and volatile destruction of landscape by the ferociously ruthless force of anonymous institutions and their merciless jubilation – a potent analogy

⁹⁷ Tomkins, *Big Art, Big Money*.

⁹⁸ SFMOMA. 2017. “Julie Mehretu · SFMOMA.” Sfmoma.Org. SFMOMA. 2017. <https://www.sfmoma.org/exhibition/julie-mehretu-howl-eon-i-ii/>.

for the capitalist institution that dictates the lay of the land⁹⁹. The chaos embedded in the cluttering of marks is a purposeful ploy to enact the sentiment of the Modernists;

I am also interested in what Kandinsky referred to in “The Great Utopia” when he talked about the inevitable implosion and/or explosion of our constructed spaces out of the sheer necessity of agency... it is in these same spaces that you can feel the undercurrents of complete chaos, violence, and disorder. Like going to see fireworks – you feel the crowd at the same time as you feel the explosions¹⁰⁰

Not unlike Smithson, Mehretu is concerned with the universal and the eternal entropic nature of civilisation and ecology. This stems from the complex and multivalent characteristics of the contemporary urban landscape experience and the outdated global power structures that have determined power structures for the majority of history. Though the forms in Mehretu’s paintings often appear to be crumbling, the entire composition is held together as an undeniable whole by a permeating sense of power—both that of majority and minority agencies. Against such an interpretation, the black marks that mutilate the architectural diagrams of her works are potently charged; each vector and each stroke, however faint, gaining identity and purpose as a character of uprising and rebellion. This rebellion against the white male protagonist is echoed by art historian and cultural critic T. J Demos in *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and the Environment Today* as he suggests artists push back against the acceptance of the human-centric term Anthropocene and its dilution of humans as a single type, with a singular narrative; ‘essentialised to the traits that created this crisis (capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy) and that, as a result of this choice, the systems that certain humans created, and other humans powerfully resisted, run rampant.¹⁰¹ In this way I suggest that Mehretu’s practice stands to defy the Anthropocene, and no less its conceptualisation and practice, and instead—if we are looking for a more accurate and politically enabling geological descriptor—we should consider adopting the term *Capitalocene*, or *Chthulocene* to include all narratives including minorities, human, nonhuman, the organic and the synthetic. Not only does this acknowledge other perspectives, but the detrimental affects of capitalist expansion on the environment and traditions of art making.

⁹⁹Tomkins, *Big Art, Big Money*.

¹⁰⁰ Ilesanmi, Olukemi *Looking Back: Email Interview Between Julie Mehretu and Olukemi Ilesanmi*, 2003, in exh. cat. Minneapolis, Julie Mehretu: Drawing into Painting, Walker Art Center, 13-14

¹⁰¹ Demos, T J. 2017. *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 55.

3.3 Marian Tubbs: Empathy in Trash

Tubbs (b. 1983) is a Sydney based artist who works with various mediums including paint, digital media, sculpture and the internet. Titled *What The Material Reveals; How The Poor Form Critiques Cultural Ascriptions Of Value*, Tubbs' Doctorate thesis establishes her practice in a contemporary context by translating, as she states, "what found materiality in sculptural installation can reveal about poetic experiences of daily life under late stages of global capitalism."¹⁰² Her theoretical reach extends from Plato's 'art imitates life', Marxist theories of wealth and capitalism, Delueze and assemblage, as well as Heidegger and the unpretentious. In regard to her practice, Tubb's material of choice is the discarded; refuse of both physical and virtual realms, taken from the street and the perpetual wastelands of the internet.



