HERE: Understanding the nature of place-based practices in Art

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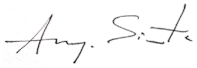

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Contents

Abstract

Site-specific artistic practice is best understood as a reflexive mode of engagement with the world that combines ideas about art, landscape architecture, and urban design on the one hand, with theories of the city, sociology, and public space, on the other. This MFA thesis, entitled *HERE*, identifies and expands spatial understandings at work in various intervention-based socio-ecological artistic practices, including my own. It will address ongoing questions of representation of site-specific work that I argue have yet to be adequately recognized within the broader discourse. In doing so I suggest how artists might continue to challenge the conventional binaries of here and there, inside and outside, nature and culture, core and periphery. Beyond merely challenging these binaries, my work is intended to invite the development of exciting new spatial and ecological imaginaries that lurk somewhere amid grey areas and in-betweens. I believe this capacity is both possible and urgently needed as we face a world which increasingly bears witness to our human modes of mark-making. The thesis will therefore engage equally with the 1) nature, 2) material and 3) representation of artistic intervention as it relates to a range of complex spatial, ecological and social realities in my work, and in the world.

Keywords

Nature, Place, Commons, Vernacular Materiality, Intervention, Site, Space, Process, Disturbance, Representation, Documentation, Installation.

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following an overview of my research questions and key terms, the structure consists of four key components: 1) the Contextual review 2) Methodologies, 3) Work, and 4) Conclusions and Coda. The contextual review will focus on situating my work within contemporary discourses on nature, the commons, and urban spatial theories. Here, I argue that our limited and binary conceptions of both "Nature" and "Place" should be expanded toward one another. I also define and demonstrate the notion of Vernacular Materiality (VM) as a critical theme in my own

practice through a consideration of accidental landscape conditions I've observed at various sites and locations throughout the world. I show how these conditions fly in the face of the "Tragedy of the Commons" narratives that typically dominate our understanding of Nature in the Anthropocene. Shifting focus to a more art-historical perspective, I examine various practices and projects which operate at the intersection of landscape intervention and representation. Here I further suggest that site-specific artistic production from earthworks through ecological art, continues to be animated by questions regarding the precise temporal and spatial locus of the work (from Smithson's "non-sites" to the Harrison Studio's speculative, unbuilt, or temporary work), Following from this contextual review, a methods section focuses on the role of disturbance, defamiliarization, and recontextualization as they relate to the staging and documentation of socio-ecological landscape interventions. I describe the reflexive loop that occurs in my work between *operative* space (in which interventions are initially staged), and *interpretive* space (where gallery-based installations occur). In the work section I demonstrate how these ideas have been employed during my time as a STAMPS MFA student, with a specific focus on how I have utilized representational devices such as time based multimedia projections and complicating didactic text to examine complex ideas related to nature and place in the context of a gallery-setting.

Finally in conclusion and Coda, I argue that beyond mere documentation, the role of interpretive strategies vis-a-vis landscape interventions should be focused on extending the initial intervention into the intimate psychic space of viewers, and to invite critical reflection among a wider public audience. I will conclude with a personal CODA that synthesizes the ideas and positions that will inform my practice as it moves forward from *HERE*.

Research questions:

1. How can artistic interventions invite expanded understandings of the nature of place, and the place of nature?

2. How can vernacular materiality, be understood and engaged as a "Commons", be employed as both a medium and subject for artistic intervention?

3. How do artists employ the representation of intervention-based work to emphasize its displacement across various spatial and temporal scales? How does this problematize the subjective interpretation and locus of "work" that a viewing public may never have physical access to?

4. How therefore, might the notion of "documentation" itself be expanded beyond its static tendencies to constitute a dynamic, secondary mode of intervention in an art space?

In order to effectively address questions 1 and 2, questions 3 and 4 were formed. It has been helpful and important for me to recognize that this research is not driven by a desire to arrive at definitive *answers*. Instead, the successful resolution of the present thesis may entail enumeration of even more questions that arise in the process of seriously (and curiously) pursuing these challenging questions through writing, reflection and art making.

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

1.1 Disrupting mythologies and constructs of "Nature"

Central to the arguments which follow is a foundational understanding that Nature is both a "thing" and an idea. Beyond the interplay of chemistry, biology and physics that interact to produce and sustain the conditions for life as we know it, *Nature* in our contemporary imagination is often conceptualized as a place,

and importantly, as a place where *we are not*. Recent literature decrying the supposed "end of nature" (McKibben 2006) and the emergence of the term "Anthropocene" are arguably steeped in deep fallacies about our own place in nature, and the very nature of that relationship. The fallacy we too often accept sounds like defeat: That the products of humankind and the processes of nature are fundamentally irreconcilable. That Nature is a pristine "elsewhere" that can only shrink in response to human expan-

sion. This dualism only serves to objectify and distance notions of the natural, and arguably represents a fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes Nature (as something "out there"). This nature/culture binary is one of the simplistic dialectics that my work and research aims to challenge and complicate through artistic intervention.

As observed by Raymond Williams, alternative, synthetic conceptions of nature are both necessary and imminently available, even if they remain somewhat rare in our public discourse;

> "If we alienate the living processes of which we are a part, we end, though unequally, by alienating ourselves... We need different ideas because we need different relationships...We need and are perhaps beginning to find different ideas, different feelings, if we are to know nature as varied and variable nature, as the changing conditions of a human world." (Williams 1980, 85)

By resisting the typical figure/ground relationship and re-imagine our everyday surroundings as complex ecosystems, it becomes possible for new definitions of the natural to emerge. The research and projects that follow from this will advance an expanded and integrative definition of Nature beyond the "pristine elsewhere." As new nature writer Emma Marris (2013) observes:

> The pristine wilderness notion is a historically created idea about what ought to count as nature, and there is no reason we can't change it. Just as the definition of citizen has changed to include more kinds of people as political ideas changed, so could nature expand to include more kinds of areas. Many ecologists today argue that we have to expand it, as our increasing understanding of history and atmospheric chemistry has left us with no areas at all that have not been altered

> by humans. And once we do change it, a heretofore unthinkable, exciting, and energizing thought occurs: we can make more nature. We can make things on Earth better, not just less bad. (2013, 56, emphasis original)

By continuing to insist on well worn binaries and fatalistic narratives of loss, many contemporary environmental movements risk further amplifying the polarity that exists between Place and Nature. This foregrounds a unique role for continued artistic engagement operating at this critical intersection. As it will be argued further, the most enduring and effective examples of site-specific interventionist art, I believe, engage with a more fluid, tentative definition of *nature as place*--one that can neither be dominated, saved, or even ever fully understood, but perhaps may still be collaboratively cultivated over time. By resisting and complicating typical figure/ground relationships that have long existed in art and everyday life (inside/outside nature/culture good/bad, etc) the role of site-specific intervention is arguably to catalyze new collective expressions of place (as a form of nature), and nature (as a form of place). Questions of locational identity and spatiality are crucial to the conception, execution, and afterlife of site-specific work. As such, the next section provides a deeper exploration of spatial theory through the lens of critical geography and sociology.

