Time To Start Over

A group exhibition featuring works by

Lauren Hall
Jennifer Rose Sciarinno
Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley)

by

Penelope Jane Smart

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Time To Start Over
Criticism and Curatorial Practice
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Penelope Jane Smart
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Time To Start Over is a group exhibition that brought together artworks by artists Lauren Hall, Jennifer Rose Sciarrino and Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley). Scientists suggest that we are entering a new geological epoch, termed the Anthropocene, in which the natural world bears the unmistakable mark of the human hand. Using this speculative scenario as a figurative starting point, *Time To Start Over* occasioned works of sculpture, mixed-media assemblage and video as immanent "findings" from the evolving surface layer of history. Here, an archaeological approach, or attitude, regarding exhibition making was taken up as a procedural and conceptual concern. In order to position the works as "new" representations of nature, *Time To Start Over* explored various parallel critical structures and dialogues of "new histories," characterized most notably through the notion of "aftermaths" and "uncanny returns" in the realms of contemporary art theory, art history, and aesthetic philosophy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

"Time to start over" is a phrase that is full of promise and impossibility. To start over is to relinquish all that has come before, and all that may come after, in order gain some position, however oblique, in the reality of the present moment. Starting over is, thus, a form of submission, a state of being beholden to the idea of *now*. Paradoxically, any hold on or claim to the present is fragile and fleeting. Just as the sun appears in the east only to disappear each day beyond the horizon in the west, the "present" charts an endless and regenerative course of going until it is gone.

Time To Start Over is a curatorial project that considers how two eternal yet eternally problematic subjects in the history of artistic representation and production, "time" and "nature," are now in throes of new conceptual slippage. At the outset, (though without lingering too long in the realm of post-structural semiotics), it is necessary to single out the word "nature" as a sign that has never possessed a clear referent. As Michel Foucault reminds us in *The Order of Things (1966),* "nature," and, in turn, "landscape" – one of the former's many synonyms at further ideological remove – are simply words for a thing, a thing that people can come to understand only by way of our ascribing a name to it. "'Nature," Foucault says, is covered over by culture and language. It is "trapped in the thin layer that holds semiology and hermeneutics one about the other; ["Nature"] is neither mysterious nor veiled. It offers itself to our cognition, which it sometimes leads astray…As a result, the grid is

less easy to see through, its transparency is clouded over from the very first."[1] I have not attempted here to unlock this Foucauldian grid for a better word. I use the word "nature" throughout this work to reference the physical and material world in which humankind exists. Perhaps there is no better starting point than this for an exhibition of "new" objects of nature, a selection and presentation of "things" that rest necessarily atop the thick strata of linguistic, social and cultural construction.

Time To Start Over is a project comprised of a group exhibition, a series of curatorial essays, and an exhibition report. My grossly oversimplified curatorial question is this: Is nature, as we know it in 2013, "gone"? Could it be the case that the West's traditional image(s), or artistic representations of the natural world are eroding, falling off, from what they once were? And if so, how are inherited cultural codes which surround the natural world of the modern era changing, and why? My claim – that three "new" visions, or versions of "nature" by artists Lauren Hall, Jennifer Rose Sciarrino and Leisure (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley) might be grounded in shifting scientific theory in addition to the "unstable" contours of contemporary art theory - is highly speculative and provisional, as it is bound intimately to modes of interdisciplinary, particularly geologic, observation. Thus, *Time To Start Over* is as much a definite statement as it is a dubious inquiry as to whether "now" is, in fact, a precise moment in which to start looking for and claiming a temporal *nowness* to a selection of three artworks aglow in the late-capitalist, or "advanced digital" dawn of the twenty-first century.

[1] Michel Foucault, *On The Order of Things, An Archaeology of the human sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1970), 33. There are many scholars who write about the problems of language, nature and landscape. For a discussion focused on the of the problem of naming in terms of nature as a "built environment," see *The Culture of Nature* (1991) by Canadian scholar Alexander Wilson.

My inquiry was spurred on by events "outside" of the art world. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, geologists are suggesting that we are moving closer and closer to the suspended reality of a human-made world: a new geological epoch dubbed the "Anthropocene" in which humankind's activity upon the earth may, for the first time, require notation in the official geological timescale (see "A New Foundation?: The Anthropocene" pgs. 10-13). By the sheer force of our presence, the accumulating mass of our waste, the scale of environmental destruction, and the proliferation of climate-altering technologies, scientists speculate that humankind may be gaining the upper hand in "planetary transformation."[2] Accordingly, *Time To Start Over* is a critical project that combines a curatorial undertaking and a series of commentaries. Somewhat unexpectedly, it reveals how the works from the group exhibition correlate thematically with nineteenth-century Romanticism, the Age of Decadence, and up through the *fin de siècle*, the literal and figurative turning over of one era into another and a point in which Modernism became fully ingrained as a socio-cultural-economic reality.[3] It is a strange interpretative chronology in which artworks that are produced today, in the so-called fading or mutating of industrial capitalism, reflect or refract similar considerations of visual artists, intellectuals, and writers who first turned to face a future of unfathomable technological and industrial change. Certainly this "periodic"

[2] The Haus der Kulturen de Welt, "The Anthropocene Project," http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/2013/anthropozaen/anthropozaen_76723.php (accessed February 28, 2013).
[3] Michael Lowry and Robert Sayre, "Redefining Romanticism," in *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (New York: Duke University Press, 2001), 1-56.

shadowing, even representational shape shifting, is complex and far from straightforward.

Time to Start Over brings together for the first time the recent work by Glasgow-based artist Lauren Hall, Montreal-based artist-curator duo Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley), and Toronto-based artist Jennifer Rose Sciarrino. In separate but related ways, each artist creates emblems of nature from an unfamiliar age. In a series of essays, I further interrogate each artist's work and practice. While autonomous in scope, these essays turn on a set of questions: What do these works tell us about our present-day relationship with nature? How can an art object implicate or "re-present" nature as "new"? After all, nature is, by *its* very nature, outside of time. For "time," though it "girds the earth tight" is not natural.[4] As a species, we are driven to measure and order time by the technological means: sundials, timepieces, and clocks. And yet, geologic "time" cannot sit "astride minutes and seconds,"[5] and, it is not generalizing to say that, scientifically, we "experience" millennia in shallow field of two-dimension, through the visual language of graphs, and charts. Thus, I offer the following as a type of rhetorical salve: In what cleavages, stoppages or crevices– in what performances of time – does "new" or "novel" nature reside? Following this, where do we look for it, where has it been hiding?

It is important here to flush out the paradox of "new" nature as a core problem. I approach this question by way of the aesthetic logic of landscape painting. Landscape is a genre of art about nature. Landscapes are views of nature and

[4] Raqs Media Collective, "Now and Elsewhere," in *e-flux Journal # 12 (Jan0Feb 2011)* under "On Time" http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/print.aspx?type=by&catid=2 (accessed March 15, 2013). There can be a distinction made here between time and the body's circadian *rhythm*.
[5] Ibid.

humankind's place within it, as the artist sees the relationship through his or her socio-cultural lens. In the Romantic era, the Western view of nature was "new" in two differential categories: the Sublime and the Picturesque. Importantly, these two traditional categories, or aesthetic visual codes for nature, still hold sway. Here, my argument around "new" nature takes up the intellectual orbit of scholar Amanda Boetzkes. In a recent paper called "Waste and the Sublime Landscape" (2010), Boetzkes suggests that a "new" nature might be emerging via artists' emerging interrogation of aesthetic potentials of trash, in a genre of art production termed "waste art."[6] In Boetzkes's research, waste art carries the capacity to explode or bring together the traditional categories of the sublime and beautiful.

On a basic visual level, however, none of the art works in *Time To Start Over* come close to landscape painting.[7] Keeping this is mind, the argument I take up from Boetzkes as to whether or not the mixed-media works in *Time To Start Over* can be read as a landscape rests on a successful marshaling of evidence in support of the following statement: In their earliest formulation, Romantic landscape painters revealed, in a visual language common to the era, new ideas of possible *future* intersections between humankind and nature. These "points of contact"[8] were brought about from radical discoveries about the history of the earth and human existence and presented a dynamic oscillation between fact and fiction. Arguably,

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[6] Amanda Boetzkes, "Waste and the Sublime Landscape," RACAR (Revue d'art canadien/Canadian Art Review) 35.1 (2010): 22-31. See also Boetzkes's *The Ethics of Earth Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Currently, Boetzkes is working on a forthcoming book entitled *Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste* that will analyze "the use and representation of garbage in contemporary art, and more subtly, how waste as such is defined, narrativized and aestheticized in the age of global capitalism." http://amandaboetzkes.com (accessed March 16 2013).

[7] Hall, Sciarrino and Leisure do not self-identify as landscape artists.

[8] " …the landscape of waste articulates the point at which human supremacy over the earth ends a new contact with it might begin." Boetzkes, 23.

then, the socio-cultural-scientific conditions of the present-day, tied, as they seem to be, to the notion of an epochal shift, reflect or recall certain aesthetic modes, or mindsets, of the nineteenth-century. I do not think this thesis project, limited as it is by space and time, can prove such a claim; nevertheless, I have, in the wake of "Waste and the Sublime Landscape," planted the seed for such an argument.

Regarding the question of how present-day artists are "seeking out" nature, I have moved toward this idea by "wandering" at times beyond the realm of art history and art theory, into the cultural spheres of literature and popular science. I have done this not only in the hopes of finding sure answers but with the idea of wanting to explore some *possible* places to which each artist in *Time To Start Over* may have gone searching. Examples of included the following: various examples of Romantic landscape painting and literature, early modern verse of Baudelaire, *fin de siècle* manifestoes of architecture and proto-science fiction writing. Ultimately, it is within the realm of Surrealism that this expedition appears to end.

The first essay of *Time to Start Over*, called "Time's new treasure seeker," explores a new notion of the sublime and the picturesque through artist Lauren Hall's mix-media assemblage, *A thing wherein we feel some hidden want (2013)*. In this work, Hall places florescent "sand," "shells," "coral," and a SAD lamp upon a glass serving dish.[9] After mulling over Hall's miniature shoreline, I perceive the artist as a strange type of beachcomber, or a tourist; a sentimental wanderer lost among new confusions of time and place. Moving forward from the title of this work, a line

[9] A SAD lamp is a light therapy device used to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a common condition in which a person experiences depressive symptoms or mood changes during the change of the seasons.

borrowed from Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), we see how Hall toys with the notion of human-made nature, or "denaturation," as a fresh agony of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

In the second essay, I consider another artist's fondness for polishing stones. In "A late capitalist lapidary," I discuss the small sculptural work *Mineral Specimen 12 (2011)* by artist Jennifer Rose Sciarrino. To make this *Specimen*, Sciarrino created plastic casts of geological minerals based on images unearthed from a digital database. The minerals are marvelously, painstakingly, fake. How does this artist's fabrication of plastic gemstones, molded from half-image, half-imaginary museological rarities, ignite a larger discussion on the contemporary art object as a naturally "dead" material?

In the third essay, I turn to Leisure's new video work *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone (2013)* with its accompanying image of a strange architectural interior: The Bedroom of Lina Loos. The stop motion animation video by artist-curators Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley is a silent looping image of an indistinct human hand as it moves gently over, or caresses, a textured grey environment. In "A more subtle fantasy" I ask after *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* as a project that inhibits a space of intimate fantasy in art and science, as it is work that collapses the recent history of Modern design within "antique" lore of space travel. Transmuting and procreant, the work's extraterrestrial imagery seduces and unsettles. Trapped in its own world, what does the human hand desire? Disparate as they are each of the discrete works in *Time To Start Over* present certain qualities and critical similarities; each is individually and collectively aesthetic, mnemonic, and ambiguous.

Here, the mixture of analytic "ambling" and more direct "seeking" points to an important process-based consideration at the heart of this project. It is a biological and geological truth that transformation takes place over the course of infinite moments, in the tenuous unfurling of new beginnings. By this process, any visible evidence of change or mutation appears only "after the fact"— in time's sloughing off of seconds, minutes, years, millennia. In this sense, history, as well as the more philosophical question of provenance, are bound up in the small details of time. Indeed, in the field of natural history the natural world is but itself an artifact of time. In conceiving this exhibition, I have allowed my curatorial eye to turn towards, or notice, works of art that, in both form and content, appear literally or figuratively as "surface" geological and archaeological debris: objects glinting off beaten path; work that "washes up on the shore"; or research-based narratives "picked up" by way of intellectual yet leisurely discussion.[10]

As an argument and exhibition, *Time To Start Over* is a group of art objects brought together using a quasi-archaeological approach to exhibition making. A productive problematic of my curatorial process has involved my consideration of these works as a traces or artifacts from a "new" landscape that is, imperatively, one we need to recognize as uniquely our own.[11] While referencing forms in the natural world, each of these works provokes ideas around ruins, detritus, kitsch and trash. Individually and collectively, then, the works are representations of nature from the

[10] Importantly, a curatorial methodology connected to collecting, ordering and naming random "fragments" or "natural occurring specimens" of an artist's practice is invested in the Foucauldian dissection of the Scientific Method. I have discovered that there are many productive tensions here – and my consideration of Scientific Empiricism (limited by time and space at this point in time) has opened up new avenues of socio-cultural research and interest in STS (Science and Technology Studies) by way of scholars deeply embedded in the field such as Bruno Latour.

[11] I take up further discussion of the archaeological approach in the Exhibition Report; see pgs. 87-93.

recent history, a destructive and traumatic period also known to some archaeologists under the title of "supermodernity."[12] In this way, I believe that there is an important undercurrent of loss, linked to undercurrents of collapse and recovery, flowing through *Time To Start Over*. In the exhibition, we see "nature" as a seductive object and distressing synthetic human-made artifact. Already it is worth noting that cast in the speculative shadow of unnatural evolution, each artist's versions of nature retreats into the realm of private reverie and imagination. "Nature" is both a near and far, sought out by each artists as both a motif and a memory. Yet perhaps it is here, at the threshold of the unreal and imaginary, that we find the contemporary art object kindling, sparking with new aesthetic afterlife (see "After the 'After' of Contemporary Art" pgs. 21-37).

Time To Start Over rests on an apparatus of a theoretical resuscitation now underway in contemporary art. In order to wrest the contemporary art object back from its respective burial grounds of modernism and post-modernism, I, in line with key thinkers in art history and curation, must permit that it may return as a deformed, hybrid, undead entity. Viewed a certain way, the contemporary art object, including those that I have selected, may be viewed as malfeasant. Several key theorists in contemporary art have considered just this, arguing that the contemporary art object can be correctly identified by its ominous and supernatural qualities. Necessarily, the proceeding section "The Coming After of Contemporary Art" functions as a form of literary review of the writing and research of three late

[12] Alfredo Gonzaelez-Ruibal, "Time To Destroy, The Archaeology of Supermodernity," *Current Anthropology* 49 (April 2008): 247-279. For philosophical analytics on modernity and the art of ruins see also *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason (2006)* by philosophy scholar Dylan Trigg.

capitalist thinkers: art critics Hal Foster and Johanna Drucker and writer and curator Carolyn-Christov Bakargiev. Each of these individuals postulate that art made in the early decades of the twenty-first century emanates a critical light that is between the brightness of dawn and the darkness of dusk. It is the afterglow of twilight: an eerie flicker of the time between the always-old and the forever-new. These thinkers ground the work of Hall, Leisure and Sciarrino firmly in the *history of contemporary art* as opposed to this exhibition's larger backdrop of the interminable history of human life on earth. The idea of a "coming after" in contemporary art brings us momentarily back to the beginning. *Time To Start Over* is more a question about ambiguous potentialities than a declarative announcement.