Fig 10. Marian Tubbs, *Fronde*, 2013, digital silk print, palm frond, styrofoam and digital image on silk

Fronde [Figure 10], a work Tubbs refers to as an 'assemblage', balances a silk print of a waterfall between a discarded sheet of styrofoam and a dried, frayed palm frond that pierces the foam, allowing the assemblage to stand on its own on the ground. The print is feathered, hacked and torn at every edge; the image is faded and badly printed. Both the palm frond and styrofoam are scuffed

¹⁰² Tubbs, Marian, 2015, *What The Material Reveals*, [online] Available at http://files.cargocollective.com/191096/Marian_Tubbs_What_The_Material_Reveals_RGB--1-.pdf [Accessed 10 Sep. 2018]

and aged, indicative of objects collected from the street. Refuse material in the gallery is utilized to critique ascriptions of value, reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp or Piero Manzoni. However, Tubbs' reference extends beyond the gallery and reflects on the value placed on landscape. The marriage of these materials reminds us of a landscape of the most contemporary kind: involving synthetic and organic matter intermingled equally. The dependency of each element in allowing the assemblage to stand evokes reliance, harmony and symbiosis, each element contributing to a totality—an ecology of systems. The printed waterfall evokes feelings of nostalgia, while the dried frayed frond brings us back to earth, to interrupt our romantic tendencies to fantasize about the pristine.



Fig. 11 Marian Tubbs, *Anagram*, 2017, plastic and resin, 30 x 15 cm

Similarly, in *Anagram* [Figure 11], Tubbs' dedication to the study of water and its interaction and interconnection to all things is the key to unlocking her understanding of the contemporary landscape. *Anagram* is a marriage of plastic and all of its various forms entwined into a 30 x 15 cm blob of resin. Reminiscent of the contaminated bowels of literally any creature on earth, *Anagram* hangs on the wall similar to a painting and much like a window, which transports us to one of the

five ‘Great Ocean Garbage Patches’, which contain 80,000 metric tonnes of plastic waste¹⁰³. For Tubbs, water is the metaphor for the contemporary landscape, for water holds and circulates information. “Rain is the internet!”¹⁰⁴ she exclaims, for in water we become aware of the fact that “we are the creators, predators and consumers of the plastic”¹⁰⁵. The ability of water to carry plastic back into our bodies symbolises the Anthropocenic, Capitalocenic and Cthulucentric qualities of the earth’s landscape.



Fig. 12 Marian Tubbs, *my internet and ocean twin*, 2017, pigment on silk, 70 x 100 cm

Similarly, *my internet and ocean twin* [Figure 12] , is a silk print of a digital collage of concrete, fishing nets, mysterious digitally rendered blobs, and metallic ribbons resembling digestive organs. Featured in the 2018 exhibition, *Hypersea*, the silk print is casually draped over a royal blue lounge, which sits in the living room of a luxury yacht moored at the Quay of the Swallow in Monaco. Curated by Juliette Desorgues, *Hypersea* reflects on the writings of Australian artist and ‘hydrofeminist’ writer Astrida Neimanis and features work by Nils Alix-Tabeling, *Lou Cantor*, Mimosas Echard, Rebecca Jagoe, Anna Solal, Marian Tubbs, Jala Wahid, and *Young Girl Reading Group*. For Desorgues, the exhibition site being a moored vessel “becomes a prime symbol of

¹⁰³ The Ocean Clean Up, 2019, *The Great Pacific Garbage Patch | The Ocean Cleanup*. The Ocean Cleanup, <https://theoceancleanup.com/great-pacific-garbage-patch/>.

¹⁰⁴ Tubbs, Marian. 2016. “Vortices and Abstraction: And in the End Relations.” *Oberon 2*, February 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Tubbs, *Oberon 2*.

today's complex dystopian conditions"¹⁰⁶ when thinking about the environmental catastrophe of rising sea levels. However, water, in this case, is not the enemy. On the contrary, water becomes a symbol: an entity that largely constitutes our planet, our bodies, and animal bodies. Desorgues understands water as "expansive, pluralistic, relational, and beyond categorisation"¹⁰⁷. It becomes a metaphor engaged with feminist, queer, post-colonial, ecological, presents and futures. As Neimanis states, "Its cyclical flow comes to undermine the Western individualistic view of humanity as an all-permeating species."¹⁰⁸. Much like Haraway, Neimanis and Tubbs acknowledges their kinship with the living things of the Earth; sharing this kinship with all landscapes, including the wasteland of the sea. Like the tentacles of Haraway's Chthulucene, water becomes a way to understand the world rhizomatically and symbiotically rather than hierarchically. Tubbs finds a contemporary understanding of nature through the embrace of everyday waste like plastic or the excess of digital junk stored in the internet;

while I am bowled over by the prettiness of perfectly shot high-definition Instagram videos that depict endangered whales breaching, simultaneously representations of worthless matter and non-correlative aesthetic retreats push me to meditate on a more common world. And I've barely begun to talk about the human.¹⁰⁹