1.2 (The Tragedy of) The Tragedy of The Commons

The "Commons" connotes two distinct meanings within my practice to date. The first sense of the word connotes a sense of "that which is shared", alluding to the shared aspects of everyday life. The second meaning alludes to that which is ordinary, banal, and "commonplace." Nowhere are these notions more

evident than in the spaces, ideas, and materials that constitute our shared human habitat in the city. Urban environments we call home are among the most complex ecosystems the planet has known, yet we often ignore or dismiss these complexities amid daily routines and established notions of both *Place* and *Nature*. These frictions within the notion of "The Commons" (as well as the word itself) form the core of my collaborative work under "COMMONStudio." The aim of our work is to understand and intentionally collaborate with urban ecosystems, by disturbing and reconfiguring materials and meanings of the urban environment with sanctioned (and unsanctioned) interventions. What follows in this contextual review is an attempt to situate my existing work, and current research in the context of existing theory and practice, with the aim of seeking new horizons of informed creative action.

Contemporary theories employing notions of the "The Commons" trace their roots to a seminal 1968 essay entitled "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin 1968). In it, ecologist and philosopher Garrett Hardin contemplates the dangers of overpopulation by employing a hypothetical scenario (originally proposed by William Forster Lloyd) in which a large number of herdsman graze their cattle in a common meadow, eventually leading to the destruction of the shared resource:

> "Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit— in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons...Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all" (ibid: 1244).

"The Tragedy of the Commons" has since gained traction as a popular heuristic device which describes tendencies toward

incremental degradation of shared systems and resources (from fisheries, to waterways, to studio refrigerators). Critiques of Hardin's original framing were waged by thinkers such as Elinor Ostrom, who rejected it's fatalism (Ostrom 1990). Other contemporary critics focused on the problem of the depiction of commons as a self-evident resource (an object) that can only lay in wait for an appropriator (subject) to exploit and destroy it (Borch and Kornberger 2015). This tendency to think of "commons" in the context of a zero-sum game of extraction and consumption, which places individual behaviors and choices in contradiction to the interests of ecological sustainability, always trending toward tragedy. Many of these beliefs are still alive today, animating the rhetoric of various contemporary environmental movements, and popular discourse related to the "Anthropocene." This includes recent memes forged throughout the global pandemic, which proclaim that #wearethevirus. Further illustrated below, theories of the commons and its implied tragedies - provide a useful lens through which to better understand the complex interactions between social, ecological and spatial phenomena that occur within specific places. As will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, notions of the "commons" (described by artist Laruen Bon as comprising of "land, water, air, and stories") have played an implicit or explicit role in land-based artistic practices over the past 50 years, and holds immense potential for continuing engagement in contemporary artistic interventions.

1.3 Vernacular Materialities (VM) and "accidental" interventions

"I suspect no landscape, vernacular or otherwise, can be compre-

hended unless we perceive it as an organization of space; unless we ask ourselves who owns or uses the spaces, how they were created and how they change."

-John Brinkerhoff Jackson

Vernacular Materialities (VM), a central thread of my thesis practice and research, refers to visible substances and patterns of a landscape that reflect localized norms, values, and processes of specific places over time. Often VM are most acutely registered within human-dominated landscapes and appear as accretions of materials, objects, or substances that arise spontaneously as byproducts of other phenomena, and take on their own distinctive quasi-geological morphologies. Oxford dictionary defines *Vernacular* on the one hand as mode of hyper-ordinary speech "used in everyday life by the general population in a geographical or social territory," and on the other, as forms of architecture that reflect "the domestic and functional rather than the public or monumental." Therefore it is important to note that *Vernacular* has etymological connotations that pertain to both human *language* and to human *space*, with an interesting slippage implied therein. Reflecting on the notion of *unintentional landscapes*, critical geographer Matthew Gandy asks: "what are we to make of any putative distinction between landscape and 'non-landscape'? And how is any space that is conceptually enframed as a landscape related to its constituent cultural, historical and material elements?" (Gandy 2016, 433)

To further illustrate the phenomenon of VM as both a physical and a social process, this section examines three cases in which various socio-ecological-spatial phenomena have spontaneously produced a range of "happy accidents" resulting in an elevated perception of their in-situ value and presence in the landscape. This exploration is intended to highlight possibilities for the visual and material expression of VM in land-based artistic

Figure 1.1 Glass beach in California. Shown during it's time as a dumping ground (left), and today as a protected state park (right).

practices, while demonstrating the strange beauty and comedy (rather than the "tragedy") that complicates our notions of "the commons."