A new foundation?: *The Anthropocene*

Geological scientists suggest that we are entering a new geological epoch. Anthropocene (Anthropo = human, cene = new) is a geological term (though, in recalling Foucault, a meaningless scientific name) now in use to mark a new geological epoch for both human history and the natural earth. In the Anthropocene, humankind is now more than ever fully implicated in the appearance, form, and function of the natural world. For the first time, this new epoch would mark human activity "in the rock record"[13] and, unlike our current period known as the Holocene[14], the Anthropocene is predicted to be a highly unstable and unpredictable epoch. According to the popular magazine *Science Daily,* the Anthropocene is an era

[13] "Have Humans Created a New Geological Epoch?" in *New Scientist*, 197 no I2641 (2008): 5.
[14] According to The Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society, the Holocene is our current geological epoch that extends back 11,700 years. http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/holocene13 (accessed April 22 2013).

that marks a critical turning point, a "beginning of the end" in which "humans have wrought such vast and unprecedented changes to our world that we actually might be ushering in a new geological time interval, and alter the planet for millions of years." (2010) The term itself, along with founding research, comes from the Nobel Prize-winning Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen. In the early 2000s, Crutzen and several colleagues published research and ideas about the anthropocene in a series of newsletters for the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (IGBP) entitled "The Anthropocene" (2000) and "How Long Have We Been in the Anthropocene Era?"(2003). According to the journal *New Scientist*, "the label has been used informally since," and today, scientists are "urging decision makers" at high levels of geological science, such as researchers at the International Union of Geological Sciences, to formalize it.[15]

In recent years, the idea of the anthropocene has gained currency as an urgent event outside the world of scientific research. It first came to my attention in a CBC radio documentary called "Anthropocene," which aired in July 2012.[16] It is a controversial idea that carries high stakes across many fields: global geo-politics; environmental policy; and aesthetic philosophy. The idea of the "human-made world" places human, animal and plant life firmly in the realm of the precarious, hybridized unknown. Such is a big idea and one that commands the power to capture public imagination as well as connect to leading theory across disciplines in the arts and sciences. Important historical and historiographical considerations are

[15] Ibid. The Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society has yet to update geologic timescale.
[16] *Anthropcene,"*The Current with Anna Maria Tremonti*,"* CBC, first aired September 7, 2011.

also at play in the sense that the idea of a new epoch recalls the socio-cultural distinctions of previous ones. Here, the search for evidence of the Anthropocene calls to light Darwin's groundbreaking *Origin of Species (1859),* a theory borne of the scientific beginnings of geology and biology.

Important for my purposes here, the idea of the Anthropocene, or a new geological era as critical structure, extends back to the nineteenth century, a period that saw the birth of modern geologic theory. Throughout the nineteenth century in Europe, new discoveries in an emergent field of geology, such as "deep time," and the age of the earth had widespread implications across the spectrum of arts and science. In the early nineteenth century, radical geological theory put forward and popularized by a complex multitude of "amateurs": artists, geologists and early natural history scientists (the best examples here are Charles Darwin and John Ruskin) "provided a conceptual framework that made visible previously invisible aspects of the earth's topography."[17] New geologic theory "posited a history of the earth profoundly different from that accepted in previous centuries. Although early geologists vigorously and sometimes acrimoniously debated almost every aspect of this new history, virtually all were agreed that the earth was far older that the six thousand years suggested by traditional biblical records."[18] Earth changed from a static, Biblical creation to an ancient and dynamic organism. The expanded and incompressible reach of time in the history of the natural world transformed the

[17] Rebecca Bedell, "The History of the Earth: Darwin, Geology and Landscape Art," in *Endless Forms, Charles Darwin, Natural Science and Visual Art.* ed. Diana Donald and Jane Monroe (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 52. A well-known primary source on nineteenth-century geological theorization is *Principles of Geology (1830)* by influential British geologist Sir Charles Lyell.
[18] Bedell, 49.

artist's vision of landscape, "impelling [artists] to develop new pictorial strategies to express their transformed understanding of the earth."[19] Once again, *Time To Start Over* situates contemporary art production at a similar point in time, a moment in which "the fading" of the old casts an eerie glow over the "new," allowing artists to "see" the natural world and our place within it in an entirely new way. The real or metaphorical anthropocene, as the dawn of a new geological era, brings forward a new, acute awareness of the faraway depths of geologic time and the relative "surface" layer of human history.

New Art for a New World?

In the same way the Anthropocene is as yet an idea, an awareness, or sensitivity to changes in how the natural world might be beginning to look and feel different in light of climatic and geological research, my aim in *Time To Start Over* is not to prove or disprove, interpret or validate, exploratory environmental research. Rather, I decided to place Hall, Leisure and Sciarrino's work in the matrix or lens of issues called forth by the idea of such an epochal shift: environmental precarity; human-nature hybridity; mass market material surplus; the role of new technologies, aesthetics of nature, and the notions of transformation, collapse and recovery. In this way, the optics of "new nature," or even "no nature," is certainly not new, but newly relevant.

There is evidence that points to a clear awareness of an emergent paradigmatic shift at play across contemporary art production. I cannot list them all,

[19] Ibid.

but I will touch briefly on a variety of exhibitions and symposia that are regional, national, and international in scope that present the Anthropocene as a curiosity and concern for artists, curators, and cultural workers in the recent history of the twenty-first century.

In one of the exhibition essays for dOCUMENTA(13) a "new sense of the future" was articulated clearly.[20] In fact, *The Book of Books, 100 Notes* includes in its massive collection of writings the declarative monograph "Living in the Anthropocene," (2013) by American art scholar Jill Bennett. Bennett, citing Thomas Kuhn's influential analysis *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962)*, describes the idea of a human-made world as an entirely new "framing concept" or worldview, and that the anthropocene will change everything: "the way we eat, carry food home from the supermarket, dispose of garbage, use transportation of water."[21] According to Bennett, the logistics of this new world will require nothing short of a "transdisciplinary revolution" or the systematic integration and implementation of "practices that refuse to stay in one place."[22] Literally and figuratively, Bennett suggests our survival as a species rests on the successful cross-pollination of art, science, theory and "everyday life."[23] For Bennett, the human-made world is a certainty; "what is not yet imagined is the shape of future collaborative practice."[24]

In the wake of dOCUMENTA (13), the Haus de Kulturen de Welt in Berlin is now in its first months of a yearlong interdisciplinary programme (something

[20] Jill Bennett, "Living in the Anthropocene," in *The Book of Books, 100 Thoughts –100 Notes*. (Berlin: Hatie Cantz, 2012), 345-347. Published in conjunction with dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, Germany.
[21] Bennett, 345.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Bennett, 346.

dubbed an "archipelago of thoughts") called "The Anthropocene Project" (2013-2014). According to the centre's website, this project explores a new reality where "Nature as we know it is a concept that belongs to the past. No longer a force separate from and ambivalent to human activity, nature is not an obstacle nor a harmonious other. Humanity forms nature. Humanity and nature are one, embedded within the recent geological record."[25] Similar to Bennett, organizers of the Anthropocene Project pose major questions of disciplinary dismantling: "If the opposition between humanity and nature has been dissolved, what processes must we undergo to shift our perspectives and trained perceptions?"[26]

As I have already intimated, the perception of time itself is bound up intimately in questions of epochal change. This year, the Musée d'art contemporian de Montréal launched an extended symposia series entitled "Contemporary Art Between Time and History." This eight-part lecture series, taking place from January to May 2013, brings together some of the key thinkers in contemporary art, curation, and aesthetic philosophy. Exploring art and artists' Modern, Postmodern and present-day perceptions of time, the lecture series is "a unique occasion to think about the ways in which contemporary art holds itself between time and history, in order to update our understanding of our historical condition."[27] The wide variety of lecturers has been gathered into intriguing discursive categories, such as "To Historicize the Contemporary/to Contemporize History" and "Returns." Here we

[25] The Haus der Kulturen de Welt, "The Anthropocene Project," http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/2013/anthropozaen/anthropozaen_76723.php (accessed February 28, 2013).
[26] Ibid.
[27] Musée d'art contemporian de Montréal, "Contemporary Art Between Time and History," http://www.macm.org/en/activites/larchive-2/(accessed February 28, 2013).

see a large institution encircling the idea of evolutionary advancement by considering the way in which the visual (i.e., aesthetic) vectors of time are far from straight arrows.

One of the strongest, though often more indirect, links to the intermingling of art, nature, and geology with contemporary art production is the widespread and numerous art exhibitions that position art, individually and collectively, as a speculative science. One of the most notable examples is *In the Holocene,* an exhibition of objects and installations presented by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology List Visual Arts Centre in Cambridge, MA, from October 18, 2012 – January 6, 2013. In this show, a large number of works were assembled to investigate "principles more commonly associated with scientific or mathematical thought…amending what is explained through traditional scientific or mathematical means: entropy, matter, time (cosmic, geological), energy, topology, mimicry, perception, consciousness, et cetera."[28] Indeed, exhibitions as re-visions of epistemologies of the natural world have never been more critical and culturally viable in the world of art production.

As a result, it is worthwhile to mention briefly the current popularity and critical significance of the practice of American artist Marc Dion (b. 1961). Dion creates intricate installations and performances that explore the complex twenty-first century "displacement" of the nineteenth-century naturalist. Through the eyes of many critics, Dion exemplifies a specific (and endemic?) group of artists "of the now" who are taking a sustained second look at the way we know things about

[28] MIT Visual Art Centre, "In the Holocene," http://listart.mit.edu/node/937#.US-P9hmr8y4 (accessed Jan 13 2013).

nature.[29] The power of practices like Dion's exists in their subtle, evocative explosion of "natural" orthodoxies, specifically the paradigm of nineteenth century scientific empiricism. Here, the notion of human-made nature is tossed poignantly in the air as a curious and antiquated "way of knowing."

Finally, I drawn attention to the renewed interest among artists in the landscape genre itself and its traditional Romantic subcategories of the Sublime and the Picturesque as markers of a new Anthropoceneic consciousness: an emergent present-day awareness of the interplay between geological theory and aesthetic understanding. This category expands outward from new ways of *knowing* to new ways of *seeing*. For the sake of brevity, the following is a non-exhaustive list of recent local and international solo and group exhibitions that re-visit the idea of "natural" landscape. The titles are in themselves expressive of my point: *To What Does this Sweet Cold Earth Belong (2011)* at The Power Plant Contemporary Arts Centre in Toronto, *Echo Dell, A Gathering of Elemental Energies (2012)* at Narwhal Art Projects, Toronto, *Dark Romanticism: From Goya to Max Ernst. (2012-2013)* at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt Germany and Musée d'Orsay, and an exhibition now in its early stages of planning under the working title of "Mystic Landscape," at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

Whether the Anthropocene is viewed as fact or fiction and, importantly, recalled in our post-Foucauldian reality as a problematic and abstract term, the Anthropocene can be viewed as a large stone thrown in a pond, now beginning to

[29] Miwon Kwon, "Unnatural Tendencies: The Scientific Guises of Mark Dion," in *Natural History and Other Fictions: An Exhibition by Mark Dion,* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1997), 38-44.

cast waves and ripples across a range of artistic, cultural and scientific disciplines. In this way, *Time To Start Over* is both the subject and object of a specific moment in time. Local, national, and international contemporary art is wrapped up in the "look and feel" of geologic time and of the idea of a "new" astonishing human world. *Time To Start Over* thus contends with a remarkable time of transition when traditional markers of what's natural and human-made grow less and less distinct.

NO FOUNDATION: *Context Overview*

NO FOUNDATION is a new project space as part of Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects in Toronto. Launched in the fall of 2012, NO FOUNDATION functions as an experimental project room in addition to her main gallery and commercial space located just next door. NO FOUNDATION is a small room with concrete floors, three metre ceilings, and a large street-facing window space.[30]

Mulherin has a fourteen-year history of putting on exhibitions, sometimes as a curator and artist, but for the past nine years, mostly as an art dealer. As one of the pioneers of independent galleries in the now-booming Queen Street West art scene, Katharine Mulherin Contemporary positioned itself from the beginning as an amorphous exhibition space for contemporary art, particularly for young and mid-career artists. A brief history of the gallery is available on the website:

> Mulherin originally opened BUSgallery, a storefront exhibition space in the neighborhood of Parkdale in Toronto. Over the past 14 years Mulherin's

[30] The NO FOUNDATION space connects to a small art multiples shop/salon called NO SHOW FOUNDATION SHOP.

> projects have shifted and grown into two showcase galleries on Toronto's Queen Street West, and a satellite project space in Manhattan's Lower East Side (MULHERIN + POLLARD with co-director John Pollard). Additional platforms have included 1080BUS, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, KMLA, Katharine Mulherin's SIDESHOW, NO SHOW EXHIBITS and MULHERIN POLLARD PROJECTS. While Mulherin has established herself as an art dealer, she continues to approach her practice as a project, driven by her concerns as an artist and curator.[31]

NO FOUNDATION is the latest development of Mulherin's "merging her work as an artist with her work as a gallerist."[32] Mulherin's aim is to work with new artists outside her current roster and to open up the space to guest curators and artist-curator collaborations.[1] NO FOUNDATION operates primarily as a non-commercial space. The nascent programming for NO FOUNDATION ensures that a solo show will run for a period of two-months (double the approximate three-week scheduling for regular gallery shows), which allows some breathing room for installations/performances, as well as public programming. Under the idea that audiences will see the project as an ongoing series, NO FOUNDATION also publishes its own small catalogue for each artist project.

The name NO FOUNDATION alludes to an absence of structure that carries both positive and negative potential: absolute freedom and a liberation from established rules or dangerous, unstable footing and a total loss of order. Conceptually, the name connects powerfully to imagery of geology, bedrock and organic stratum. As a non-traditional exhibition space, NO FOUNDATION presents clear entry into the open dialogues of the hybridization, destabilization, and

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[31] "Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects," under "History," http://www.katharinemulherin.com (accessed September 2012).
[32] Katharine Mulherin, interview by the author, July 2012.

transmutability that surround the professional frameworks of curation. *Time To Start Over* is thus a selection of works that I have brought together in a specific time and space in light of their tentative and flickering supplications to the *now*.

LITERATURE REVIEW: *After the "After" of Contemporary Art*

It is in within this language of new histories where the works in *Time To Start Over* find their theoretical foundation. As I have alluded to in my introduction, it is a footing, or underpinning that is shifting and unstable. This instability is, in part, due to the notion of conceptual "aftermaths" at play in contemporary art. The idea of an aftermath – aftershocks, reverberations and after-effects – infers that there was an end, a death, or cessation of some kind; importantly, it is the philosophical paradox of "the end of art" that simultaneously draws the strongest and most tenuous contours of contemporary art. It is here, within the scrutinized history of the recent-past, a period marked by the playing out of the old and tired critical structures of modernism and postmodernism, that new ideas of possible critical frameworks for art in a new period of "coming after," begin to emerge.

The idea of the "end of Art" involves many key philosophical and theoretical texts from a great number of art critics, theorists, essayists and intellectuals who have written about beginnings, endings and Art.[33] I have limited my research on the "end of Art" to a selection of art critics, theorists, historians, and curators who, in the last few years, have taken up a critical "shine" to the idea of certain "spectral" qualities and temporal "afterglow" of the art being made in the first decades of the twenty-first century, that is, half a century after art's theoretical "death." This section includes a brief discussion about the concept of the end of Art. It will move forward

[33] Most notably: Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Victor Burgin's *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Post Modernity*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1986); Arthur C. Danto's *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

to explore more recent developments of the concept in the writing and scholarship of three late-capitalist thinkers: Hal Foster, Johanna Drucker, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.

The "end of Art" has a specific history. The phrase – popularized by American philosopher-critic Arthur C. Danto in *After the End of Art, Contemporary Art and the End of History (1997)* – became the analytical refrain codified in the mid-eighties, yet it is a concept that maintains deep roots in the mix-sixties. Critically, the mid-sixties in the West was a time when ideas and proclamations about art, in ceasing to be what it once was, "came fast and furious."[34] Importantly, in *After The End of Art*, Danto never meant to signal the end of art production. Instead, through a philosophical case study of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes (1964)*, Danto contended that art was no longer bound by two key historical narratives, namely the "visual mandate" of naturalism, or mimetic theory (the striving towards a "better and better" depiction of the natural world; the camera and film challenged this concern) and its more recent Greenburgian aim towards purity of media.[35] In the sixties, Danto explains, art had nowhere to go but inside itself, and so began a new and unwieldy chapter of self-theorizing: "A story was over. It was not my view that there would be no more art, which 'death' certainly implies, but that whatever art there was to be would be made

[34] Foster, Hal. "This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse," in *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zurich: JRPRiniger, 2007), 12. Foster quotes Minimalist artist Donald Judd who stated about the sixties that: "linear history has unravelled somewhat." See Joseph Kosuth, "Specific Objects," in *Complete Writings*, (New York/Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1974), 184.