I believe that Tubbs dismantles the separation between human and nonhuman by acknowledging the inevitable connectedness of synthetic and organic material. Additionally, Tubbs acknowledges the formation of new landscapes, like the Great Ocean Garbage Patch or MySpace, and nurtures these landscapes by dedicating her practice to their representation. In this way, Tubbs reflects the kinship of Haraway's Chthulucene and moreover, a representation of a landscape that encapsulates the connection between the human and the nonhuman, the synthetic and the natural, and so on and so forth until there are no other polarities to make and all become unified in Ecomimesis.

When the representation of new landscapes confronts the practical and philosophical limitations of traditions of painting, we look to contemporary artists such as Laurence, Mehretu and Tubbs to

¹⁰⁶ Desorgues, Juliette. 2018. "Hypersea / 2018 – Artmonte-Carlo." Artmontecarlo.Ch. April 29, 2018. <http://artmontecarlo.ch/evenements/contemporary-art-on-a-private-boat-2018/>.

¹⁰⁷ Desorgues, *Hypersea*.

¹⁰⁸ Astrida Neimanis 'Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water' in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, ed. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96.

¹⁰⁹ Tubbs, *Oberon 2*.

contemplate new realities in art and the world at large. They provide insight and understanding of a new philosophical shift in the way we see nature; no longer separate from man but cut from the same cloth. The knowledge of both historical and contemporary fields of art making allows me to contemplate how I too must find a position to take—this has resulted in my understanding that junk is a cultural commodity where art is concerned, it also has the greatest potential to represent a contemporary landscape.

Chapter 4

Nature Disguised as Painting:

Junk as a Cultural Commodity, The Wasteland as a Future Quarry.

Dedicated to the development of my own theoretical and experimental practice this chapter is designed to outline how this research concisely comes together to form a practice concerned with the contemporary landscape. This includes the adoption of sympoeisis, ecomimesis and entropy to cultivate an understanding that the implicit inclusion of trash in the landscape stands for the most accurate description of a contemporary landscape.

4.1 Sympoeisis & Ecomimesis in Practice

The process of making involves observation: quiet observation of the everyday; the mundane interaction between living and non-living things that make up a landscape. These are the interactions between soil and concrete, of plastic and grass, of steel and water. Reminiscent of Merz's combination of neon, water, glass, stone, and twigs, in which the juxtaposition of material, comes together to resemble a complex code of sympoeisis; a code revealing the inevitable connectivity of all things from architecture to rabbits. The collection of information is documented through Merz's lived experience in both industrial pre and postwar Italy, as well as the countryside near Pisa. Similarly, I am influenced by my own lived experience in the city and in rural isolation. This observation is constant and perpetual, by artistic habit, but more importantly, due to the presence of technology and the ease in which photographic documentation takes place. Naturally then, photographic documentation is the formative process through which I began my method of practice. *Dog and Crow in Landscape* [Figure 13] and *Darlinghurst Drain* [Figure 14] are my own examples which reminds us of Smithson's documentation of the landscape in early works such as *Glue Pour*, in which he captures the chaotic interaction between glue and soil. Similar to Smithson, the immediacy of photography allows me to capture moments that insight ideas or questions about the landscape including its sympoeisis. However my subject is never sought out or composed, rather it presents itself through the poetic meeting of materials and moments unaltered. The documentation of the landscape is a significant process yet bears less importance to the final piece. What is significant is the documentation of non-living material in the landscape and its interaction

with living substances. This observation leads me to the process of collection. Reminiscent of Laurence’s museological displays, my medium is sourced from the landscape, usually wetlands or nature-strips. This process is focused on the collection of plastic – the most common non-living material found in any landscape. Not unlike Tubbs, whom collects and configures the ‘poor material’ of the world as an anagram for like an Earth—I use plastic as a symbol for the current flux of the landscape—it becomes a representation of multiple interactions with nature.