Glass Beach (Fort Bragg, CA)

Following years of garbage dumping at this site in the early part of the 20th century, the repetitive cycles of the ocean/shore threshold have slowly turned various glass-based waste into a landscape of brightly colored and polished sea glass. What was once considered a marginalized and undervalued site is now protected by the state, and it is illegal to remove any material from the site as a souvenir. (Fabulous and Profile n.d.). Glass beach marks a case where "Tragedy of the Commons" has therefore been turned inside out (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.2 Monte Testaccio (Rome, Italy)

Monte Testaccio (Rome, Italy)

Monte Testaccio is an enormous mound of broken ancient amphore which were methodically stacked over the course of 250 years in ancient Roman times as a byproduct of the city's olive oil imports. Over many centuries, they have been spontaneously colonized by various plants, animals and cultural uses:

> It's been the site of jousting knights and frolicking revelers in carnivale celebrations. Garibaldi defended Rome from the top of it, while wine cooled in caves under it. It has stood in for Golgotha in passion plays, and hosted picnicking lovers for generations. But this hill is not one of Rome's famous seven sisters, it is, instead, an ancient garbage heap. (ugc 2014)

Similar to the phenomenon observed at glass beach in California, Monte Testaccio highlights the role of time in the co-evolution of urban commons. The collective narratives of tragedy, entropy and degradation have been replaced over time with renewed cultural perceptions of value (Figure 1.2). Sites once considered lit-

tle more than dumping grounds, have evolved into anthropogenic landscapes that are both 100% natural and 100% artificial, and are celebrated, protected, and valued as landscape artifacts in their own right.

The Conscious Pile (Petrified Forest National Park, AZ)

We might also consider the so-called "conscience pile" which exists at the entrance gate of the Petrified Forest National Park in northeastern Arizona. The pile, informally "curated" by the local administrative staff of the National Park Service, comprises thousands of pieces of repatriated petrified wood, which were previously stolen and subsequently returned by park visitors. Despite ample signage warning visitors of the illegality of removing petrified wood from the premises, many tons of "keepsakes" are illicitly removed every year by visitors who are drawn to the visual and symbolic beauty of the rocks. This pile represents those pieces which have been returned by mail (often years later), along with "conscience letters" describing the bad luck that befell the thieves in the aftermath of their indiscretion. "They are beautiful," reads one letter, "but I can't enjoy them. They weigh like a ton of bricks on my conscience. Sorry…." ("Bad Luck, Hot Rocks: Conscience Letters and Photographs from the Petrified Forest" n.d.). The hope is that by returning the rocks, good fortune and clear conscience might be restored to the lives of those who attone. This pile of material emerges out of the logistical impossibility of returning the stolen artifacts to their original locations, creating a novel spatial condition which serves as a visual register of social relations within the landscape (Figure 1.3).

These precedents illustrate the power of VM as a mode of anthropogenic landscape phenomenology. VM plays a distinct role

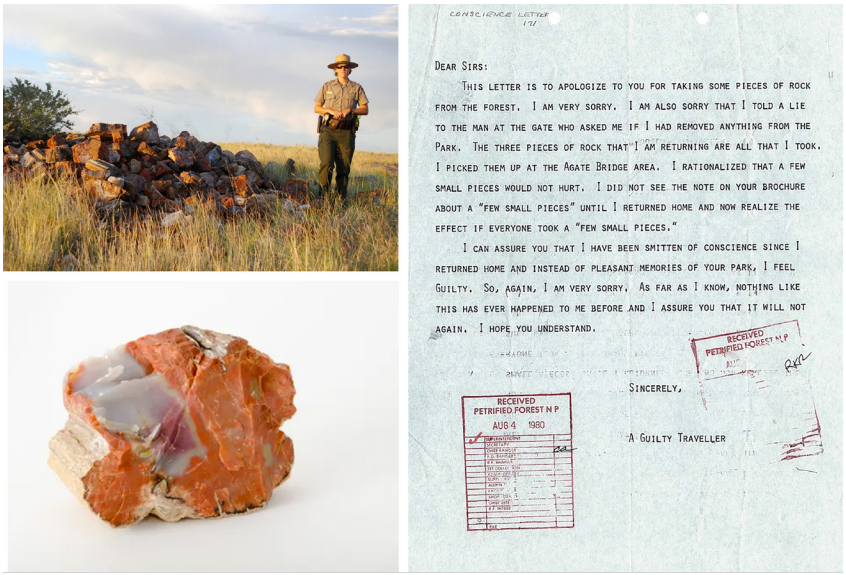


Figure 1.3 The "conscience pile" in the Petrified Forest National Park, with a letter of remorse.

in shaping the identity of place, and demonstrates the slippage that can occur over time between various spatial and ontological binaries: natural vs. artificial, object vs. landscape, place vs. non-place. It will be argued that VM both *reflects* and *shapes* social and spatial norms in a constant feedback loop, and should therefore be understood as an evolving form of *commons* that is ripe for creative intervention and engagement. As all three of these examples involve time as a key driver of their development, It will further be argued that the role of time and co-evolution are vital considerations in the conception and documentation of site-specific land-based interventions. If these outcomes can arise "by accident", the next section will examine the role of artistic intention and situate this discussion in the broader context of site-specific, earthwork, and ecological art.

1.4 Artistic interventions at the intersection of nature, place, and materiality

Ideas of place and of nature are central to the development of many land-based practices, from land art and earthwork of the 1960's and 70's, to subsequent ecological and socially engaged art of the decades which followed (Deutsche 1996; Kwon 2004; Lippard 1997; Bai 2015). In shifting the locus of creation and presentation from the studio and gallery to that of the earth itself, artists were now required to attend to the dynamic complexities of the real world contexts in which they often operate. Art critic Lucy Lippard introduces a definition of place as a corollary of "landscape", suggesting that whereas landscape implies a certain subjective or perspectival distance, (the outsiders view), "place applies to our own "local"--entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke...A lived in landscape becomes a place." (Lippard 1997, 9). I believe this serves as an urgent provocation to both the artist and their public audiences to consider new ecological imaginaries in which human activities and values, embedded in a particular place, comprise a synthetic Nature that is inclusive of human agency. This contrasts heavily with the common logic of environmentalism which tend to relegate notions of Nature to a distanced "elsewhere." This alienation is at the heart of the dual tendencies with regard to the conception and management of Nature: On the one one hand to *dominate*, and on the other to *save*.

Earthwork artist Robert Smithson famously despised the sentimentality and dualism of the nascent environmental movement of the 1970's. Lucy Lippard similarly expresses her distaste for notions of Mother Nature, or as she deems "M/Other Nature" to suggest the tendencies toward its *othering*:

> The idea that "nature is a place where we are not" has ruled for centuries; at least since Newton. Nature like woman, has been seen as powerful, uncontrollable, and threatening on one hand, and inferior and subordinate (though necessary and convenient) to human culture on the other" (Lippard 1997, 12).