[35] Daniel Herwitz, ed., *Danto's End of Art Thesis*, under "Danto, Arthur," in Oxford Art Online, www.oxfordartonline.com (accessed Jan 6, 2013).

without benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage of the story."[36]

In the loss of art's philosophical and historical anchor in the Hegelian notion of art history, it was unclear what, if anything, art stood to gain.[37] In the 1969 post-humous publication of *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodore Adorno states: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the word, not even its right to exist."[38] After the collapse of the critical structure of Modernism, a rapid succession of key movements or "isms," such as conceptualism, minimalism, post-minimalism, as well as Process and Body art – offered no definitive or particularly comforting narratives.[39] Instead, art objects and artistic practice continued to expand ideological bounds further and faster. It is here, in the pall of Adorno's admonishing and Danto's neat philosophical end-tying, American art critic Hal Foster wonders if there might, in fact, be ways in which contemporary art is moving away from art-as-philosophy, or, "Art-as-*whatever*."[40]

As a way to work around "whatever," Foster posits, what about positioning art as approximate, or better yet, "undead." In the essay "This Funeral is for the

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[36] Arthur C. Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

[37] German aesthetic philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) theorized "art is both evidence of the progress of history and, at various stages, crucial to the process by which progress takes place." For more on Hegelain aesthetic philosophy see Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, "Hegel and the birth of art history" in *Art History, A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (London: Manchester University Press, 2006), 21-39.

[38] Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 1 edition 1998), 1.

[39] The least comforting of all these non-narratives was perhaps the argument put forward by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle (1967)*. This is key text of the Situationists. In the 60s and 70s, The Situationalist International Group, "formed a caucus of opposition to the mediated experience of life under capitalism. They issued a call for the simultaneous dissolution and transcendence of art, for a return to pleasure, to spontaneity, to instinct and prelogical creativity," see Simon Anderson, "Situationist Aesthetics," under "Situationists,"*Oxford Art Online*, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy-library.ocad.ca/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0478 (accessed Jan 14 2013).

[40] Foster, 11.

Wrong Corpse" (2007, first published in 2002) Foster wonders if it is possible, now, to resurrect art from its philosophical burial site. For Foster, contemporary art and its lack of ideology or *critical stance* has laid waste to an interminable "trope-ing" of oppositional narratives and negative ideologies: "All of us (artists, critics, curators, historians, viewers) need some narrative to focus our present practices – situated stories, not *grand recits*. Without this guide we may remain swamped in the double wake of post/modernism and the neo/avant-garde. Rather than deny this aftermath, then, why not, admit it and ask: what now, what else?"[41] In the wake of this admittance, Foster proposes four strategies that are interrelated, descriptive "ways of being"– through which contemporary art might stake new critical claims: "traumatic"; "spectral"; "nonsychronous"; and "incongruent."[42] With these four words, we see Foster asking after the possibility of "newly situated" stories, or perhaps narrative genres, that position art in general, and in the this context of this thesis exhibition, the specific works of *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want*, *Mineral Specimen 12*, or *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* as strangely unfamiliar protagonists. It is important to point out here that for Foster, and a good number of others, it is – or *has been* – the art-world(s) insistence on art's "negative" or oppositional anti-aesthetics – now a relic of modernism *and* post-modernism - that is now most damaging, or innocuous.[43] Thus, in this new late-capitalist chronicle – Foster points to an uncomfortable absolution of art's formerly held wholeness and

41 Foster, 13. See also Benjamin Buchloch's *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2000).
42 Ibid.
43 For one of the most widely cited argument outlining postmodernism's "break" from modernist ideals see Rosalind Krauss's collection of essays *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (1986)*. See also *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (1983),* which is edited by Hal Foster, and the later, more political analysis of art in the postmodern era, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents (2004)* by French theorist Jacques Rancière.

moral high ground. At the occasion of art's philosophical transcendence, Danto, was, after all, staring at a Brillo Box, a sundry commercial, consumable object. With this in mind, it is possible to rephrase Foster's question once again: How might present-day art and exhibitions *positively engage* with the stark insidiousness of capitalism; namely, the forces of free-market capitalism (including the art market), and, for my purposes here, a new potency surrounding humankind's anthropocentric view of nature and most other living organisms. In this light, contemporary art is not so much an "undead" object as an indefinite entity "returning" from a new birthplace: not from the "outside" but from the complex "inside" of engrained cultural codes of Western democratic, free-market liberation and/or human-made ecological destruction. This is indeed a challenging set of assumptions about contemporary art's form and function. It is in very real ways distressing.

Briefly then, Foster's first "new" category is "trauma." Foster refers to works or exhibitions that manifest through paradoxical modalities of "experience that is *not* experienced, at least not punctually."[44] For example: the Holocaust, the World Wars and ongoing international conflicts, the psychological terror of global warming. Works of art that engage the notion of "meta disasters" are works that give way to our globalized, advanced-digital experience of being impeccably *out of time*.[45] In the twenty-first century, Foster posits that not only when, but *where* trauma originates is often unclear. In this way, the notion of provenance – or derivation – in terms of

[44] Foster, 14. Note author's addition of Italics on "not." Foster uses the example of American sculpture and installation artist Robert Gober (b.1954).

[45] "...moments of dreaming and lucid alertness are eroded with the knowledge of intimate terrors and distant wars." Raqs Media Collective, "Now and Elsewhere," in *e-flux Journal* 12 (January-December 2011), under "On Time," http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/images/pdf/9e843ea2-7f3c-426c-aa5e-28072bdfccf7.pdf (accessed April 19 2013).

global, national, local (or, individual and communal) suffering, is key; where things went drastically "wrong" is both obvious and deceptive. Works of art that speak to "trauma" are powerful in their ability to be either "real or fantastic."[46] Here, Leisure's stop animation video *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* inhabits the borderland of a possible "ordeal": is the human hand gentle caressing, or mutely disturbing – or distressing - the environment to which it is bound?

The second quality, "spectral" is about a more literal shadowing of old genres in contemporary art; however, the quality of these shadows are "muted, a sort of outlining and shading"[47] rather than bold strokes as outlines. Importantly, this spectrality can also operate "formally at the level of genre or medium," as in the case of British artist Rachel Whiteread's (b. 1963) *House (1993)*: a concrete casting of a house scheduled for demolition in London's East End working-class neighbourhood. Hauntingly, Whiteread's critically acclaimed sculpture was a "negative imprint of vanished rooms…inscribed not only with the outlines of window sills, doors frames and utility lines, but also with traces of past inhabitants."[48] On a much smaller scale, Jennifer Rose Sciarinno's *Mineral Specimen 12,* the plastic cast of a geological mineral, also operates on Whiteread's haunting representational terms of hollowness, vacancy and materiality. It is the undaunted material presence of these objects (i.e. plastics and concrete) that sets us toward a new visual understanding of what may be, more viscerally, disappearing.

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Foster, 15. "Spectrality" here is exampled by Jim Jarmush's film *Ghost Dog (2000).*

[48] Foster, 5.

Foster's third category is that of the "nonsynchronous." In Foster's view, an artist's capacity to work with mnemonic and nonsynchronous forms allows him or her to "hold together markers of different times."[49] The film, photography and installation work of artists William Kentridge (b. 1955) and Stan Douglas (b.1960), according to Foster, place subtle pressures on, and draw invisible lines between, what is "outmoded": technologies, materials, meaning. Strategies of the "nonsychronous" explode "conventional categories of cultural objects" and challenge free-market capitalism's and bourgeoisie taste with its own "wish symbols."[50] By doing so, says Foster, these artists force us to remember "our own forfeited dreams of liberty, equality, and fraternity."[51] And, in a similar vein perhaps, new twenty-first century "sacrifices" of nature. Following the logic of what is nonsyncronous, Lauren Hall's *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* might be read as a confused collection plate of the mid nineteenth-century culture of nature, a newly operative mix-mash of stale, overly consumed, or overly-consumable, Western desires.

The final strategy is "incongruent." Examples of incongruency for Foster dwell in the "often performative and provisional" work of artists Rirkit Tiravanjia (b. 1961) and Felix-Gonzalez-Torres (b. 1957-1966). Though not performance or relational works in and off themselves, it is my view that each of the works in *Time to Start Over* "juxtaposes traces of different spaces" and "complicates found things with invented ones, reframes given spaces, and…leaves behind enigmatic site-specific

[49] Foster, 16-17.

[50] "Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie. But it was Surrealism that first opened our eyes to them. The development of the forms of production shattered the wish symbols of the previous century, even before the monuments representing them had collapsed." Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans., Rolph Tiedemann (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), 13.

[51] Foster, 16.

souvenirs..." [52] In his most recent book titled *Thinking Contemporary Curating (2012)*, American art critic Terry Smith touches on Foster's idea of "incongruency" in the realm of present-day curatorial practice. Smith states: "Like, contemporary art, contemporary curating is embroiled in time, but not bound by it; entangled with periodizing urges, but not enslaved to them; committed to space, but of many kinds, actual and virtual, anxious about place, yet thrilled by dispersion's roller-coaster ride."[53] Certainly, *Time To Start Over* is enmeshed in Smith and Foster's pragmatic yet poetic calling out of ours as a moment in time in which both artists and curators are caught up in a strange "scattering" and "gathering up" of both art and history.

Deeply puzzling, then, and stirring, are the results of Foster's "attitudinal" categories. In this light, Hall, Sciarrino and Leisure's are works that not only move away from negative dialectics of modernism/post-modernism/post-postmodernism but *towards* a more intimate alignment with undercurrents of present-day social, cultural and economic situations. What is "new" about these works, in my view, is their critical forbearance for artifice and for doubling – an object's dual self-reference to the past and present. In Foster's view, contemporary art that holds the most promise of breaking free from ideological stasis are works that embody various forms of "ghostly persistence" by artists who seek subtle yet candid collaborations with the past. The idea of art's "internality" is still imperative, yet now slightly off kilter from the early-modernist mantra: Art for Art's Sake.

[52] Foster, 7.
[53] Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International), 29.

In various ways, then, it is time to give up the ghost. Contemporary art is not autonomous in the same way it was before, but instead, implicated deeply in its present reality. Art is "complicit." Writing at the same time as Foster, American cultural critic Johanna Drucker casts her own ominous glow around contemporary art production in the early decades of the twenty-first century. In *Sweet Dreams, Contemporary Art and Complicity (2005)*, Drucker shares Foster's sentiment that contemporary art finds itself in a theoretical and philosophical twilight – a "twilight of resistant aesthetics."[54] As with Foster, this fading, too, is bound up in the flickering of the "dim flame" of the "anti-aesthetics," of past centuries' avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements, and the academic and art critical pursuance of art's assumed "oppositional critique" of the mass market and the media. Drucker says this is nonsense: "Artists and critics under the sway of this legacy cultivate a self-styled radical chic supposedly pure of crass motives like careerism or material gain. They pretend to hold aloof from the supposedly polluting pleasures of the consumer culture in which they participate. Hypocrisy aside, the stance nets little insight on our current condition."[55] Drucker insists it is high time to insert contemporary art back into its present reality.

Drucker's "complicity" is thus less descriptive of past dialectics as much as it is of the new legacy of mass-market consumerism. Even if art today might stand as a symbol for social change or of social critique, it is still, at some base level, a (elite) commodity. Drucker's complicity, in broad terms, speaks of art object's emergent

[54] Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, *Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), xvii.
[55] Drucker, xiv.

"attitudes of affirmation"[56] within the system of post-industrial capitalism.[57] Yet in line with Foster, the "coming after," for Drucker, is a strangely elegiac period, an eerie "blurring" in which "The absence of clear distinctions between good and evil, black and white, are characteristics of the hours between sunset and a creeping darkness."[58] In this eventide, art is "newly" bound to the rules of the art worlds(s) and art market(s) through which it gains its existence.[59] Unwieldy as this seems, Drucker says this is not necessarily a bad thing. The critical act of "calling out" art's "polluted" i.e. "participatory" status might allow theorists, critics and curators the opportunity to begin to look for art in the fractures or cracks in the wall of "natural" systems (or as Drucker states "the 'natural' condition of our existence").[60] To be sure, Drucker insolently pushes contemporary art off its inherited pedestal that stands "outside" the capitalist system. Drucker does so in order to ascertain art's status as a covert double agent.

Resurrecting "complicity" as a critical category requires that critics, curators, need to meet present-day art on its own indistinct moral terms. Accordingly, the "bad" attitudes of complicity – fakeness, emptiness, artifice – are *potentially* redemptive.[61] Here, Drucker widens her definition of complicity to include the strategy of "'complicit formalism' that suggests entangled and embedded associative

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[56] Drucker, xii.

[57] Drucker, 5.

[58] Drucker, 2.

[59] Drucker, xii. Drucker also states: "The highly refined system of artistic practices has its own codes. No matter how diverse the object – lint sculpture, snapshot, painted wood, or the artist's body—every work that passes for 'art' is operating within that system."

[60] Drucker, xiii.

[61] "Work that indicates no qualms, no hesitation, no flickering of guilt of sense that these are lesser sources than those of Leonardo, or the great works reproduced in Janson's art history class." Drucker, 3.

possibilities of critical method. "Form making, facture, the structure of iconography of images, means of production, circumstances of making and reception, critical and technical training, as well as underlying assumptions – all of these are facets of complicity, of the embedded condition of meaning and effect accessed through response to formal properties."[62] Drucker's complicit formalism thus urges art theorists, critics and curators to re-engage formal qualities of contemporary work; to take a sustained second look, for example, at Whiteread's sepulchral concrete or, as Foster puts it, the "enigmatic souvenirs" of relational aesthetics. In other words, it might be true that the tawdry aesthetics of (much) contemporary art implore a closer read. This aspect of Drucker's argument comes from the same starting point as Foster's: that today, the "high-minded" dead end of art-as-philosophy is simply insufficient as, for better or worse, art is always more than just an idea. Consequently, critics and theorists must bring their "respect for the aesthetic properties of works of art—material and visual considerations—to a central place within our understanding of the ways art works through constructed artifice."[63] In facile summing up, *Sweet Dreams* submits that we *seriously* need to stop pretending, as this is most certainly the "new" era of the mannered, the man-made, and the phony. Acknowledging the fact the "the twilight in these works announces a change, once that has long been in coming but now falls fast"[64] is the uncomfortable, but smart thing to do. It is time to come clean; it is "Time to start over."[65] And fundamentally,

[62] Drucker, xv-xvi.
[63] Drucker, xvii.
[64] Drucker, 5.
[65] Drucker, 2.

this is where the art – the "bastardly" material things in *Time to Start Over* begin to twinkle.

Under such beguiling protocol, I now turn to a third and final thinker: writer and creative direct of dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel Germany (2012). As a curator, Christov-Barkagiev positions the larger idea of "beginning again" as more subtle and gracious "backward gaze." To understand what is to come, we need a highly diplomatic, ground level understanding of what came before. In this way, a persistent yet subjective "bringing to mind" of the past is one way in which present-day artists and curators can open up a space for criticality and new knowledge production. Christov-Bakargiev's various writings and interviews about dOCUMENTA (13), as well as the curatorial processes she used to direct it, reveal a set of curatorial curiosities, aims, and approaches that are deeply engaged with the aesthetics of collapse, salvage and recovery.[66] Christov-Bakargiev's approach to the present-ness of twenty-first century art productive asks after the fluidity of time, and describes a moment that requires artists and curators to acquiesce to new forms of "moving through" intuitions and meditative states of mind.[67] To articulate this type of critical approach (to dOCUMENTA (13) specifically, and to contemporary art and curation in general) Christov-Bakargiev does not write a book, or an essay, but a letter: "A Letter to a Friend." "My dear friend," she writes on October 25th, 2010:

> If…we might think together about today's world, where individuals have gotten used to sudden change, the unusual, and the unexpected; a reality that

[66] Carloyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Letter to a Friend, in "*Book of Books/100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, dOCUMENTA (13), Catalogue 1/3* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 75.

[67] "dOCUMENTA (13) is for me more than, and not exactly, an exhibition—it is a state of mind." Christov-Bakargiev, 75.

> is repeatedly innovated and where the distinction between a stable "inside" and an uncertain and telluric "outside" blurs, a world of "not feeling at home," of homelessness. Some thinkers propose exodus and a withdrawal as modes of resistance to this state of affairs. dOCUMENTA (13) proposes paradoxes, ways of speaking without speech, acting without performing action, and an archeological perspective, according to which every cultural project that moves forward can be grounded in a backward gaze, in an ecological relationship to the past, as well as a constantly escaping itself in a play and display of lack.[68]

There is much in this epistolary statement that connects with Foster's four furtive watchwords: traumatic, spectral, nonsynchronous, incongruous, and Drucker's "new" absolutions, yet here I tune my discussion to a key point in Christov-Bakargiev's "theory": a specific way for artists and curators alike to go about "excavating" trauma and "exhuming" complicity – through archaeological perspectives and methodologies, a way of looking and recreating the past through the collection and analysis of human detritus.