Fig. 13 Chrystal Rimmer, *Dog and Crow in Landscape*, 2018, digital photograph



Fig. 14 Chrystal Rimmer, *Darlinghurst Drain*, 2018, digital photograph

A more practical exploration begins in understanding ecomimesis: the acknowledgement that representing nature through art is an act of nature absorbed in the ecology of humans and nature at large. The intention of my practice remains a way to find an accurate representation of the landscape. To do so I have employed Morton’s theories of ecomimesis and the medial:

When ecomimesis points out the environment, it performs a medial function, either at the level of content or at the level of form. Contact becomes content. Ecomimesis interrupts the flow of an

*argument or a sequence of narrative events, thus making us aware of the atmosphere “around” the action or the environment*¹¹⁰

To enact ecomimesis in my work plastic is collected and utilised like a raw material; broken down, heated, then sculpted into a unit or image. Beginning with the collection of plastic from the landscape, I became more intimately aware of a ‘nature’ that does not seclude the synthetic, but implicates it in its description. A variation of coloured Low-density polyethylene (LDPE) and High-density polyethylene (HDPE) discarded bags are heated to one-hundred-and-fifty degrees Celsius and one-hundred-and-twenty degrees Celsius; reaching the consistency of dough I am able to compose an object or an image in relief. I refer to these works as paintings. The processes the plastic endures transforms it into faux granite, marble or precious stone and the painterly and medial qualities of plastic become apparent. The transformation of the material lulls the viewer into a sense of admiration before dissolving into disgust through its revealing—enacting its medial function. The medial function is most effective in the work *Of Loss and Finding* [Figure 15] and [Figure 16] where a contrast is made in the juxtaposition of repetitive units and the organic sprawl of the rainforest. This also includes [Figure 17] and [Figure 18] where the illusion of geology is contrast with organic forms. The key to each work is the viewer is unaware of the material unless given a description.



Fig. 15 Chrystal Rimmer, *Of Loss and Finding*, 2018, Discarded plastic bags, 2.9 x 1.5 m

¹¹⁰ Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 31.



Fig. 16 Chrystal Rimmer, *Of Loss and Finding*, 2018, Discarded plastic bags, 2.9 x 1.5 m



Fig. 17 Chrystal Rimmer, *Future Fossil 0.1*, 2019, discarded plastic, 22 x 17cm



Fig. 18 Chrystal Rimmer, *Future Fossil 0.2*, 2019, discarded plastic, 29 x 15.5 cm

4.2 Entropy: A marker for stability in truly acknowledging nature.

Similar to Laurence, I seek to contemplate the current state of the environment, to reminisce, and mourn the loss of habitat and species through the act of documentation, material manipulation and display. Such as her work *After Nature* it may seem irresistible to avoid accepting a future landscape void of nature and instead seek to preserve and catalogue as much data as possible to insight empathy and begin the long mourning. However, through the observation and experimentation of images and material, a contrary practice arises: one that revels in the permanency and flux of nature in the landscape of industry. For example, *The Matter Of Masters* reveals the dependence of artists on natural materials to produce colour. Rather than seeking to represent nature in a colonised museological way, in typical Laurence fashion, I wish to realign industry with nature by the manipulation of plastic into stone, or the presentation of nature as synonymous with the industrial landscape. In this manner, I hope to use scale and installation to reveal a kinship between nature and man, reminiscent of *Deep Breathing - Resurrecting the Reef*, where we acknowledge nature's dependency on humanity to survive, as well as human dependency on nature to exist. Transforming plastic into objects found within the natural world, similar to a fossil, I am able to utilise a man-made material as a platform to challenge old and circulate new hypotheses of nature.