Many poignant examples of engagement with Nature, place, and vernacular materialities can be found in many works proposed or realized by The Harrison Studio, the collaborative creative practice of Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, often referred to as simply "The Harrisons." The practice spans many disciplines and many decades of creative engagement with a body of work that is highly instructive to art, design, activism and ecology. Notably, The Harrisons frame their work as embracing many possible manifestations: from the cognitive, to the discursive to the site-specific:

> "Our work begins when we perceive an anomaly in the environment that is the result of opposing beliefs or contradictory metaphors. Moments when reality no longer appears seamless and the cost of belief has become outrageous offer the opportunity to create new spaces – first in the mind and thereafter in everyday life." ("The Harrison Studio – Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison Environmental & Ecological Artists" n.d.)

The Harrison's *Art Park (Spoils Pile Reclamation Site, 1973)* is located at the side of a disused 40 acre rock quarry in New York state. The Harrisons worked with the local community to collect and transport materials such as earth, leaf material, tree trunks, and grass cuttings. All truckloads were given a tax deduction for donation of art material. Over 3000 truckloads of materials were deposited over the site in ways that created intentional landscape conditions. The initial stage of the project lasted for

Figure 1.4 Art Park (Spoils Pile Reclamation), *The Harrison Studio*

Figure 1.5 Photo and conceptual diagram of The Endangered Meadows of Europe, *by The Harrison Studio*

Figure 1.6 Conceptual aerial sketch of Trummerflora, *an unrealized project by the Harrisonstudio in Berlin.*

a 2 year period and was a local collaboration with park services, municipalities, construction companies, and farms. The project materials created the basis for this highly disturbed site to build viable topsoil and catalyze a transformation into a thriving meadow and berry patch (Figure 1.4).

In *The Endangered Meadows of Europe*, the Harrisons transplanted a 400 year old meadow that was endangered by development construction, to the 1.5 acre rooftop of the Kunst Museum in Bonn Germany. The meadow was paired with didactic text that highlighted the ecological value of the meadow and it's important relationship to humans. The exhibition was open for 2 years. Seeds from the roof top meadow were collected and used to generate new meadowlands throughout the public parks of Bonn, thus grafting and scaling the meadowlands back into the city, thus in effect reversing the figure ground of city and nature (Figure 1.5). This project also complicates the binary of here vs. there, and the notion of the "site" as a discreet location. One site was chosen as a functional stand in for another, and it in turn produced other sites beyond sites beyond itself. The site is

therefore both real and a projected imaginary.

The Harrison's *Trummaflora* was a proposed WWII memorial project for a site in Berlin that was associated with the Nazi atrocities. The project was never constructed but proposes many interesting treatments of the site materials to register its numerous irreversible histories, including use and germination of the seeds which lay dormant amid the rubble of bombed buildings. "This four-part work proposes an interactive memorial that is not a monument. The first part is the trummerflora, or rubble flowers, made of the materials of the site itself and of those which find their way to the site without human agency." ("The Harrison Studio – Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison Environmental & Ecological Artists" n.d.)

The Harrisons were conceptualizing a process of working with vernacular site materials and cycles, connecting these materials and cycles to the cultural and historical narratives of the site, the past, present and future, as well as notions of healing (employing vegetation as an ecological "scab").

The work of the Harrisons demonstrates the possibilities for artistic practice to operate outside of conventional frames, utilizing landscape and time as a material and subject. As many of these projects are either speculative or transitory in nature, it raises many interesting questions: Where exactly is the work located? When did it happen? Is it still happening? Will it ever be complete? These critical questions will be explored further in the following sections.

Where is the work? Understanding notions of site-specificity

Notions of site-specificity are central to landscape interventions across a range of creative disciplines, and heavily influence my

own artistic practice. Therefore it is important to situate this idea theoretically in relation to emerging and established art movements in recent decades. As observed by Miwon Kwon in her influential book *One Place After Another*, site-specific art of the 60's and 70's as evidenced by land-based artists such as Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Richard Long, reflected a desire to:

> "exceed the limitations of traditional media, like painting and sculpture, as well as their institutional setting; the epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context"

Such work is often seen as an extension of Minimalism's critique of modernist painting and sculpture as a "placeless" institutional commodity that could be easily moved (ie "displaced") from one location to another as it was sold or acquired. As Michael Fried lamented in his 1967 article *Art and Objecthood*, "the experience of literalist [minimalist] art is of an object in a situation – one which, virtually by definition, includes the beholder."(105). Influenced by subsequent theoretical contributions to art theory such as Rosalind Krauss's *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979), many artists began to question the conventional institutional frames, sites and modes of meaning and production in their practice, looking to the earth itself as a raw material with which to work. The site-specific nature of earthworks and other landscape interventions such as Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and Holt's *Sun Tunnels* called new attention to the contingencies of a particular place and context, including the viewer's physicality and subjective experience of the work.

Yet perhaps ironically, many of the same artists who embraced these polemical principles continued to engage with "conventional" art spaces (and art markets) as a matter of choice (and/

or necessity). Robert Smithson's concept of the "Non-site" was one example of how site-specific art found expression in the context of the gallery. In his 1968 essay "*A Provisional Theory of Non-sites*", Smithson differentiates sites from non-sites, describing the latter as akin to a "three dimensional logical picture that is abstract, yet it represents an actual site....It is by this three dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it--thus The Non-Site." (Smithson 1996, 390). Although "actual" sites remained the primary locus

Figure 1.7 Robert Smithson, Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968

of artistic intervention for Smithson, these *non-sites* consisted of various referential and interpretive devices including drawings, diagrams, and compositions of material fragments. His project entitled *A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968* (Fig. 1.7) referred to an actual site in New Jersey, yet was also presented for consideration by a viewing public in the abstract elsewhere of a New York gallery. According to Smithson, site and non-site are never identical or fully commensurable (the non-site can never represent the site as it "is"), nor are they separable.

While site-specific interventionist art such as Smithson's was ultimately concerned with the larger scales of time and space beyond the bounds of an exhibition space, it is important to note that *Non-sites* were articulated as distinct artifacts that could ultimately be displayed in an art space such as a gallery or museum. This, I argue, suggests a kernal of dislocation that has always implied by the site specific, as well as the engagement with notions of "spatial trialectics", which will be expanded upon further in later sections of the thesis.