Archaeology is "the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and analysis of artifacts and other physical remains."[69] It is a discipline that straddles the broad fields of science and social science. The forensic analyses of the physical traces of past human life (graves, tools, and dwellings) allow archaeologists to systematically, albeit problematically, infer a great deal about the social and cultural conditions of the past. Here, Christov-Bakargiev's promotion of the "archaeological perspective" in her "Letter" necessitates a more detailed discussion of how a new archaeological mindset is manifest in the intertwining of art making and exhibition-making. In other words, when an artist takes on the role of a

[68] Christov-Bakargiev, 76.

[69] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v "archaeology."

curator, or vice versa, he or she often deploys archaeological tactics. How is the newly looming figurehead of the Western archaeologist working to trouble and/or politicize the legacy of appropriation?

A key twentieth and twenty-first century artist-curator is American artist Fred Wilson (b. 1954). Wilson is an artist who excavates specific museological "sites" by a method of reassembling and rearranging the culturally charged "artifacts" of museum collections. About his practice, Wilson says: "everything I want to say, I say by putting things together. In my studio, I was always arranging things, like, this is right out of school, I couldn't really say this is my art, it wasn't art with a capital A, but this is who I was."[70] Smith takes a detailed look at Wilson's practice in the chapter entitled "Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists" in *Contemporary Curating*. In the early nineties, Wilson's *Mining the Museum (1992-93)* at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore was a radical deployment of curatorial display techniques that allowed him to make "visible the African American stories that the museum had previously rendered minor or invisible. He did so literally, by bringing up from storage items that had not been exhibited for years, if ever, and figuratively, by repurposing art that was regularly shown."[71] Wilson's strategy, bound up in nuance and complexity, has been significant for the next generation of artist-curators working both independently and in public institutions.[72]

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[70] PBS, "Fred Wilson," PBS ART:21 series, online video stream, http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/fred-wilson, (accessed December 15 2013).
[71] Smith, 122.
[72] Smith, 123-124.

An institutionalization of Wilson's tactics is The Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) "Artist's Choice" series in which the MoMA invites artists to create exhibits from its permanent collection. In the context of *Time to Start Over*, Artist's Choice's tenth iteration – a "mystical, interstellar"[73] re-mix hanging by American artist Trisha Donnelly (b. 1974) – is worth brief detailing. Donnelly's practice is hard to pin down or, in the words of art critic Jerry Saltz, is "abstruse and hard to parse."[74] The result of Donnelly's decision-making can be described as an aesthetic amalgamation of "Insanity and logic."[75] Donnelly filled three rooms with a vast array of work across media, movements and historical periods. For example, photographs of birds by a relatively unknown and experimental mid-century photographer named Eliot Porter (1901–1990) filled Donnelly's first gallery space. "Every bird Porter saw was a path," explained Donnelly " … when he shot images, lines between him and the bird exploded."[76] Among the selection in the second room was Odilon Redon's famous oil painting, *Rocks on the Beach (ca. 1883)*, a charcoal drawing by Vincent Van Gogh (*Sorrow (1882)*); and a large Modernist couch, the *Antifibio Convertible Couch (1971)* by Italian designer Alessandro Becchi. Finally, in the third room, large diagrammatic renderings of early silicon microprocessors were with rare finds such as artist J. Sullivan's (1894-1967) surrealist painting *The Fourth Dimension (1938)*. In such an exhibition, particularly when faced with the finale of cosmic "thought-maps" of the

[73] Whitney Kimball, "Trisha Donnelly's mystical, interstellar 'Artist's Choice' Show Lands at MoMA," *Capital* http://www.capitalnewyork.com (accessed February 8, 2013).
[74] Jerry Saltz,"The Best of the Basement," in *New York Magazine*, under "Art," December 9 2012. http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/saltz-trisha-donnelly-2012-12/(accessed February 8, 2013).
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

microprocessors, we get a sense of how "In the digital age, the past haunts us like never before, a potentially inexhaustible repository of traces of history, from which memory (and hence subjectivity) might possibly emerge."[77] Yet, how, to begin to unearth these tangible and intangibles remnants?

Returning to Christov-Bakargiev's "Letter,*"* the new archaeologist sensibility at play in Donnelly's "the best of the basement," for example, or its conceptual forbearer, Wilson's "mining the museum" – comes to light as a systematic yet poetic refusal by these artists to deny, accept or excuse the past. In this irresolute but *conscious* "coming to terms" with a necessary "new age," there is a glint, a very delicate chrysalis of hope. But it is a hope contingent on a certain kind of looking. In fact, for Christov-Bakargiev, if there are remnants or residues from our past – no matter how badly misconstrued or covered over by past principles - we are lucky to find them. And if artists (and museums) in the twenty-first century are now brave enough to "dust off," "salvage," or look anew, we can be thankful when they come back, after the end, with new understandings of artifacts and transformed, if not transformative, perspectives.

To conclude, the varied theoretical substructures of Foster, Drucker and Christov-Bakargiev together, take the form of an awkward "salutation": at the dawn of a "new" era, critics and curators must forgo the impossible goodbyes, past strategies of theoretical exorcism. There can no longer be declarative statements such with the tenor of Danto's "It's over!" and/or and deleterious "Good riddance!" of modernism and post-modernism. Instead, the refrain of Foster, Drucker and

[77] Christov-Bakargiev, 76.

Christov-Bakargiev is, I think, a more subtle, more challenging "Thank you for returning:"[78] Thusly, *Time To Start Over*'s theoretical starting point is the tentative greeting of a multitude of art critical, art historical and methodological "ghosts." Here, whether or not a "new" world of our own making is at hand, it is clear contemporary art faces age-old problems that co-exist with humankind's fondness for fantastic second-natures.

[78] Ibid.

Figure 1. Lauren Hall. *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want*. SAD light, glass bowl, dyed salt, microwaved bar soap, shells, beads, 2013, variable. *Courtesy of the artist*. Image by Josh Fee Photography.

Figure 2. Lauren Hall. *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want (detail)*. SAD light, glass bowl, dyed salt, microwaved bar soap, shells, beads, 2013, variable. *Courtesy of the artist*. Image by Josh Fee Photography.

Figure 3. William Dyce *(1806-1864). Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of October 5th, 1858-9*. Oil paint on canvas, 950 x 1200 x 125mm, 1858-1860(?). Tate Britain.

Figure 4. Jennifer Rose Sciarrino, *Mineral Specimen 12*. Resin and glass paint on acrylic mount, 2011, 6.5 x 6.5 x 5 cm (approx.), *Courtesy of Private collection*. Image by Josh Fee Photography.

Figure 5. Jennifer Rose Sciarrino, *Mineral Specimen 12 (detail)*. Resin and glass paint on acrylic mount, 2011, 6.5 x 6.5 x 5 cm (approx.), *Courtesy of Private collection*. Image by Josh Fee Photography.

Figure 6. Leisure (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley) *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone*. Stop-motion animation video, research clipping, 2013, 54 seconds (28 seconds forward, 28 seconds looping back), clipping 10.5 x 14 cm, unframed, *Courtesy of the artists*. Image by Josh Fee Photography.

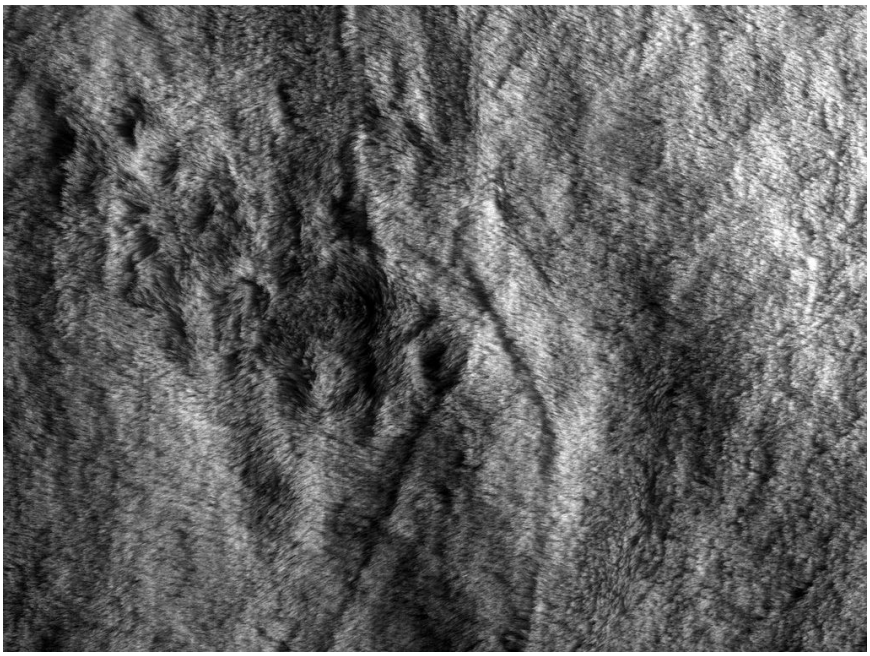

Figure 7. Leisure (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley) *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone (video still)*. Stop-motion animation video, research clipping, 2013, 54 seconds (28 seconds forward, 28 seconds looping back), clipping 10.5 x 14 cm, unframed, *Courtesy of the artists*.

Figure 8. *Time To Start Over*, NO FOUNDATION, Toronto, ON, April 4-21, 2013. Installation shot. Image by Josh Fee Photography.

Figure 9. *Time To Start Over*, NO FOUNDATION, Toronto, ON, April 4-21, 2013. Installation shot (window view). Image by Josh Fee Photography.

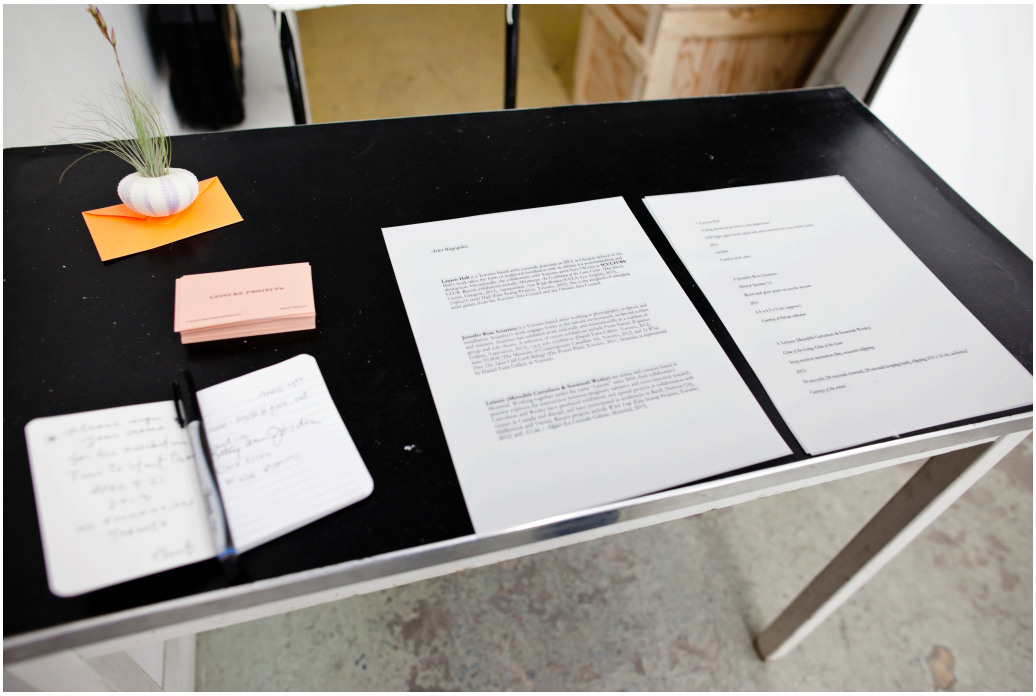

Figure 10. *Time To Start Over*, NO FOUNDATION, Toronto, ON, April 4-21, 2013. Installation shot (reception table). Image by Josh Fee Photography.

LAUREN HALL: *time's new treasure-seeker*

The glass serving dish is filled with small, seashore treasures: shells, coral, and sand. I can easily gaze upon it for hours, consuming this collection; my eyes travel over and through this landscape of charmed miniatures as if I were beachcombing. Yet, the sand is fluorescent. The coral belies unnatural accretion. There are cheap plastic beads glinting amongst the shells. Nature here is deviant, friendly and fake. And what can be the meaning of the electric orb in the middle of this assemblage? Disconcertingly, it neither credits nor discredits the artificiality of its environment. It simply glows. I shudder, thinking suddenly of the water's edge *outside* the hermetic world of this art object: the dull edge of Lake Ontario near the expressways and condominiums, or the faraway freshwater beaches of my childhood, much too murky, chilly and vast for opulence. At this thought, the light of the electric orb seems richer and more welcoming. Frightfully seduced, I move my body away. From what shoreline, what point of origin, does this alluring, dazzling, and perturbed version of nature belong? Who – or what – is alien here? Where has nature gone? Where is it hiding?

Lauren Hall is an artist who fabricates nature, and who does so in a very selective manner. Hall seeks out nature – and western ideas about nature – in specific places, most recently and most often in family retirement complexes in Florida or at visitor centres in the far North. For Hall, vacation spots and retirement homes are nodal sites where ideas of wonder and wilderness can be explored through the proxy of tourism. In recalling a trip to Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska, for instance,

Hall describes how her material substitutions for nature derive from our richly acculturated view of the outdoors:

> After travelling to Alaska… it was clear to me that the North was considered a place to visit upon retirement, and it was to be viewed through thick panes of blue-tinted glass. There seemed to be a parallel with my experience in Florida as a child, staying in retirement communities with my grandparents. The condos there were almost exclusively decorated with palm, shell, and sunburst designs, but the quite mobile inhabitants rarely ventured outside to find these things at the beach.[79]

In the same way, Hall did not venture outside to find the objects in *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want (2013) (Figure 1)*. Instead, the work is a carefully chosen combination of human-made, human-bought and human-found debris: a seasonal affective disorder (SAD) lamp, a mass-produced glass bowl, dyed salt, bits of microwaved bar soap, found shells, and craft jewelry beads. *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* is far from a random collection or retrieval of denatured materials, kitsch, or trash. For the artist, the objects here are specific, present-day "riches" that call into question the idea of nature as motif and decoration. Thus, although Hall did not walk along any real seashore to make this work, we must ask the question: where has the artist been? Or, more on point, from where is the treasure-seeker returning?

Hall's work departs from a Romantic vision of nature. *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* takes its title from a line in one of the most well known odes of the Romantic age, "To A Skylark" by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). In "To A

[79] Lauren Hall, artist statement, July 2012.

Skylark," the speaker describes a small bird, a heavenly spirit who flies higher and higher until almost out of view:

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert-
That from heaven or near it
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.
. . .
Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aërial hue
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:
. . .
Chorus Hymeneal,
Or triumphal chant,
Match'd with thine would be all
But an empty vaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want. [80]

For nineteenth century Romantics, there can be no substitution for nature. It is boundless and untamable by the hand of humankind. The rich metaphors in this poem show how we always come up short in our vain attempts to recreate, or even celebrate, nature through culture, i.e. poetry, art and music. Perhaps we can interpret Hall's contemporary sculptural installations and mixed media assemblages as works that give a wink and a nod to Shelley. The sand made of salt and dye and the coral made of microwaved soap do embody the "blithe spirit" of nature, but they also explore the "empty vaunt," or bankrupt bluster, of mimesis and earthly imitation.

Hall has evoked Shelley's poetry numerous times in order to title and situate her works. In larger installation and wall works such as *To Crystal Columns and Clear Shrines of Pearl (2012)*, *Their Starry Domes of Diamond and Gold Expand Above (2011),* and *A Poetic Byward for an Unspoiled Vision (2012)*, Hall creates fearsome scenes from

[80] Shelley, *To A Skylark*, lines 1-15.

Shelley's verse by using common building and packaging materials such as polystyrene, corrugated plastic, and cellophane to serve as stand-ins for rock, snow and ice. In more recent work, Hall's "choosing materials based on how well they can stand-in for something else" has taken a "less-laboured" form in which the artist has been more inclined to "set things in motion to see where they end up, rather than forcing materials to do what I want them to."[81] The result, though dreadful, is also comical. Whether built or assembled, Hall's approach to representing nature remains flashy and trashy, or, as the artist puts it, similar to "the way one would tackle the set for a school play, game show, or diorama."[82] Hyperbole then, as well as humour, are important elements in Hall's work (*Figure 2*).