An accumulation of knowledge about plastic allowed me to make more complex forms out of plaster and then resin. The mimetic quality of plastic has led me to extend my methodological and theoretical research in understanding junk as a cultural commodity and the wasteland as a future quarry. In the context of a contemporary practice, this contemplation considers what it means to live in the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene or the Cthulacene. My practices now continues with an extension of symbiosis through the acknowledgement of entropy's place in exposing the indistinguishable difference in geology between the existence of humans and dinosaurs, or the forming of marble, and the burial, compression and heating of waste in the earth. This idea involves the consideration of theories put forward by all individuals included in this thesis and additionally Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizeck. Zizeck makes two key statements when referring to waste;

Nature is not a balanced totality that we humans disturb, nature is a big series of unimaginable catastrophes. We profit from them. What is our main source of energy today? Oil, what is oil? Oil reserves beneath the earth are material remainders of an unimaginable catastrophe. Are we aware

oil is the remainder of animal life and plants and so on. Can you imagine what kind of unthinkable catastrophe has to occur on Earth [for this to happen]

[...]

The difficult thing is to find beauty and poetry in this reality. The difficulty is to find an aesthetic dimension, to recreate beauty in trash itself, that is a true love of the world. Because what is love? It is not idealisation, every lover knows that, if you really love a man or a woman then you don't idealise him or her, love means you accept a person as absolute, you see perfection in imperfection itself. True ecology is to love all of this [garbage]¹¹¹

The important comparison Zizek makes about oil reserves and the embrace of waste points to two staggering suggestions; 1. That the quarry is but a prehistoric wasteland of crystallised creatures buried, uncovered and culturally commodified for the purpose of capital and 2. The potentiality of waste to be uncovered, inverted from trash to treasure and commodified once again. By adopting these ideas in practice it is my intention to develop an unbiased replication of nature. The potential of using plastic in this way presents an artwork in the form of a future fossil. This future artefact is successful when it reflects a combination of human and nonhuman through a synthetic geology of plastic; [Figure 19].



Fig. 19 Chrystal Rimmer, *Plastick 0.1*, discarded plastic, 29 x 13 cm

¹¹¹ Examined Life. 2010. "Slavoj Zizek on Ecology as Religion." YouTube Video. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQblqNd5D90>.

The success of this join is heightened when an artefact is replicated over and over to signify industrial replication; [Figure 20].

These works embody a totality: the explicit inclusion of all interactions on Earth. These paintings are synthetic, organic, natural, unnatural, human, nonhuman, figurative, industrial and one-of-a-kind. Therefore, I feel like I have completed the task I had set out to achieve and have come closer to illuminating what a truly contemporary landscape might look like.



Fig. 20 Chrystal Rimmer, *Dead Weight/Life Weight*, discarded plastic, 165 x 130 cm

Conclusion

What I hope to present in this conclusion is a culmination of philosophies, theories and artistic practices that have contributed to the synthesis of my own methodologies of practice. This synthesis involves the analysis of dogma associated with landscape painting and, additionally, a broader discussion involving ecocriticism, and junk as a cultural commodity in art. It is the poetic use of refuse, and the wasteland that arises as the common thread to elaborate my hypothesis of nature. That is that the implicit inclusion of trash in the landscape stands for another marker in dissolving romantic ideologies of object and subject; trash moves beyond ideology to stand for both ecomimesis, sympoeisis and kinship. Junk as a cultural commodity in art becomes an actant for cultural critique, with the power to reflect current philosophies of thought in regard to landscape and nature. This hypothesis manifests as a personal fascination with waste, plastic in particular, as a transformative medium which often resembles stone. Exposing the potential of this medium, new questions arise about plastic as a geological form in the future. Both theoretical and practical research has led me to suggest that the answer to the landscape in art after landscape painting is the acknowledgment that junk is a cultural commodity, and the wasteland has the potential to be adopted as a future quarry.