> "Literal and allegorical, the Nonsites confounded the illusion of materiality and order. The mirrors functioned to order and displace, to add and subtract, while the sediments, displaced from its original site, blur distinctions between outdoors and indoors as well as refer the viewer back to the site where the materials were originally collected." (Pantaleon 2014)

Other land-based ecological artists have experimented with the adaptive translation of site/place-specific practices to the context of the art space by experimenting with multi-media and immersive elements. We can see these tensions exploited to dramatic effect in the work of artists such as Betty Beaumont and the Harrison Studio. For example, Betty Beaumont's 1978 project *Ocean Landmark*, consists of 500 tons of coal fly ash blocks,

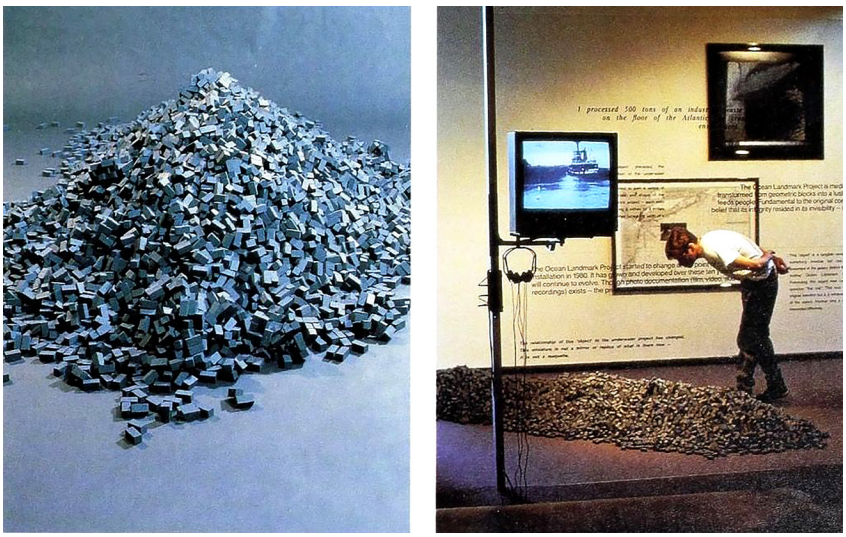


Figure 1.8 Betty Beaumont Ocean Landmark, *1978-*

Figure 1.9 Harrison Studio's Greenhouse Great Britain *(2003)*

dumped by barge onto the outer continental shelf of the Atlantic ocean 40 miles offshore of New York Harbor. The project was intended to divert an industrial wastestream in such a way that it could create a habitat for fish and aquatic plants over time. One of the locational and logistical realities of such a project was the inaccessibility of the intervention itself--of course it is unlikely that the viewing public would ever be able to see the work in situ. To express this project in the context of a conventional art space, Beaumont created a scaled replica of the aggregated blocks, and a multimedia installation describing to audiences her intention and visions for its future development (Figure 1.8).

Beaumont's approach serves as a displaced, dislocated, and supplementary representation of the project that acquires its own intimate textures, presence and meanings in the interpretive context of the art gallery. Similarly, the Harrison Studio's *Greenhouse Britain (2003)* utilizes dynamic scaled projections and mapping to examine the impacts of sea level rise on a regional scale. Here, "sites" are conceptualized as larger geographies of the earth itself, presented in engaging ways using the ground plane of the gallery as a surface of projection and three dimensional modelling (Figure 1.9).

The installation extends the purview of the "site" beyond the limitations of normal human subjectivity. This work was also coupled with didactics and sound-based elements which reinforced the reading of the work, with a notably non-binary, and non-moralizing tone.

It begins with: "The news is not good and it's getting worse." And ends with:

> "Finally understanding that the news is neither good nor

bad

it is simply that great differences are upon us

that great changes are upon us as a culture

whether we will it or not

and great changes are upon all planetary life systems

and the news is really about how we meet these changes

and are transformed by them or in turn transform them."
(Lewallen et al. n.d.)

One of the aims of this research is to place renewed emphasis on the questions and problems concerning "representation", "documentation" of site-specific practices. Where exactly can the work be said to be *located*? Is it in the world at large, or in the gallery or museum? All of these? None of them? In particular, I am interested in examining the ways in which virtual simulation, modelling, or other modes of representations of site-specific art might become more than merely adequate"place-holders" for phenomena and interventions that a viewing public may never have immediate physical access to. I believe these representational works can create critical dialogs. On the one hand, this dialog exists between the gallery space and the larger world, with the former acting as a proxy for the latter. On the other hand an important relationship persists between the work and the viewer as an engaged subject, to produce intimate interpretive effects. This suggests an interesting slippage between that which is the signifier of the work and the work which is being signified, and by extension the viewing subject with the larger world from which these representations are derived. It also suggests the possibility that the locus of site-specific work might be multiple and

simultaneous, or immaterial altogether (Kang 2016).

As observed by Art critic Miwon Kwon in *One Place After Another*:: "in the advanced art practices of the past thirty years the operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location – grounded, fixed, actual – to a discursive vector – ungrounded, fluid, virtual." (Kwon 2004, 29). This virtual or discursive vector, according to Kwon, has effectively eclipsed the "actuality" of the site. I will argue in subsequent sections of this thesis, I believe this tendency rather than being lamented as a form of dislocation, should be embraced and further explored by artistic practitioners concerned with issues of site-specificity, as it introduces new possibilities for site-based interventionist art to engage with a wider array of "sites", timeframes and audiences.

When, if ever, is the work completed?

"Landscape is 99% time"

--Unknown

Land-based artistic interventions engage with a range of unpredictable, open-ended processes that exert an influence on how the work develops (or deteriorates) over time. Indeed many of the early canonical earthworks (such as Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967), have succumbed to the elements in ways that have effectively erased or severely altered their original form and presence (Fig. 1.10. Some only exist today by virtue of photographic documentation. This distinguishes site-specific ecological art from other movements and mediums because it yields to the various contingencies of a particular context. Smithson was particularly interested in the notion and process-

Figure 1.10 Richard Long, A Line Made By Walking *(1967)*

es of "entropy" ; other works actively incorporate processes of change and evolution into their construction. This raises important questions as to when, if ever, the work in question can be considered "complete."