But what, exactly, is so funny about coral made from microwaved soap? For Hall, "confusing irony with earnestness seems to be a central problem"[83] and the Romantic comedy of Hall's "trash" is bound up in the false experience of nature itself. What, we might ask, is "junky" about nature in *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want*? Hall's materials poke fun at an overwrought-ness of Western culture, not the natural world itself. In this way, Hall's practice can be positioned as a sustained "attempt to understand the impulse to describe nature through culture, re-examining concepts of the picturesque and the sublime."[84] How might Hall's enigmatic bursting of ingrained cultural codes – the sublime and the picturesque - work to distance nature even further, or provide some new point of contact?

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[81] Hall, artist statement, July 2012.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

I am moving towards the idea of a "new" sublime in Hall's work. But first, however, we need to gain some familiarity with its traditional conceptualization. Oversimplified, the Sublime is the terrible, "unknown" force in nature.[85] As its philosophical counterpoint, the Beautiful (or Picturesque) is the safe and "familiar," aspects of nature that are appealing and comforting to the human senses. On the one hand, the sublime is visually exemplified by the Romantic landscape paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (1774 –1840) and J.M.W Turner (1775-1851). In Turner's work, for example, we often see humanity dwarfed by wind, rain, and mountain peaks; the sublime is a swirling, terrifying, Godly and climatic force of unbound immensity. The picturesque, on the other hand, is described and often defined by a contemporary of Turner's, the English landscape painter John Constable (1776-1837). Constable's world is a highly ordered universe of ploughed fields and stone dwellings, a world where people (namely, peasants) can coexist with nature in sunlit, verdant peace.

These schismatic visual and philosophic categories came about during a particular cultural and philosophical context; that is, during the Enlightenment and the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the West were a time in which the natural world was subjected to two opposing views: first, to quantification and subjugation due to the rise of scientific empiricism and industrialization; and second, to artistic and intellectual mystification and glorification. These diametrical socio-cultural, as well as philosophical, views are

[85] A Greek author by the name of Longinus is credited with the first a treatise on the sublime. Writing in the 1-Century CE, Longinus states in writing titled *On the Sublime*, "Sublimity (*hypsos*) is… a certain height and majesty in words."

at play in the two most influential writings on the sublime, one by Irish-born British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke (1730–1797), and another by the German theoretician Immanuel (1724–1804).[86]

Burke is credited with the first philosophical delineation of a modern sublime, a notion clearly distinct from the beautiful. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke argues that the sublime arises from a drive for self-preservation in the face of forms of vastness and obscurity in nature. According to Burke, these sensations, brought on by sensory experiences of the natural world (the darkness of night, forces of wind, storms, etc.), can overwhelm both the mind and body and raise the possibility of death. The key word here is *possibility*. The sublime is the mind sparking due to the *perception* of mortal danger, as "when danger and pain press to nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight…but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience"[87] The sublime, then, is the delightfully fearful *idea* of death by nature.

In *The Critique of Judgment,* published in 1790, thirty-three years after Burke, Kant takes the sublime subtly, but drastically *out of nature*. In the Kantian schema, the sublime occurs in the painful, or laborious stretching of the imagination, which human reason, in its infinite capacity, will supersede. In other words, the boundlessness of natural world affords our mental faculties the opportunity to self-realize, or "triumph" over nature. Thus for Kant, the sublime's "assertion of the

[86] Edmund Burke, "Of the Sublime," in *A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*. trans. J.H. Bernard (London: MacMillan and Co.,1914).
[87] Burke, 36-37.

primacy of Reason over nature"[88] presents a massive philosophical shift in scale as "*The sublime is that in comparison with which everything else is small.*"[89] For a number of contemporary art and cultural critics, the Kantian legacy of humankind's "transcendence" over nature – has come at a high cost. Here, recent arguments have been made about the Western ideation of the sublime as manifest in the large-scale project Industrial Capitalism. This "disenchantment" of the sublime-in-nature has far reaches in the realm of art. Some critics wonder if decades upon decades of Reason-over-nature have leached the last pre-modern "enchantment" there was to be found in the natural world.[90]

For Hall, we see the sublime as a bitterly false promise, and her practice as an articulated attempt to stage the tragic comedy of our present-day (though prolonged) circumstance. Though Hall illuminates our imagination of "remote" nature, the installations fall short of instilling a sense of vastness and terror. The material, form and gesture of Hall's work all point to an abortive ideation of the sublime that must give itself over almost entirely to a strange and bastardized beauty. Thus, if nature's once "boundless" and "awe inspiring" forces are now ridiculous, or the punch line of a bad Romantic joke, how do Hall's high-gloss, low-fi representations of nature engage a *new* mutable discourse of the sublime – a sublime that seems to make certain allowances for aestheticized trash?

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[88] Amanda Boetzkes, "Waste and the Sublime Landscape," *RACAR, Revue d'art canadien/Canadian Art Review,*35, no.1(2010): 22.
[89] Kant, 109.
[90] See, for example, the arguments made in *The Death of Nature (1990)* by ecological-feminist Carolyn Merchant, or *The Reenchantment of Art (1992)* by cultural critic Suzi Gablick.

What if we have reached a new moment when polystyrene can sit comfortably in the same sentence as the sublime? In the essay "Waste and the Sublime Landscape" (2010), Boetzkes examines the aesthetic potential of trash and posits that, yes, contemporary art production is experiencing "the uncanny return" of the sublime.[91] Drawing from her background in art theory, earth art, and a category she dubs "waste art," Boetzkes ventures forth from W.T.J. Mitchell's theory of landscape as a "dead" genre[92] to posit that contemporary artists are finding a new visual language with which to translate and comprehend our twenty-first century's vast, incalculable amounts of trash. Intriguingly, she defines this new visual language as "a screen of garbage."[93] This screen is an awe-inspiring, inexplicable part of our present-day reality of nature that can – and should – be considered a conflation of two surprising terms: sublime and prosthesis.

Boetzkes points to the large-scale photographs of toxic waste sites by Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky (b.1955) and the pictorial plastic bottle tableauxs of Montreal-based artist Jerome Fortin (b. 1971) as examples of artists who present us with a new picture of the sublime in nature. These artists, "By signifying nature with trash…reveal the modern aesthetic of the sublime is rooted in an oscillation between nature and its prosthetic reconstruction in imagination."[94] In Burtysky's photographs, there is a double blind of the vast and the finite, the unknown and the consumable. They are an example of how the sublime's uncanny

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[91] Boetzkes, 26.

[92] W.T.J. Mitchell's theses on landscape in *Landscape and Power* is widely held to be fundamental in the discipline or art history and cultural studies. See. *Landscape and Power*, 1st ed. (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

[93] Boetzkes, 22.

[94] Boetzkes, 26-27.

oscillation between the real and fake present a collapsing of traditional aesthetic categories. For Boetzkes, a "new sublime," then, allows the contemporary art object, installation, or photograph to create a new, but as yet not entirely un-Romantic, space in which nature recedes, hides, or visibly slips away. Here it is no wonder that *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* offers the viewer a site in which the coral, shells, and sand have washed up as half treasure, half trash.

Perhaps it is not the objects or materials themselves that is most significant to the argument I put forward in *Time To Start Over*, but Hall's *search* for the sublime at the boundary of Shelley and Styrofoam, or trinket and treasure. Is it possible to read Hall's work as positively engaging with the radical aspect of the Romantic sublime? The logic of *radical* Romanticism lays in the struggle against the quantification of every aspect of humanity and the natural world. For the eighteenth-century Romantics, nature remained the last bastion of freedom and unquantifiable imagination. In a recent book entitled *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity (2002)*, scholars Robert Lowy and Michael Sayre put forward that various "trends in contemporary art and culture perpetuate the Romantic legacy: not just by 'repeating it'... but also by transforming and developing it further."[95] At this juncture, I put forward that the most radically Romantic feature of Hall's work is the way the crass objects of *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* flow so freely in the dual current of the real and the imaginary.

Looking closely, *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* carries a type of aesthetic ambling that is related to the mid nineteenth-century tradition of gathering

[95] Lowry and Sayre, 148-149.

up "real" nature as a hobby: objects to contemplate one's leisure time, perhaps in order to inspect, classify and, ultimately, possess. Beachcombing, in fact, is a part of the social-cultural legacy of the one of the Modern age's most transformative theories, Darwin's *Origin of Species (1859)*. Darwin did more than upend the Biblical history of plant, animals and human species. His observation that change occurs over a long period of time in the natural world transformed our understanding of nature from an unknowable subject to a classifiable object. Suddenly, the earth's ancient-yet-still-unfolding history became visible on the surface at the end of the nineteenth century, and people went hunting for its wondrous and unholy clues.

Geological traces, namely, pebbles, shells and gems, were particularly popular. People took a great interest in natural history, and observing and understanding pebbles was not only something everyone could do, but a leisure activity of social merit. The same year *Origin of Species* was published, a resident of Isle of Wight named J.G. Francis published *Beach Rambles: In search of seaside pebbles and crystals, with some observations on the origin of the diamond and other precious stones (1859)*. This book, which is a "grouping together of many scattered facts,"[96] displays Francis's impressive knowledge of gems and minerals from all over the world, including intimate knowledge of local geography and topography. Yet, while *Beach Rambles* includes a variety of scientific charts, indexical lists, and illustrative coloured plates, Francis, like Darwin, was far from what we would recognize as a modern specialist in

[96] J. G Francis, *Beach Rambles: In search of seaside pebbles and crystals, with some observations on the origin of the diamond and other precious stones*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, Warne, & Routledge,1859), preface.

the fields of geology, biology or mineralogy.[97] Instead, *Beach Rambles* is a product of its age: an enthusiastically researched, carefully illustrated, and morally impassioned instruction manual for walks along the beach. Francis describes beach pebbles as worthwhile treasures to have at home: "We all of us have eyes for ripe cherries and red roses, why not for pebbles?"[98] Back then, just as now, it was proper for the middle classes – idlers, vacationers, retirees – to go looking for these specimens, and it was certainly decent enough to display them proudly in their (now air-conditioned) homes:[99]

> There is a pleasure to an intelligent mind in discovering the origin, or tracing the past history, of any natural object as revealed in its structure and growth. It is thus that the study of trees and plants, ferns and field flowers occupies and delights us. And a similar interest would be found attached to Seaside Pebbles, as one branch of mineralogy, if we could once come to observe and understand them.[100]

It is by way of Francis' *Beach Rambles* that I turn to a landscape painting entitled *Pegwell Bay, Kent—A Recollection of October 5th (1858-59)* (*Figure 3*). *Pegwell Bay* is the most well known work of William Dyce (1806-1864), a British painter, who was a contemporary of Darwin, Francis and a multitude of other "gentlemen geologists."[101]

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[97] "The 18th century began to draw a distinction between experience and experiment, accelerating science's momentum toward specialization." John Leslie, "Among The Naturalists" in *Natural History and Other Fictions, An Exhibition by Marc Dion* (West Bromwich, England: Ikon Gallery, Kunsterverin, De Appel, 1997), 9. Accordingly, Francis positions himself in between a "hobbyist" and a professional scientist in *Beach Rambles*. To conclude this preface he states: "If this essay of mine should induce anyone possessed of ampler leisure and more adequate powers to entre more largely upon the merits of the theme, I shall be indeed gratified."

[98] Francis, 49.

[99] For Francis's earnest instructions for men (and women) on how to properly eat, dress and mentally prepare before setting out a beach ramble, see pp, 46-47.

[100] Francis, preface.

[101] "An unpaid naturalist, Darwin joined HMS Beagle on a voyage to South America in 1831. Although at the time his main interest was in geology, his observations on the richness and the diversity of Island fauna provided the groundwork for his subsequent theory of evolution," Leslie, 8. Also see Miwon Kwon, "Unnatural Tendencies: Scientific Guises of Mark Dion" in above publication, pp: 38-43.

Dyce's large oil painting captures vividly the era's enthusiasm for beachcombing as well as the sudden turmoil of human and planetary history in the nineteenth century.

The scene on the canvas is a group of well-dressed ladies and children hunting for pebbles and fossils on a stretch of tide-stripped beach in Wales. A rise of rocky cliffs encloses the human activity, yet arguably the central subject in this work is not action, but time: "geologic time, astronomical time, and very personal, human time."[102] The painter has cast this scene in an eerie yellow wash of twilight. As the shell-seekers comb the beach, a male figure (perhaps Dyce himself) casts his gaze upwards, towards the uncertain future of humankind's new history:

> Here time is both cyclical and historical, recollective and predictive, cast thoughts back into the past and forwards into the distant future. The 'recollection' of the painting's title promises a pictorial return to a precise moment in the past, while its creation marks both an acknowledgement of and resistance to, time's passing.[103]

Through a contemporary reading of *Pegwell Bay* we can view *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want* as the work of a strange twenty-first century beachcomber. Hall is a new naturalist, a treasure seeker of our own age. Back from a place half-real, half-imaginary, the artist presents us with a new landscape where the sand, the coral, the shells, and beads are cast in the electric glow of their own uncanny season.

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[102] Marcia Pointon, "The Representation of Time in Painting: A Study of William Dyce's Pegwell Bay" (1978) quoted in Rebecca Bedell "The History of the Earth: Darwin, Geology and Landscape Art," in *Endless Forms, Charles Darwin, Natural Science and Visual Art*. Diana Donald and Jane Monroe (eds.). (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 62.
[103] Bedell, 63.

JENNIFER ROSE SCIARRINO: *a late capitalist lapidary*

Remember, my love, the object we saw
The beautiful morning in June;
By a bend in the path a carcass reclined
On a bed sewn with pebbles and stones
Her legs were spread out like a lecherous whore
Sweating out poisonous fumes,
Who opened in slick invitational style
Her stinking and festering womb.
And the sky cast an eye on this marvelous meat
As over the flowers in bloom.
The stench was so wretched that there on the grass
You nearly collapsed in swoon
And you in your turn, will be rotten as this:
Horrible, filthy, undone,
O sun of my nature and star of my eyes,
My passion my angel in one!
Beaudelaire "Une Charogne" (1857)

Beaudelaire's scandalous book of poetry appeared on Paris bookshelves within a year of Dyce's *Pegwell Bay*; yet, in a similar way to Hall's assemblage of ocean debris, the small sculptural work titled *Mineral Specimen 12 (2011)* (*Figure 4)* could never be collected by Dyce's beachcombers. Its earthly origin, though perceptible on the surface level, is too unclear.

Beaudelaire's mid-nineteenth century poem "Carcass" presents us with a dead "object" that visually possesses its own secret, sentient afterlife. I begin here, with lines of verse from the French poet's famous collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil (1857*), in order to create a comparative position for *Mineral Specimen 12*. On one hand, Sciarinno's small-scale sculpture is a type of artificial geological specimen that seems to be the embodiment of early-Modernist, *fin de siècle* self-consciousness, aesthetic refinement, and vice – a glorious "dying off" of morals. On

the other hand, this sculptural miniature exists as a twenty-first century exoskeleton, a new kind of tainted flower surreptitiously budding in its own age.

Sciarrino's geological specimens are skillful simulations of museological minerals, crystals and gemstones. *Mineral Specimen 12* is part of a 2009 series of more than a dozen artificial geological specimens cast in resin and hand-painted by the artist. To create these *trompe l'oeils,* Sciarrino mined the Royal Ontario Museum's database of more than three thousand images of "meteorites, rocks, precious minerals and gemstones."[104] This archive includes pictures of numerous material specimens available on view as part of the museum's permanent exhibition, "Treasure of the Earth." Sciarrino's final selection of images was based purely on her desire to complete "formal investigations"[105] of naturally occurring rocks and minerals. She was drawn to specific specimens based on pictorial qualities of form, texture and shape, but nothing more. Due to the front-facing nature of the images, visual information on the specimens was limited, and in order to render the objects into 3-D sculptures, Sciarrino allowed her mind's eye to fill in the blanks. The result was a series called *Specimens*: objects at multiple levels of remove from the real thing, but not quite pure simulacra.