In attempting to discover the landscape in art after landscape painting, I have found that the answers I was seeking came to fruition through the contemplation of three key figures; Deitch, Morton and Haraway. Each have a significant role to play in understanding my conundrum through the discourse of nature and ecology. Deitch highlighted the need for artists to ponder on new visions of nature—to confront the synthetic and the artificial mechanisms of humanity as combatants to idealisations of a pristine wilderness. This ‘Post-Natural Nature’ would seek to depart from Modernist dichotomies by including man, machine, mammal and insect. In confronting my own nostalgia for the ‘natural’, I began to question its definitions. It was in this search to discover a finite description it dissolved before me. This problem began to reveal itself in the inadequacies of language. Morton identifies this conundrum through a mimetic list: grass, trees, sky, lightbulb, energy¹¹²—whereby each word manifests a description heavily mixed between the organic and synthetic. Morton suggests that it is art that has the potential to overcome these dualities through ecomimesis—an aesthetic device adopted by artists to include all things, ambient and solid, to describe landscape. Ecomimesis is also an identification and acceptance that art making itself is an

¹¹² Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 14.

act of nature. In synthesising with everything this way, Morton accepts the inevitability of the extinction of species, including humans, as something dissolved within ecology, therefore accepting the premise of the Anthropocene—a human-centric geological epoch pertaining to a Modernist individualist narrative. To supersede this idea, Haraway becomes the protagonist in this thesis. She suggests, in opposition to Morton, a more sentimental, compassionate outlook that nurtures kinship with all species and non-species. It is a consolidation of all these thoughts, sentimental and anti-sentimental, which draws me to contemplate on the value of plastic waste in making art.

Vergine's *JUNK into Art* allowed me to contemplate on the history of junk in art as a mirror for culture and nature, for both run parallel in time. Developments in waste often correlated with the developments of philosophical and psychological thoughts in regard to nature and culture. Notably, this is seen in the works of artists such as Merz, who used materials such as clay and neon, and Smithson, who used tar to evoke the entropic characteristic of human expansion and 'natural' disasters, and Tubbs using the litter of the internet to celebrate difference as well as interconnectedness. The pinnacle of this research came in Smithson's description of entropic geology:

*If we consider the earth in terms of geologic time we end up with what we call geological entropy, for everything is gradually wearing down. It is evolutionary, but it is not evolutionary in terms of any idealism, it may be that human beings are just different from dinosaur rather than better, they almost seem to be the same thing*¹¹³

Although similar thoughts had crossed my mind regarding the burial of waste and its eventual conversion into a geological substance, Smithson reiterated ideas that I had developed in isolation. Importantly, Smithson's statement had reflected an understanding of ecomimesis and simpoesis decades before Morton or Haraway had published their theories. It was the essence of this statement that I sought to develop in my own practice; a painterly material of a current and future geology.

You could be forgiven for thinking that my studio practice was led by theory rather than methodology, though you would be mistaken. Although theory plays an extensive role in the development of my thesis, it is the experimentation and development of plastic as a transformative medium that leads this research. The intention of my practice was, and remains a way, to find an accurate representation of the contemporary landscape. To do so I have employed Morton's theories

¹¹³ Fiori, Bob. 1993. "RUNDOWN." Documentary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1M3HoZpXBc>.

of ecomimesis and the medial: an interruption of thought. Beginning with the collection of plastic from the landscape, I became more intimately aware of a landscape that does not seclude the synthetic, but implicates it in its description. The painterly qualities of plastic become apparent when the material is heated and compressed. Beginning with formalist blocks made from a compression mould of form-ply, an accumulation of knowledge about the material allowed me to make more complex reliefs out of plaster and then resin. Casts were made from objects I had found on my journey through the landscape. Over time I was able to compose the colour of each piece using the various bags I had collected. No pigment was added to any pieces. The success of a piece would be measured on its mimicry of marble, granite or precious stone.

The mimetic quality of plastic has led me to extend my methodological and theoretical research in understanding junk as a cultural commodity and the wasteland as a future quarry. From this point, my research has already begun to pave the way for further exploration into plastic as a painterly and geological medium similar to stone. In the end, this thesis poses more questions to be answered and more artistic possibilities to be explored. How far can I push the potential of plastic as a painterly medium? What would it mean to have a future quarry? What would it mean to mine such a quarry? Will humans exist in the future to do so? The future quarry opens up many significant possibilities in art and philosophy, including the geological recognition of human life on earth, not as a enlightened entity at the highest peak of evolutionary progress, but no different to the ancient crustaceans solidified in blocks of Carara marble

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