Questions of time and process also reinforce the ways in which various modes of time-based documentation become an integral aspect of the work, creating secondary reverberations of interpretive content that extend beyond the initial gesture and invite new layers of meaning. One example of this can be observed in the documentation of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty. Originally "completed" in the salt lake bed during a particularly dry season in the Great Salt Lake in 1970, the work was quickly submerged

thereafter due to increased precipitation patterns, and remained hidden underwater for nearly 40 years. A drought eventually lowered the water level once again, visually revealing its presence in 2004 and leading to a subsequent profusion of renewed interest in and documentation of the work. The Dia Art Foundation, a non-profit who acquired the piece in 1999, has in recent years begun a systematic documentation campaign which tracks it's evolution over time (Fig 1.11). As they state on their website, "As stewards of Spiral Jetty, Dia is committed to recording changes to the work over time through photographic documentation. Since 2012, a geospatial aerial photographer has documented Spiral Jetty twice a year, in May and October" (Dia Art Foundation n.d.)

Just as many of Smithson's own writings, photos, sketches and reflections on the Spiral Jetty manifest the work as an evolving, "multicentered", multimedia process, these posthumous modes of documentation become equally inseparable from it. This serves to further displace the locus of the work from the site, to

Figure 1.11 Aerial photographic time-series of robert smithson's spiral jetty, 2012-2018. Compiled from the website of the dia art foundation (https://www.Diaart.Org/collection/spiraljettyaerials).

the non-site, and in the contemporary context, to that of the *website*.

Betty Beaumont's *Ocean Landmark* (1980) also exemplifies this sense of open-ended evolution (Kemp 2004). The initial gesture of dumping 500 tons of coal fly ash material onto the ocean floor was merely the start of an evolving process that has developed over the last 40 years, and will continue to develop for decades, even centuries to come. Beaumont has recognized the importance of documenting these changes as an important part of the work itself:

> "Current technology enables me to image this work in its life-giving, mature condition and in its entire form. Using global positioning satellite technology, the work can be located and images created through the use of underwater remote sensing and side-scan sonar. Coded in the images of the now-evolved underwater sculpture will be its progression as a sustaining environment for marine life and a thriving ecosystem."

Land-based (or in this case ocean-based) artists' engagement with issues with unpredictable social and ecological processes is often further reinforced by the "dating" of projects themselves. Although seemingly trivial, this should not be overlooked, as it provides critical insight into the artist's intentions with regard to how the work should be read and understood. Whereas conventional artistic artifacts are typically accompanied with definitive dates of creation, land-based work is sometimes classified with more ambiguous timeframes in the didactic materials or supplementary texts available on artists' websites. For example, the webpage for the Harrison Studio's previously mentioned *Art Park Spoils' Pile Reclamation* project, while specifying the dates in which the bulk of the participatory creative activities occurred

Figure 1.12 Screenshot from the harrison studio website documenting the art park spoils pile reclamation project .

Figure 1.13 Aerial of earl w. Brydges state park, circa 2019. Site of intervention by harrison studio, circa 1978

(1976-1978), also includes the word “Ongoing” thereafter (Figure 1.12).

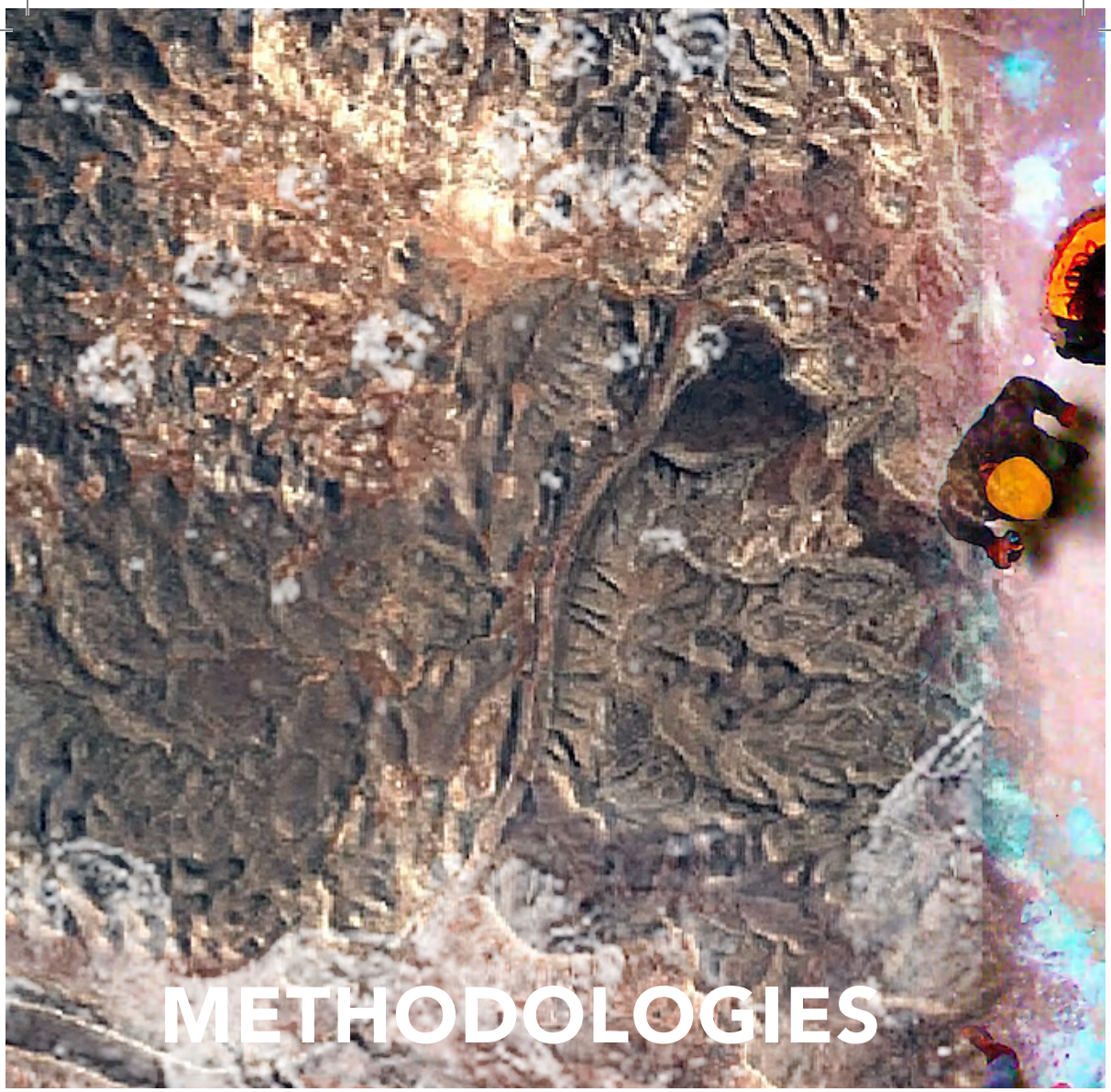
This suggests that the project remains “unfinished” to this day, and therefore its current state of development should be considered equally a part of the original work. Although the Harrson’s did not engage in long-term monitoring or documentation of the site as it evolved, google earth reveals that the site is now referred to officially as the Earl W. Brydges State Park in Lewiston, New York. The 40 acres now comprises a dog park and a large open meadow that appears to be frequently mown and maintained (Fig 1.13).