French theorist Jean Beaudrillard's influential postmodern thesis on "Simulacra and Simulation" (original French publication, 1981) defines the simulacra as "a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal"[106] Thus, simulacra – fake copies of

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[104] Royal Ontario Museum. "Earth's Treasures," http://www.rom.on.ca/en/exhibitions-galleries/galleries/natural-history/teck-suite-galleries-earths-treasures (accessed Feb 17, 2013).
[105] Jennifer Rose Sciarrino, interview by author, February 2013.
[106] Jean Beaudrillard. "The Precession of the Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

fake originals - are not a mediation of nature or reality; the simulacrum is simply a free-floating sign or symbol with mutable meaning. Beyond material mimicry, an important component of Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum is the role of capitalism and mass-market consumerism. Simulacra are not just a negative consequence of contemporary forms of media, but embodiment of unbound abstraction of labour and value. For Baudrillard, "what society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it," and thus:

> The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational.[107]

Baudrillard's criticism of postmodern automaton art is indeed bleak: "If only art could achieve the magic act of its own disappearance! But it continues to make believe it is disappearing when it is already gone."[108]

Peering a little closer into *Mineral Specimen 12* (*Figure 5*), Sciarrino's plastic rock looks neither "real" nor hyperreal. The taint of the artist's hand, tools, is there. Up close, its fakeness holds an ersatz claim to the "real," almost, it seems, in spite of artistic finesse. Instead of aspiring to technological exactitude, *Mineral Specimen 12* is a composite of two equal and opposing twenty-first century strategies: transparency and concealment. To happen upon this object on a gallery plinth and under a spotlight is to experience a "swoon" of seduction, suspicion, and disdain. Strangely, it brings us back to the turn of the century, to Beaudelaire's carcass. I thus present

[107] Beaudrillard, 2.
[108] Beaudrillard quoted in Suzi Gablick's *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 30.

Mineral Specimen 12 as something close to Beaudelaire's uncanny cadaver ("horrible, filthy and undone,…My passion, my angel in one!") Up close *Mineral Specimen 12* is assuredly *fake, dead*; yet, at the same time, it might be *nearly alive*.

But before we bring it back from the dead, we need to consider how malfeasant this hybrid, strangely beautiful object will be. Returning to *Sweet Dreams*, Drucker throws off Beaudrillard's thesis on the simulacra by exploring a new phase of the ambiguous nature of the fine art object and its role as a complicit "specimen" of consumerism. For Drucker then, Sciarrino's plastic rock can be constituted as "new" art: treasures embedded within the insidious layering of capitalism:

> In a fully corrupted world, one in which consumerism holds sway, commercial images provide a standard for production. In an administered world such as our own, the purpose of aesthetics – the awareness of the artifice, the appeal to pleasure, beauty and the imagination -- is a necessity in its own right.[109]

In this way, it is the *Specimen*'s unflinching artificiality that must define the terms of its representation. The gemstone carries value not in its material worth, but by means of its complicity with the "fantasy system" of consumerism, and perhaps, the art world's problematic stake in works of art as inherently critical. Thus, Drucker's project is one of coming fully to terms with the moral and critical "negativity," not only of the simulacrum but of the entire modernist system:

> [T]he critical frameworks inherited from the avant-garde and passed through the academic discourses of current art history are constrained by the expectation of negativity. Fine art should not have to bear the burden of

[109] Drucker, 5.

> criticality nor can it assume superiority as if operating outside the ideologies it has long presumed to critique. [110]

I see hope in Drucker where there is little in Baudrillard. Another important aspect of complicity – and in fact, perhaps the last place for contemporary art to haunt the legacy of a moral high ground of Modern art – is through *hybridity:* a distinct yet hard-to-define *unnaturalness* of last-capitalist art production. For Drucker, a hybrid sensibility can act as an antidote to the possibility of "negative" complicity. Drucker tells us that hybrid is not necessarily half-human, half-machine, but instead, half-real, half-*imaginary*:

> The exploration of the phantasmatic realm of imaginary life-forms is taking place across the spectrum of oil paint and sculpture using standard, representational conventions of realism even as these are extended by digital-imaging capabilities. Imagery filled with fearful curiosity about mutation and technointervention, of metaorganisms and psychoprostheses, machinic interfaces, and tropes of an altered somatic condition figure prominently in this work. Scarily not – sci fi, but already too true. [111]

Already too true. The question of Sciarrino's aesthetic response to nature *now* is significant. Here, I can return to Boetzkes' attentiveness, too, to the high stakes in considering the history and present condition of representational forms of nature: "What is at stake is not only a new visual language of nature but a release from anthropocentric discourse altogether."[112] In the work of Sciarrino, then, we arrive at a moment where people and the planet are set on a new and unknown aesthetic course altogether, where hybrid material objects, born of human imagination, desire and destruction, present a new *unhuman* relationship to the world. In fact, in the

[110] Drucker, 247.
[111] Drucker, 145.
[112] Boetzkes, 31.

reality of late-capitalism, there is much to gain in relating to the world through objects instead of people. I regrettably do not have time nor space to diverge fully into a lengthy discussion of the burgeoning scholarship on this area of known as object-oriented ontology (OOO) – but the writing of Jane Bennett in, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things (2010)* for example, suggests that by granting materials non-traditional philosophical understandings as active ("actant") and alive instead of passive and inert, objects such as *Mineral Specimen 12* gains uncanny cognizance.[113] If we allow contemporary art's "already dead" objects to kindle with a life of their own, a new hybridized magic or "force"[114] we might learn something new about the present, past and future condition of human life on earth.

Here *Mineral Specimen 12* begins to spark, or flicker with life. With an idea of Bennett in mind, what are the consequences of a truly "dead" object? At this juncture, it is worthwhile to revisit the highly-influential thesis of Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"(1936), in which the German cultural critic introduced – or unleashed, rather – the concept of the "aura" into Modern art theory and criticism. According to Benjamin, the aura is the unique, non-reproducible, and near-magic quality embodied within an original piece of artwork. Put another way, the aura is what is "living" or "alive" about a work of art. Benjamin's rule of no exception - that the aura can dwell uniquely in an original - is well known: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it

[113] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (New York: Duke University Press, 2010). Bennett borrows the term "actant" from Bruno Latour' Actor-Network' theory. See Latour's *Reassembling the Social, An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (2007).*
[114] Bennett, 1-20.

happens to be."[115] Ominously, the emergence of free-floating, decontextualized, ahistorical, "aura-less" and "perfect" copies coincides with the increasing immobility and paralysis of the viewer. In this way, Benjamin equates modernism's march toward the "loss of the aura" with the foreboding totalitarian aesthetics of the Russian Futurists: "Let art exist, though the world perish."[116] If the stakes are this high, how did we allow art to lose its aura? Can it ever be redeemed in a replica?

More than half a century later, the dimensions of authenticity have been stretched and bent beyond Benjamin's imagination. In the essay "The Topology of Contemporary Art" (2008), German art critic Boris Groys contends with the phantom of "the auratic." Groys states that Benjamin simply "overlooked the possibility – and thus the unavoidability –of reauratizations, relocations and new topographical inscriptions of a copy."[117] Thus, contends Groys, "it may be less the loss of the aura, but rather, its emergence that gives us the opportunity to reach a better understanding of the process taking place in today's art, which operates predominantly within new media and techniques of reproduction."[118] Sciarrino's *Specimen* is borne of the formal study of images but, fundamentally, each specimen exists as an object extracted from the vein of fantasy and imagination. They represent multiple complex realities: ebb of the aura; indifferent exteriors; the non-reproducibility of earth's mineralogical "treasures." It is through equivocality that *Specimen* manifests delicacy and uniqueness. Art can rely no longer on the crutch of

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115 Water Benjamin "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 230.
116 "Fiat ars—pereat mundus" was a slogan of the Futurists. Benjamin quotes this phrase in the conclusion of this essay.
117 Boris Groys,"The Topology of Contemporary Art," in *Antimonies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Terry Smith Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee. (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 74.
118 Groys, 73.

authenticity. There can only be new connections, arrangements, gestures, and contexts. In this way, Groys argues it is time to be done with the notion of an idea's immortal essence, as "there are no eternal copies, just as there are no eternal originals."[119] Within the context of the exhibition *Time To Start Over*, what mortal signals does *Specimen 12* aim to crystallize?

In his essay "Signs of Life," art critic J.J. Charlesworth asks this very question about *Seizure (2008),* a crystal installation by British artist Robert Hiorn (b. 1975). In *Seizure*, Hiorn "uses the process of crystal formation…fast growing blue crystals that are formed in copper sulphate solution to coast the surface of an object…"[120] In this case, Hiorn engineered blue crystals – or "cultures" – to "grow" over and cover the interior surface of a derelict 1950s low-rise housing block. In a very alien or unfeeling way, the blue crystals begin to fill the negative space of the abandoned house that, for nearly half a century, contained the comings and goings of human activity and human history. Hiorn's crystals, in a similar way to Sciarrino's *Specimen*, seem to "appear" or "grow" by means of their own inhuman and uncanny processes, cancelling out or shrouding what came before through sheer and "cold"[121] properties of surface:

> Rather than operating as indexes of human presence, [the crystals] become material symbols of the process of production and reproduction, separated from the original reference point. This is perhaps why these substances take on the character of something either sacred or alchemical, but in either case something occult, whose properties go beyond the norms of raw matter.[122]

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[119] Groys, 75.
[120] J.J. Charlesworth, "Signs of Life," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 203.
[121] The word crystal is based on the Greek word "krystallos" derived from kryos, which means "icy cold." See "What is a crystal," http://www.gemsociety.org/wow/jj4.htm (accessed January 17, 2013).
[122] Charlesworth, 205.

Crystals, indeed, hold certain magic in the form of raw material. Though crystals are naturally occurring, they are composed of inorganic minerals with regular chemical patterns and compound structures. They cannot change or mutate; they can only become more pure atomic formulations. For Charlesworth, "The form of the crystal and the process of crystallization are exemplary in this respect – it is about as far from human as matter can be. Entirely lifeless, based on nothing but the dynamics of inorganic chemistry, the crystal nevertheless is said to 'grow.'"[123] In this way, *Mineral Specimen 12* brings to mind an inhuman process of growth and creation as it imperfectly replicates it: "Crystallization…is the purest expression of self-containment, self-producing process of matter which goes from internal instability to stability, indifferent to materials and energies outside of it."[124] An object such as *Mineral Specimen 12*, indifferent to the complex, organic human world outside of it, is troubling for the human viewer, albeit wondrous to behold.

In both *Seizure* and *Mineral Specimen 12* something is undoubtedly missing. Here, we see Hiorn's and Sciarrino's crystals potentially filling an ecological vacuum: Where "there are no signs of life," says Charlesworth, "Art enters in."[125] Here, crystallization is a strange metaphor for both ruination and recovery because, instead of nature "taking" back a space, crystallization represents "a moment of paralysis or sudden arrest in the processes of a living organism."[126] The regular narrative of ruination and reclamation is upended, as "A more conventionally Romantic ecological narrative might imagine the reclamation of human space by organic nature

[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Charlesworth, 208.
[126] Charlesworth, 207.

– ruins overgrown by plants and trees – *Seizure* expels even organic nature in favour of the inorganic, choosing simple molecular growth over that more complex and curious molecule, DNA."[127] Sciarrino's, like Hiorn's, is a new kind of lapidary, fashioning and polishing nature's precious "dead" minerals into languid, semi-conscious objects. Half "alive," half "dead," Sciarrino's *Mineral Specimen 12* poses the mortal and moral question of Beaudelaire's *Fleurs de Mal*: What new blood might be drawn from the stone?

[127] Ibid. Charlesworth's correlation is problematic, as DNA, as the 'more curious and complex molecule' does not "grow" in the same way as a crystal. DNA divides instead of multiplying.

LEISURE (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley): *a more subtle fantasy*

Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow.
-- William Blake

In the stop motion animation film *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone (2013)* we see the shifting imprint of human fingertips as they move over a grey environment. Though we cannot see the hand, its presence is strongly felt; it makes fluid, soft impressions upon the surface of its inhospitable-looking setting – a lunar landscape or, perhaps, a murky, silty floor of an extraterrestrial sea. What is this hand doing here? Why does it "feel," and what is it "feeling"? As it affects and generates in its hermetic universe, who or what does it desire?

Leisure is the artist-curator collaborative practice of Susannah Wesley and Meredith Carruthers. This collaborative practice has taken on many forms, which makes it difficult to navigate and describe. In the service of time and space, I will focus on the *places* from where they create instead of on their various past creations (exhibitions, installations, performances, symposia, texts).[128] That said, it is still important to be attentive to their own context as artist-curators. Leisure began as a creative response to what Wesley and Carruthers felt to be a pervasive atmosphere of bureaucratic "gravity" in their adopted art world of Montreal. Leisure, first conceived as a "delirious brainchild"[129] was meant to create a more fluid working space of off-hour levity, *joie de vivre*, and intimacy in their simultaneous professional and

[128] Recent exhibitions include *A Line/Aligner* at La Galerie Centrale in Montreal (2013) and *Witch Trap (2011)* at ESP Gallery in Toronto (2012). Notable transdiciplinary events include the exhibition-symposia such as *I haven't been a figment of my own imagination (2009)*. For a full list of projects see www.leisuregallery.ca.
[129] This term, until recently, appeared in Leisure's online biography.

"leisurely" artistic practices.[130] Certain concepts connected to their work, such as delirium, confusion, hallucination, and ecstasy, are not to be taken literally, but instead are meant to underscore the fact that "Contemporary art works on the level of context, framework, background or of new theoretical interpretation."[131] Leisure is a compelling example of an interdisciplinary art practice set in a subtle scaffolding of restlessness, emotion and disorientation. It is important to note that the productive space that Wesley and Carruthers make through Leisure is certainly a gendered one, although the role of feminism and feminist art practices functions as a shifting, subversive aspect of their work. The silent, "soft" world conjured by *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* (*Figure 6)* can be read as a feminine one as the video explores the history and design of space supposedly concealed or "covered over" by the psychological status of a 19 year-old bride (as determined by a male architect). Without being able to devote more discussion to the topic here, there is much worthwhile discussion to draw out in the future surrounding the complex role feminism and feminist curating play in Leisure's practice.[132]

As a conceptual practice, Leisure seeks to inhabit the figurative gaps and interstitial spaces between the past and the present, the "intersections between imaginary narrative and socio-historical research."[133] Leisure views the past as a type of self-styled social science: it is an active, engaging time and place, densely inhabited

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130 "Houdini-like identity-swapping of roles across the spectrum." Smith, 65.Wesley and Carruthers met in Glasgow, Scotland as MFA students. Leisure began in 2004, when both women moved to Montreal.
131 Smith, 71.
132 This discussion too, could widen out to explore the fact that all three of the artists in *Time To Start Over* are female. It was a conscious curatorial decision on my part to make no direct reference to the gender of the artists.
133 Leisure, "Leisure Projects," under "All About Leisure," http://www.leisuregallery.ca/about_us (accessed January 2013).

by people, places, events, judgments, facts and fictions. On the surface of things – that is, in the present moment – the past's various "players" are only physically present in pictures, texts, raw materials, and stories. Once three-dimensional, fluid and speaking, these players are now mute, half-halted and obscure. For Leisure, the re-creation of the past requires a certain protocol. For almost ten years, Wesley and Carruthers have undertaken "strategies of curating and art-making to create a productive space for leaps of the imagination and understanding."[134] Leisure achieves such dynamic, dreamlike spaces through a "device" of compound optics, which is, in my view, a method of invocation achieved by a simultaneous microscoping and telescoping. Put another way, Leisure's exhibitions, artworks, and writings are micro-observations of things that are impossibly far away, for "The trick by which this world of things is mastered—it is more proper to speak of a trick than a method—consists in the substitution of a political for a historical view of the past."[135] It is this overlay of lenses with different focal distances that allows Leisure to alter the past and "to propose an alternate present"[136] in their work. Theirs is a constant curiosity: How best to invite the charlatans back in? In this essay, in the spirit of the "doubling" of frames, I pose the following question twice: From where does this work originate, from where does Leisure create?

Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone originates from a singular human made site: a small bedroom lined with fur. The imagery in Leisure's animation explores the

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[134] Ibid.

[135] Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the Europe an Intelligentsia," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings (1927-1930),* Vol 2, Pt. 1, ed. Michael Jennings, Howard Eland and Gary Smith (New York: Harvard University Press, 1999), 210.