As the original didactic signage announcing it as an art project has since been removed, it is unlikely that visitors realize that this site is conceptualized as an “ongoing” earthwork. This represents a fascinating reversal of many of the typical assumptions of site-specificity, as the original “site” has been effectively erased and naturalized as an anonymous landscape, yet remains a work of art in various evolving modes of representation. It also reinforces the sense of the “work” no longer seeking to be a noun or object, but a verb and a process, provoking “the viewers critical (not just physical) acuity regarding the ideological conditions of their viewing…the guarantee of a site specific relationship between an art work and its site is not based on a physical permanence…but rather on the recognition of its unfixed impermanence” (Kwon 2004, 24)

Projects such as the ones mentioned above demonstrate practitioners’ engagement with a range of spatial and temporal scales that are reinforced through various modes of secondary representation. This serves to foreground both the problematics and potentials of documentation in relation to “site-specific” work that a viewing public will never have physical access to. Rather than an impartial, objective, mode of representing the develop-

ment of a project, it is perhaps more accurate to consider the process of documentation and representation *itself* as a mode of secondary intervention which suggests how viewers should interpret or approach the work. Representation is therefore understood by many site-specific artists as a critical supplement, rather than a dislocated simulacrum.

As will be further argued in the development of my own MFA thesis work, the use of curated multi-media representations (projection, mapping, modelling, didactics, etc) can serve to complicate the reading of the original work, inviting new layers of meaning and intimate subjectivity. This constitutes a reflexive loop between the world (as the *operative* space for the work), and the gallery or museum (as the *interpretive* space in which the work continues to produce effects through de/recontextualization). This reflexive process further problematizes the locus of the work, and effectively extends the purview of the "site-specific" into newly discursive spaces, the space of ideas, to places and timescales both real and imagined. The next section will further explore how and why these ideas have shaped the methods I deploy in my creative practice.



METHODOLOGIES

2.1 Understanding operative and interpretive space

My practice is primarily based in site-specific socio-ecological-spatial interventions. This has presented a challenge of how to best frame and represent this work in a gallery setting, which is far removed from the temporal and spatial locus of their original creation. Rather than resist this process of *dislocation*,

I have instead chosen to embrace it as a means of complicating and heightening the expression of the work within these new contexts. Embracing this dislocation also unlocks new opportunities to further challenge the binaries of the here and there, the near and far, the inside and outside, the natural and the artificial to a wide array of public audiences.

It has therefore been important to differentiate (or understand the complex slippage that can occur) between the *operational*

space of the intervention itself, and the *interpretive space(s)* of the installations which express them by proxy. I have also used this expanded field as an opportunity to further explore past work (interventions which were staged before my MFA work) with equal weight as the work created during my two years at STAMPS as an MFA student, as well as the speculative work(s) which I intend to create in the near and distant future. A brief list of these works and their spatial/temporal relationships is summarized in Table 1.

This reflexive engagement between operative and interpretive space draws upon french sociologist Henry Lefebvre's notion of spatial trialectics as a means of understanding the politics and aesthetics of spatial abstraction. Lefebvre discusses spatial trialectics as the interplay between three scales or perspectives of

Table 1: Past, present, and future work in context

	Intervention (operative space)	***Installation (interpretive space)***
Past	*Suparichit Pile Study #1* (2017) Bangalore, India Intervention with marigold flower heads as medium	*Eternal Return* (2020) STAMPS Gallery Ann Arbor, MI Video projection and sculpted earth
Present	*Amounting a salt* (2018-19) Green Road Studio Ann Arbor, MI	*At This Point in Time* (2020) STAMPS Gallery Ann Arbor, MI Video projection and salt/crystals
Future	TBD (unknown)	*Mine* (2020) STAMPS Gallery Ann Arbor, MI A personal mobile kit for understanding and processing urban soil

Table 1

social space: Space as it is a) “perceived” b) “conceived”, and c) “lived” (Lefebvre 1991). These have been subsequently interpreted by political geographer Edward Soja as “Firstspace” “Secondspace” and “Thirdspace” respectively (Soja 1996; Harvey 2008). A specific example of these various scales of social space is explored in the following example of a Moroccan bath house:

> In a sense of firstspace, the Moroccan traditional hammam can (in a geographically way of speaking) be found all over Morocco. In almost every area in the city there is one. So it is clearly visible. It is physically present. In a sense of secondspace, the hammam is a place where people come to clean themselves. This is how it is conceptualized. Although the true purpose is somewhat disappeared because nowadays people have their own showers and ways to clean themselves, its original purpose is cleaning of the body. From a thirdspace point of view, the hammam is much more than the first and second space combined. The hammam is, especially for women, a place to discuss their marriage, maintain social contacts and gossip. In this case I mention it is especially important for women, that is because inside the hammam the man has no authority at all, which is exceptional in arab worlds. (“Third Space - Geography” n.d.).