[136] Leisure, "How one becomes what one is," (working title) text for exhibition proposal, March 2013.

artists' absorption in the bedroom of a young turn-of-the-century bride: The Bedroom of Lina Loos. In 1903, Austrian architect Adolf Loos designed a white-fur lined bedroom for his 19-year-old bride, Lina. The room was completely white, "the walls were draped with white curtains and the floor and bed were covered in white angora sheepskins."[137] For Leisure, Loos's fetishization of the surfaces of a bedroom transforms a private interior into a sexually charged space of display. The sheepskin-lined room is a "stage set where the inhabitant is the object and a visitor (or Loos himself) is cast as the objective spectator. This becomes especially complex when the inhabitant is a sexualized woman; in this case his young wife, Lina."[138] Here we see a portrayal of Modern "insides," or interiors, as private rooms as "stages" for domestic, hidden life. The imagery in the *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* is in fact, an altered time-elapse of Wesley and Carruthers passing one of their hands over a swatch of fake white fur. As such, this work appears to articulate Leisure's "visit" or intimate, feeling observation of the idiosyncratic interiority, or psyche, of a *fin de siècle* interior.

What can be learned from reading this space as a psychological landscape? In "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," (1992) architectural scholar Beatriz Colomina discusses Loos's design as a calculated superimposition of materials governed by the "psychological status of each room."[139] Modern covering, according

[137] Leisure, "How one becomes what one is," March 2013.

[138] Ibid.

[139] "The white room that Loos designed for Lina, his blonde, blue-eyed, nineteen-year-old wife, was the most intimate place in the house. The white walls, the white draperies and the white angora sheepskins created a sensual and delicate fluidity; every object in the room was white. Even the closets were concealed behind pale linen drapes. this was an architecture of silence, of a sentimental and erotic approach. Its contrast with the more

to Loos, was the stratological overlay of silence, sentiment and stimulation: "architecture is a form of covering, but it is not the walls that are covered. Structure plays a secondary role, and its primary function is to hold the covering in its place."[140] Loos described Lina's bedroom as a "bag of fur and cloth" and as "an architecture of pleasure," or "architecture of the womb." [141] Though Modernist in style, this strange bourgeois interior aims towards an aesthetic purism, an anti-historical or sparse aesthetic, but it is also sumptuous and ceremonial.

The incongruent emptiness and overwrought-ness of the bedroom is brought into strange relief by Loos's famous manifesto of Modern architecture. In *Ornament and Crime (1908),* he argues against ornament any historical reference or affect. Loos, a churlish pioneer of modern aesthetic, saw ornament as a form of devolution, a "crime" against progress, something modern civilization has "outgrown."[142] Loos desired a "new style for a new age" in which we have "grown finer, more subtle."[143] In the manifesto he states: "I have made the following discovery and I pass it on to the world. The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects. I believed that with this discovery I was bringing joy to the world, but no one has thanked me…"[144] Indeed, Loos's jettisoning a "regressive"

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public living spaces attests to a method of composition that was strictly governed by the psychological status of each room." Panayotis Tournikiotis, *Adolf Loos* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 36.

[140] Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Spaces, Princeton Papers on Architecture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 91.

[141] Colomina, 93.

[142] "Every age has its style, and by style, is our age alone to be refused a style? By style, people meant ornament. Then I said, weep not! See therein lies the greatness of our age, that it is incapable of producing a new ornament. We have outgrown ornament; we have fought our way through to freedom from ornament." Adolf Loos, "1908, Ornament and Crime," in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture. Ed. Ulrich Conrads.* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), 24.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Loos, 21.

history from architectural design was far from a widely-accepted or a straightforward endeavour.[145]

What sort of subtleties does Leisure detect by "feeling" the room's plush surface? Intriguingly, the more hermetic and tactile the hand's universe – the further "outside" the imagery seems to go. The transmuting imagery of this video indeed calls to mind forms of interplanetary life (*Figure 7*). Instead of pointing us to a human-made interior, *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* pushes beyond the bounds of earth and into space. Such a visual trajectory may seem like a grand one, but I cannot help but be drawn here, to the grandiose "outside" of nature. Thus, by way of an oddly luxuriant "inside" of Modern design, I will re-focus the lens and start anew with the rise of astronomy and popular history of space travel.

Peering through the glass eye of his telescope, Galileo (1564 -1652) was the first to gaze intimately upon the cold, uneven surface of the moon. In the seventeenth century, new advances in astronomical sciences gave people unprecedented views of the heavens: "It was a hopeful age. Anything might be accomplished by science, and for the first time in over a thousand years men were again eagerly studying the heavens, the astronomers in serious observation, the writers in fanciful speculation."[146] For instance, the power of magnification gave Galileo and other proponents of "new astronomy" supporting evidence for Copernicus' "ungodly" view: a cosmic order in which the globe was neither the

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[145] In the mid-nineteenth century, the Pre-Raphelites, for example, under the artistic leadership of William Morris undertook the opposite stance to Loos. Morris was the leader the English Arts and Crafts design movement (1860-1910 approx.), which privileged traditional design techniques and aesthetics as modes of economic and social reform.

[146] Courtlandt Canby, *A History of Rockets and Space*, vol 1 in *Leisure Arts Limited* (Switzerland: Heliogravure Centrale, 1962), 34.

center of the universe nor a perfect celestial body. Rather, the earth was only one of many lonesome planets charted on an elliptical course around the sun.[147] These massive recalibrations of the universe paved the way for the Scientific Revolution's next generation, namely Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and his Laws of Motion. Newton's laws offered mathematical explanations for how and why things stop, speed up, or slow down in a certain direction. One of the more enigmatic of Newton's laws describes the gravitational pull of a larger body on a smaller one. The effect of this circumstance is a circular path of motion: such as the earth's orbit of the sun.[148] Centripetal force is elemental in the physics of rocket launching and space travel. Eventually, an intimate knowledge of "circling" would allow us to successfully (and unsuccessfully) send astronauts (and, in fact, a great many other things) into space.

In early interdisciplinary writings about space travel, scientists anticipated the reality of lunar landings with a mixture of excitement and dread. Looking at fiction, we see traces of this, as "Fiction is always a useful barometer of the moods and attitudes of a period, and space fiction is no exception."[149] A contemporary of Galileo, Johannes Kepler (1571 - 1630), a mathematician and astronomer, was the first author of a science fiction manuscript about interplanetary travel. *Somnium (the Dream*) is the story of the son of an Icelandic witch who travels to the moon. It is a

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147 Canby, 34-36. The Italian physicist Copernicus first proposed the "Heliocentric" view of the universe during the Renaissance. The Galilean picture of cosmos worked to further displace the long-held theory of Aristotle, which held that the earth was the century of the universe.

148 "Centripetal" from Latin centrum "center" and petere "to seek" is a force that makes a body follow a curved path. Centripetal force is thought to be the general cause of circular motion. In *Principia* Newton's definition is as follows: "A centripetal force is that by which bodies are drawn or impelled, or any way tend, towards a point as to a center."

149 Canby, 33-34.

"gentle fantasy" of interplanetary travel and lunar astronomy.[150] As Canby notes, *Somnium* was as much an attempt to explore the moon's inhospitable surface as to offer humankind an alarming new perspective, a view of earth as an orb in space:

> Kepler's moon…was the dead, forbidding planet revealed to Galileo through the telescope, a desperate contrast to the full moon's slivery promise that had enthralled mankind since the beginning of time. A waste of towering peaks, dizzy chasms, fissures, a climate of extreme contrasts and a lunar night whose uninterrupted darkness persisted for 15 to 16 days (as indeed it was), this was Kepler's moon."[151]

Thus, we have returned to a space not unlike Loos's surreal sheepskin interior. The lunar surface is void of ornament and history; it is a stage, a psychological setting. Yet, as *Glow of the Going, Glow of Gone* suggests, these are real places. The "feeling" eye of the telescope or the "seeing" touch of the human hand urges the viewer to imagine what it would be like to become an actor upon the universal surface.

Leisure, then, inhabits the cracks and the fissures of "time" and "nature." The design of Lina's bedroom, like Kepler's *Somnium,* straddles a chaotic ushering-in of the old and new. Lina's bedroom is a small space borne of "The Age of Decadence," a phase identified by art historians and socio-cultural disciplinarians as a generalized period of cultural affluence that, plagued by excess, inauspiciously precedes decline and collapse: "Art Nouveau was born here, Romanticism suffered a strange death-agony here, and Surrealism stripped the place of its treasures."[152] Comparatively, *Somnium* comes from the rise of the "Age of New Astronomy," when the earth was evicted from its position as the centre of the known universe. This

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[150] Canby, 33.
[151] Canby, 33-34.
[152] Phillipe Julian, *Dreamers of Decadence, Symbolist Painters of the 1890s*. trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 23.

tumult of old and new offers a larger context in which to place *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone*. The title of this work especially engages the oppositional qualities of change: apogee and nadir, the combination of which "opens the door to yet another period of transformation."[153]

Finally: what is transformative?

In his essay "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of European Intelligentsia"(1929), Walter Benjamin writes of the "intoxicated" and "charmed spaces" of Surrealism as vital sites of social change. He explains Surrealism as a method and artistic movement that privileges the unconscious in order to uncover, investigate, and arrange the physical world: "In the world structure, dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the charmed space of intoxication."[154] Benjamin also argues for the radical potential of Surrealism, "To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution—this is the project on which Surrealism focuses in all its books and enterprises. This it may call its most particular task. For them it is not enough that, as we know, an intoxicating component lives in every revolutionary act."[155] He wonders, however, how Surrealism and surrealists survive beyond its early twenty-first century beginnings:

> At present, Surrealism is in the phase of transformation. But at the time when it broke over its founders as an inspiring dream wave, it seemed the

[153] Leisure, e-mail message to author, January 24, 2013.
[154] Benjamin, "Surrealism," 210.
[155] Benjamin, 216.

> most integral, conclusive, absolute of movements. Everything with which it came into contact was integrated. Life seemed worth living only where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth.[156]

I put forward that Leisure occupies present-day Surrealist territory with *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone*. To operate in such a strange "little universe" is, for Benjamin, to operate "in the space in which the lyrical poetry of Surrealism reports. That is to say, in the larger one, the cosmos, things look no different. There, too, are crossroads where ghostly signals flash from the traffic, and inconceivable analogies and connections between events are the order of the day."[157] The order of *today*, as I have argued throughout this thesis, is the changing relationship between humans and nature, and in turn artists' aesthetic understanding of it. As Leisure's video suggests, in desiring to know the human hand effects; it is an unsteady picture that derives from simultaneous telescopic and microscopic actions. Here, a telescope is a figurative and literal device of "presentism," a seeing and feeling hand of unknowable surfaces. In this way, it provides a useful metaphor for the predicament of contemporaneity, for "A telescope powerful enough to aid us in the discerning the shapes and extent of craters on the moon will reveal very different image of the universe than one that unravels the rings of Saturn, or one that can bring us the light of a distant star. The universe looks different, depending on the questions we ask of the stars."[158] To this day, astronomy's intimate optical knowledge of alien planetary planes remains both soothing and distressing for humankind. For Leisure, certainly,

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156 Benjamin, 209.
157 Benjamin, 211.
158 Raqs Media Collective, "Contemporaneity," in "Now and Elsewhere" http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/print.aspx?type=by&catid=2 (accessed March 18 2013).

"It is not too early to cultivate the new science of astronautics, for one day mankind may have to leave the earth. In the meantime, there are other worlds to explore."[159]

[159] Canby, 7.

CONCLUSIONS

...the moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places.
-- Frankenstein, 1818

In Mary Shelley's Romantic masterpiece, *Frankenstein*, a young scientist takes up a breathless and bold pursuit of "nature": Dr. Victor Frankenstein, driven by the ordeal of his beloved mother's passing, toils in secret to unlock the mysteries of life and death. To his delight and horror, he succeeds in creating an artificial man from a composite of dead organic matter. Upon this being's immoral "birth," however, Frankenstein rejects his creation, and the monster, the scientist's now-undead "double," escapes. Shelley's story is a tragic tale; as a result of humankind's numerous denunciations of him, Frankenstein gains reparation with himself by means of murder, destroying everyone and everything his human counterparts hold dear.

The parable of Shelley's *Frankenstein* is rich and complex. It can be read in many ways for many purposes. In the context of this curatorial thesis, Shelley's themes of profane nature and human interpretations of "it" serve as larger histrionic touchstones. *Frankenstein* was born in the heart of the Romantic age, at the onset of Industrial Capitalism; it is my conviction that Shelley's monster story – steeped in themes of hybridity and immorality – haunts us now, at the twilight of industrial capitalism's historical narrative, more than ever. It remains a singular critique of modernity, capitalism, and the protocol of progress. I evoke Shelley's story as a foundational narrative of hybridity, artifice and wickedness as a way to cast my concluding remarks in a certain light. Uncannily, one of Shelley's main messages is an

analysis of the cultural codes surrounding "unnaturalness." In *Frankenstein*, the human-made creature, profane as he is, craves communion with the human world. At first, the monster is gentle and good-natured, seeking out modes of living, even loving, in the world he has been born into. Frankenstein seeks participation and agency in the socio-cultural-economic matrix. Pitifully denied this, he turns on his maker to exact merciless vengeance.

Revenge and reprisal are not the types of "return" or "coming after" hoped for in the writings of contemporary art agents Hal Foster, Johanna Drucker and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. In the section "After the 'After' of Contemporary Art," I have inquired after the carefully chosen watchwords that each of these critics and thinkers apply to the character of quality of contemporary art – traumatic, spectral, nonsynchronous, incongruous, complicit. As with Shelley, each appear to be sensitive to socio-economic realities of their world, and the impressionable ambiguity of the entities we create and desire. Why? The sooner we come to terms with monsters of our own making, the better.

The three works I have brought together in *Time To Start Over* are views of nature that are hybrid, ambiguous, ghostly. Each offers a present-day view of the natural world. As art objects, they cannot be read as one-to-one representations of natural forms or naturally occurring materials. Instead, they stand as emblems of nature's complex current condition in the twenty-first century. They are not "pure" objects of the present, but muddied representations of nature cobbled together to form ideas about what nature, as refracted through the lens of Western culture since the late eighteenth century, has looked like to us, as well as speculation about what it

might look like in the future. Accordingly, *Time To Start Over* is an exhibition that engages with the future while reflecting on the past. Walter Benjamin, a key modernist thinker I have returned to more than once in this thesis, points out the problem of conjuring up or "curating" art objects in the belief that they will perform the intangible machinations of passing time. In his essay "On the Concept of History" (1938), he states: "To articulate what is the past does not mean to recognize 'how it really was.' It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger."[160] As we have seen in the work of *A thing wherein we feel some hidden want* by Lauren Hall, *Mineral Specimen 12* by Jennifer Rose Sciarrino, and *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* by Leisure, in attempts to create views of the physical world, there has been a considerable marshaling of mnemonics. In many ways, these works stand as make-believe relics of nature.

In *Time To Start Over*, a Benjaminian notion of vestige emerging in a "moment of danger" finds purchase in the reality, or fantasy, of the Anthropocene. Geologists posit that we are entering a new "human-made" era. The Anthropocene is an unofficial scientific term for the advent of a new geological age – the first to be shaped not only by natural forces but also by the unmistakable stamp of the human hand. In the same way the Anthropocene is a hybrid of theory and science, *Time To Start Over* operates on the level of speculation and in the genre of fantasy or science fiction. By consequence, this exhibit places the viewer before a shoreline of fluorescent sands, in the glint a plastic gemstone, and in front of half-halting footage

[160] Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History (also called Theses on the Philosophy of History)," in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 253-265.

of an animated human hand moving seductively over a lunar-looking surface. These are deeply thoughtful, varied, and nuanced views of a human-made world. Admittedly, these do not give up all the answers, nor do they ask the same questions; yet, through varied materials, form and content, each artist and artist-curator hovers near "the very significance of human life and human history, at a time when what it means to be human, and the direction of human society itself seems less certain than before."[161]

Thus, in light of this scientific *qua* linguistic demarcation of a new human-made world, my curatorial inquiry in bringing these works together is bold and urgent: What does human-made "nature" look like? What kind of culture constructs a new nature? What dangers lie in these wonders? And, most importantly, how will we positively or negatively engage with it? In my view, there is urgency of this twilight period, or *denouement*, that is clearly expressed in Jill Bennett's "Living in the Anthropocoene:" a sense of serious acknowledgement of, and responsibility to, the concept of "hybridity." Today, we must find ways of cohabitating and collaborating with each other across disciplines and discourses in the arts and sciences. It may be the only way to parse the parallel universes of fantasy and reality.

In terms of art production, positive engagement with "new" views of nature moves us swiftly into new aesthetic territory. As Amanda Boetzkes outlines in "Waste and the Sublime Landscape," now is a time in which artists are re-visiting the Landscape genre and its modes of representation. In *Time To Start Over*, I have put forward some ways in which the old frameworks of landscape art allow

[161] Charlesworth, 204.

contemporary artists to explore new representations of the awe-inspiring and terrifying material and immaterial "surfaces" of a human-made world. The most effective and straightforward way to view contemporary landscapes is through the codes of the Romantic landscape genre and its traditional categories of the sublime and picturesque. Or at least it's a place to start. The stakes of the "new" sublime, for instance, have perhaps never been higher. As Boetzkes suggests:

> From an ecological perspective, it is important to consider not only how nature is constructed and represented, but also how nature exceeds our systems of representation. While it may seem that the appropriate response to environmental crisis is to leave nature alone (a response that quickly slides back into the ideal of virginal nature), we might instead consider the need to reconceptualize our contact with nature by remaining attentive to the limits of our grasp of it, thereby opening a space for it to exist on its own terms.[162]

As we have seen in the works of *Time To Start Over*, the aesthetic terms of a hybrid "real-fake" nature are difficult to parse, perhaps for the simple reason that nature and art (or artifact) are pleasing in similar ways. Here, as a way of ending, my curatorial thesis takes a brief foray into the Aesthetics of Nature. The "separation" of aesthetic judgments in terms of art and nature is a complicated philosophical undertaking. The divide between how we understand the visual affect of art from that of nature rests in the interpretations of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (first published in 1790). In *The Philosophy of Art (2012),* philosophy scholar Theodore Gracyk touches on how a close reading of the Kantian distinction between the "judgments of taste" regarding "nature" *vis-á-vis* "art" or "artifact" is highly relevant to the

[162] Boetzkes, 22.

burgeoning contemporary debate and literature surrounding environmental aesthetics.[163]

One can easily argue that nature is beautiful on its own. Natural objects such as seashells, sunsets, and a field of wildflowers are aesthetically pleasing to the human eye without the involvement or intention of the human hand. Gracyk, in line with Kant, agrees, noting that "natural objects such as roses, bird songs, and scenic views invite a pure, uncomplicated mode of significance"[164] or, in Kantian terms, an "immediate response." Kantian theory holds that examples of beauty found in natural objects "should serve as the *basis* for aesthetic theory, not art."[165] According to Gracyk, it is on this point that many readers and theorists *misread* Kant and conflate his idea about a "pure response" to nature (also defined as "aesthetic empiricism") to categories of visual art as well. Gracyk pointing out this logical leap shows that "the discipline of aesthetics" is not one in the same with the philosophy of art.

In several passages, Kant describes a distinction to be made between fake bird song or fake flowers with the real. In Part I of the *Critique of Judgment*, "On The Division of Philosophy," Kant writes:

> ...it is noteworthy that if we secretly deceived this lover of the beautiful by planting in the ground artificial flowers (which can be manufacture exactly like real ones), or by placing artificially carved birds on the boughs of trees, and he discovered the deceit, the immediate interest that he previously took in them would disappear at once; though perhaps, a different interest viz., the interest of vanity in adorning his chamber with them for the eyes of others, would take its place. The superiority of natural to artificial beauty in that it

[163] Theodore Gracyk, "Aesthetics and Nature," in *The Philosophy of Art*. (Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press, 2012), 128.
[164] Gracyk, 129.
[165] Ibid.

alone arouses immediate interest, although as regards form the first may be surpassed by the second.[166]

Gracyk suggests that Kant is in fact making a *normative* point here, saying that "Origins always make an aesthetic difference and people should take relevant information into account before making aesthetic judgments."[167] The question of provenance, then, is key in the philosophy of art, but not necessarily in the aesthetics of nature. There is no need to question the origins of "natural" beauty, for nature is beautiful on its own. Only with art, with artifice, should we go looking for the place(s) from which it came.

But, what if nature is not "natural" anymore? In the Anthropocene, the central question of the aesthetics of nature sparks anew: "How much information should we take into account when considering the aesthetic qualities of natural object?"[168] Again, starting from Boetzkes's work, how are we *now* to understand nature on its own terms? Allen Carlson, editor of a collection of essays called *The Aesthetics of the Natural Environment (2004)* and proponent of "scientific cognitivism," brings forward a list of ten models of contemporary aesthetic judgments, drawn from Kantian theory. The first two are as follows:

> 1. A minimal position holds that acceptable aesthetic judgments of nature require awareness of what is human-produced and what is natural, but nothing more. The aesthetic appreciation of nature should proceed from some understanding of what is to be a product of nature.
>
> 2. Scientific cognitivism sees a strong parallel between aesthetic judgment about art and those about nature. Acceptable aesthetic judgments of

[166] Kant, 131.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Gracyk, 131.

> artworks require some understanding of the art-historical tradition informing their production. Analogously, aesthetic appreciation of natural things requires a minimal understanding of relevant natural-historical and scientific information.[169]

Carlson's position holds that we should go looking for the "origin" of nature. At the very least, the viewer should know whether they are looking at a "natural" seashell, for example, or a manufactured one before casting aesthetic judgments about it. Furthermore, for an aesthetic judgment to be valid, it must be "grounded in what natural science tells us about the subject."[170] This last statement points out that most people will fail to appreciate nature properly, according to Carlson; not everyone knows off-hand, for example, that "monarch butterflies are like ducks," and that for their size the monarch's wings allow them to migrate relatively long distances. With this scientific observation in mind, we find that "fragile" and "delicate" are inaccurate aesthetic qualities to give a butterfly.[171]

There are many ways to challenge the scientific cognitivist approach. For one, it discards the more imaginative and folkloric considerations of nature, which as Gracyk reminds us, can offer new and exploratory interpretations of living organisms and the natural environment.[172] Another counterpoint to scientific cognitivism is that, if appreciated always in terms of scientific knowledge, *all* nature will seem "aesthetically good."[173] In this way, our immediate response to a rotting carcass

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169 Carlson, quoted in Gracyk, 131.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Gracyk, 132.
173 Ibid.

would require a "superhuman suppression of ordinary human responses"[174] in order to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of decomposition.

Time To Start Over is thus an exhibition and curatorial project that occasion the present moment – eerily reminiscent of the collisions of science and nature in early Romantic age – as one of luminous admonishment. In order to begin to understand the nature of "unnaturalness" – in this context, works of contemporary art that hover in the uncertain realms of "human-made," the "undead," or the "hybrid," in other words, the now-profanely *possible* – we must welcome them into the clear light of a new day.

[174] Ibid.

EXHIBITION REPORT

But let us now look into the back-parlour, where all the cutting and polishing takes place. A peep behind the scenes is generally instructive.[175]

I think that every exhibition has not one, but many "back parlours." In my limited experience, it happens that over the course of exhibition-making there are a number of private spaces – both physical and psychological – that are reserved for the "cutting and polishing" of curatorial practice. These final few pages offer a look at two of the curtained off "rooms" now filled with the productive tension of the most challenging and inspiring methodological problematics of *Time To Start Over*: archaeology and impermanence. In the first case, I reflect briefly on an ostensible "archaeological approach" which I have studied primarily through the writings of Christov-Bakargiev and her creative direction of dOCUMENTA(13). Secondly, I discuss my interest in present-day curation as a form of "provisional practice," a phrase put forward by Canadian curator Renee Baert in *Naming A Practice, Curatorial Strategies for the Future (1996).*[176] And finally, while "Every exhibition demonstrates that curators reflect on circumstance, wrestle with ideas, develop research programs and spark insight,"[177] it is also the case that exhibitions produce unknown outcomes and ideas on their own once they "arrive" fully formed in a space. I will talk briefly about ocean-like the look and feel of *Time To Start Over* as its own unpredictable entity (*Figures 8 and 9*).

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[175] Francis, 22.
[176] Renee Baert, "Provisional Practices," in *Naming A Practice, Curatorial Strategies for the Future*: ed. Peter (White Banff, AB: Walter Phillips Gallery Editions, 1996), 117-33.
[177] Smith 17.

Since the beginning of this project, I have felt that my process-based concerns are best articulated by Christov-Bakargiev, as I share her belief that "…procedural questions are as meaningful as, if not more than, the so-called thematic content or subject matter of an art project – how one exercises agency and relates to others, how one proceeds as an artist, or how one acts as a member of the audience."[178] I am not sure if how I proceeded throughout this project is truly "archeological" or not. I certainly never referred to myself as anything other than a curator. But an archeological attitude is one way to describe how I began to "look" and "notice" the art works I chose for the exhibition, and how I reflected the nature of the works themselves. In my view, what is most critical about an archaeological approach, or attitude, is that it offers curators agency that is both transdisciplinary and trans-temporal. In the first case, the "logic" of archaeology allows curators to "notice," "observe" or "look and find" works of art using the conventions of a now politically and historically "reclaimed" discipline. I suggest it is "reclaimed" in the realm of contemporary art because Archaeology is an academic field with a contested Western legacy in both the "hard" and "soft" sciences. In her "Letter" Christov-Bakargiev's describes how curatorial "excavation" helps us piece together our own present-day predicament:

> To understand our time, there are conversations to be had with the past, through an archaeological approach, excavating backward in what appears to be a work about the past, a reading through and a building up of archives concerning specific twentieth-century events, one can build a project about our own time, and about our future that is enigmatic.[179]

[178] Christov-Bakargiev, 76.
[179] Christov-Bakargiev, 79.

Accordingly, *Time To Start Over* was very much an exercise in trying to put on display "trans-temporal" evidences of an "enigmatic future." As a curator, I adopted the critical function of Christov-Bakargiev's curator-archaeologist in order to "seek" and "unearth" clues of an unknown, perhaps newly unfolding chapter of the human-nature relationship. Crucially, an archaeological approach is not passive, but a highly self-reflexive one: curators and artist-curators are not simply choosing and arranging art and objects, but questioning and re-organizing past orthodoxies, ontologies and epistemologies. Exhibitions can thus activate the artworks as powerful, previously "unknown" cultural and historical "findings." In this way, the methodological likenesses between early archeology (excavations of ancient ruins on a human scale) and early nineteenth-century geological science (amateur observations of earth's ancient past through trace remains on the surface) led me towards further socio-historical research into the nineteenth-century naturalist. Accordingly, "The fragmentary and descriptive style of an amateur naturalist drawing on his own experience observing habit and behaviour, the interrelations between flora and fauna and the changing seasons"[180] became a qualitative "observational" curatorial tactic that I found myself caught up in, or constantly drifting towards.

Yet, at the end of the day, *Time To Start Over* was a group exhibition necessarily formulated around the three works of art themselves, and was not, after all, a project or exhibition about role-play, "method-curating," or even a curatorial project attempting to forefront the process of "curating." Thus, wary of my actions as a curator-as-geologist or curator-as-archeologist, I found myself constantly re-

[180] Leslie, 8.

committing to or pulling away from these conceptual, historical and performative frameworks.

Instead, this exhibition seemed to inhabit an indistinctive, shadowy, transdisciplinary *space*: a crack or crevice momentarily "lit up," or illuminated, by ideas and impressions from a wide variety of sources: earth sciences, art, history, literature and philosophy. Here, by the logic of Western aesthetics and the Landscape genre, I found myself studying new representational "landscapes" filled with uncanny and subliminal potentialities. Perhaps Christov-Bakargiev's idea of "excavating backward," then, might be more appropriately redefined under my curatorial protocol in *Time To Start Over* as "excavating *forward*." I was trying to excavate, paradoxically, anticipatory traces in order to better understand something yet to come: the scientific stamp of a "human-made world." In this way, over the course of a year, my research and curatorial arguments teetered continually, haphazardly, and frustratingly on methods that were propositional, speculative and uncertain.[181]

It may be a present-day paradox that exhibitions are more definitive the more they are provisional. Yet, as an emerging curator, this is a contradiction I am happy to exist within. *Time To Start Over* as a curatorial argument suggests that, through the various works assembled, I am pinpointing an exact moment of change. But this is an impossible task. Real transformation is the accumulation of small changes that occur over time, and in geological science, as in the art world, "Turning points are

[181] As part of the frontismatter to *Contemporary Curating*, Smith includes an image of a video still from "A Curator's Last Will and Testament"(2012) based on the original list made by late-curator Nick Waterlow. It reads: "1. Passion 2. An eye of discernment 3. An empty vessel 4. An ability to be uncertain 5. Belief in the necessity of art and artists 6. A medium – bringing a passionate and informed understanding of works of art to an audience in ways that will stimulate, inspire, question 7. Making Possible the Altering of Perception," pg. 16. I find "Number 4" particularly insightful.

long in the making."[182] Accordingly, there is much to be learned at present by claiming curatorial territory in the indistinct and conditional realm of "interim" and the "impermanent."[183]

That said, *Time To Start Over* was not an exhibition wholly makeshift, or given entirely up to chance by any means. I sought out and chose certain works over others. In "Provisional Practices," Renee Baert sums up wonderfully the predicament of exhibition-making as a strategized, yet amorphous activity: "I myself do not already know altogether in advance what it is I am up to – even as I necessarily do, and must know what I am doing."[184] Here, there is an imperative circumstance of *not already knowing*. Once more, as outlined by Baert, "I find myself confronting a certain gap between the status of the curator as (inevitably) a desiring subject, and any notion of method as an orderly and logical curatorial procedure."[185] In this regard, I think it is fair to say that curatorial practice operates under the unfixed rationale of longing. And perhaps longing is another "back parlour" of *Time To Start Over*, "a place for our discomforts, confusions, frustrations, imaginings, pleasures, and also for our encounters – sometimes serendipitous, sometimes sought out – with people, texts, objects, that lead us to question, search outside of ourselves, search amongst ourselves, for other models, answers, practices, possibilities."[186] In fact, the idea of desire connects to the machinations, however metaphorical, of "beachcombing" as part of *Time To Start Over*.

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[182] Smith, 121.
[183] Another example of provisionality is the publication "notebook" for dOCUMENTA(13). "Note-taking – how thinking emerges and lies at the heart of reimaging the world. In its cumulative nature, the publication project is a continuous articulation of the emphasis of on the propositional," Christov-Bakargiev, 78.
[184] Baert, 117.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Baert, 121.

A lingering intrigue for me about this exhibition is the way in which, on the one hand, the gallery felt as a space akin to the bottom of the ocean, where the works seemed to have "washed up" from some far and distant shore. On the other hand the show took on the quiet, pristine, or highly Modern "feel." Briefly, I'll discuss each of these surprising *in situ* results. Though the room was very quiet and clean (white walls, blue-greenish raw concrete floors, fluorescent track lighting), there was something unmistakably "of the sea" about *Time To Start Over*. From the colourful shoreline "platter," of *A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want*, to the amorphous waves of movement of *Glow of the Going, Glow of the Gone* and the crustaceous look of *Mineral Specimen 12*, the room contained an ocean atmosphere. In many ways, though especially through the materials of Hall's piece, the works appeared, as sea-creatures (or aquatic communiqué) "bellied up" from some deep fathoms. Here, I can try to put these oceanic aesthetics, or even "deep sea imaginary," in the context of the sublime; as for Burke, in *Philosophical Inquiry*, the ocean represented the most sublime force in nature, as an object of obscuration and terror in the external world.[187] Perhaps, then, the "feel" of the exhibition has to do with the question of scale; the surprising relational "reality" of such small-scale works cast (or, curated) in the vast context of an incomprehensible "future" history. The most suitable summation of this strange result is, for me, oddly articulated through the chapter titles of Canby's *A History of Rockets in Space*. The final two

[187] "And to things with great dimensions, if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater. A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as the prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself?" Burke, 53.

chapters of this idiosyncratic book, which in fact, describe the cool, sleek, surfaces of the first modern spacecraft, are entitled enigmatically, poetically:

This is a new sea…

…And we must sail on it

I'm not yet sure why *Time To Start Over's* "new sea" has such clear vestiges of Modernist design (heightened, of course, by Leisure's more direct "return" to this the Bedroom of Lina Loos). The aesthetic "stasis" and "emptiness" of Modernism seems very counter-intuitive to the idea of contemporary art entering an entangled, transdisciplinary epoch marked by a "messy" condition of ecological responsibility and awareness. One obvious way in which the gallery space felt even more sparse and empty was through the fluorescent track lighting. Fluorescents evacuate shadows and thus are useful in exhibiting three-dimensional (sculptural) works; yet, this type of lighting gives the alienating feeling of dollar-stores and office towers and science laboratories. These are human-made places devoid of history, present-day enclosures where time seems to stand still. How then to account for the flow of energy in the "little universe" of these small objects? Once together, harnessing the undercurrents, or energies, of unknown eras for some new purpose.

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