The spatial framework offers three interrelated scales which could be said to represent various stages of abstraction. It introduces an interpretation of space as a complex tapestry of nested narratives, a multiplicity of contrasting and competing conceptions that “are never either simple or stable” (Lefebvre 1991, 50). Using these spatial frameworks as an inspiration in my work, I attempt to depict and reference these various perspectives, often in ways that are in tension or simultaneous in nature. The interventions are operating in firstspace, whereas the repre-

sentations can evoke second and thirdspace perspectives. Taken together, this embracing of multiple loci suggests the emergence of a non-binary space which is simultaneously site-specific and non-sited altogether. It reinforces the work as an evolving, multi-centered mode of communication between the artist, the environment, and the viewer which invites entirely new spatial and ecological imaginaries.

2.2 Disrupting Habitus (Defamiliarization and recontextualization)

"Wonder is the byproduct of first sight"

-Michael Pollan

Why are new spatial and ecological imaginaries needed? Originally formulated by the French philosopher and anthropologist Pierre Bordieu, the concept of "Habitus" has been widely interpreted in sociology to refer to a "sense of place" (Swartz 2002; Bordieu 1990). More nuanced readings of the text have defined this more broadly as "a system of dispositions, a series of schemas, forms of know-how and structures of perception, conception and action" (Tardiveau and Mallo 2014, 462). Habitus might be more usefully interpreted as a sense of the "status quo", or "that which is taken for granted."

Habitus structures norms, perceptions, and actions. It has been argued that habitus and space have a two way relationship, in which "they both produce environment and are produced by it" (Tardiveau and Mallo 2014, 465). This can be seen in action at various scales throughout the urban landscape. The various "cues to care" which structure domestic landscape norms such as keeping a freshly trimmed lawn to stay up with the neighbors

maintenance schedule. Even the manicured, stable and picturesque qualities of a public park in an urban setting maintain and produce habitus (Copley and Garside 1994). As observed by urban landscape ecologist Joan Nassauer, "The fundamental premise for examining culture in landscape ecology is that culture structures landscapes. A corollary premise is that landscapes inculcate culture. Culture changes landscapes and culture is embodied by landscapes." (Nassauer 1995, 229). That which is considered normative or dominant conditions therefore eclipse other narratives that might defy those norms. This tends to reinforce established binaries between good/bad, inside/outside, public/private, human/non-human, city/nature, natural/artificial. The purpose of creative intervention, as argued by Tardiveau and Mallo (2014) is the intentional disturbance of habitus to allow alternative states to take shape and evolve. Successful interventions work to both understand and undermine habitus, finding "windows of opportunity" and triggering new social, ecological and spatial trajectories. Notions of site, place, space, landscape, and nature are therefore central to understanding the implications of land-based interventions, and their subsequent interpretations.

My own engagement with vernacular materiality (VM) has offered a critical lens through which to see and understand local norms and habitus, and the means by which VM inscribes the urban landscape with unique and distinctive forms of mark making. Much of my landscape intervention work therefore starts by identifying common, banal materials or liminal spaces and conditions, and elevating them to the status of an artistic medium and subject. This critical interrogation of local norms, meanings and vernacular materials often requires that the physical materials are taken out of their original context and reconfigured in such a way that they can be seen with a sense of renewed perspective. I have achieved this through various material manipulations (crys-

tallization, piling, etc) as well as aesthetic devices (scale, speed juxtaposition, superimposition, etc). For example, adjusting the scale of a familiar spatial condition, such that the scene appears to be a miniature scaled-model can produce a sense of distanced consideration, inviting critical reflection. Inversely, amplifying or upscaling a material or process to a *larger than life* scale, such as 30 tons of common road salt dumped into an interior environment, can invite deeper reflection through its physical and multisensory presence (it's smell, taste, touch, sound). Adjusting the speed with which a recording of that intervention process is played back or looped can similarly produce an almost hypnotic effect that teases out cognitive investment beyond the typical attention spans demanded by our contemporary media culture. A summary of these methods is provided in Table 2.

The notion of "disturbance" is also a key driver of this methodological framework. In ecology, this notion is key to the understanding of ecosystems as dynamic and changing systems (Gunderson and Holling 2002). Small or large scale disturbance

Table 2: Methods matrix

Methods	***Intervention (operative space)***	***Installation (interpretive space)***
Disturbance	Digging holes Planting seeds Growing Piling materials	Disrupting norms and 'habitus' Inviting reflection rather than closure New ideas form
De+Refamiliarization	Making the invisible visible Turning objects into landscapes Turning landscapes into objects	up/downscaling the phenomena Crossing a sensory barrier Amplification Plating/Coating/embellishment Abstraction Speeding up Slowing down
De+Recontextualization	Moving to a new site Moving materials between sites	Super-imposition Juxtaposition Looping

Table 2

events (such as a tree falling in a dense forest) create novel ecological niches in which new life processes eventually emerge. In artistic terms one might think of the processes of defamiliarization and recontextualization in a similar way as an ecological "disturbance" within a landscape: an unexpected event such as a lightning strike or the arrival of a new species which triggers a new set of circumstances or sets entirely new processes into motion. This forms the basis on which to understand the role of socio-ecological-spatial interventions staged within urban commons, as well as the installations which arise to represent them to a wider public. One is an intervention into *space*, and the other is an intervention into the *space of ideas*, a psychic space. Yet in both cases, these intervention tactics can only ever set into motion the initial conditions in which new meanings and processes might occur over time: *They invite rather than prescribe*.

2.3 Use of complicating text

Just as the materiality and aesthetic devices employed by the work are resistant to closure, my use of text and didactics is intended to reinforce an actively evolving process which is resistant to closure and singular readings. My goal is to invite critical and personal reflection on the possible themes of the work without explicitly revealing them. The textual elements are therefore not descriptive or objective, but are a crucial dialectical element in the overall reading of the work in situ—intended to be read and reread in concert with the visual and spatial experience provided by the various multimedia representations and installations. They offer a secondary, or tertiary mode of discursive intervention, as the only aspect displayed on the vertical surfaces of the gallery space (all other elements are exclusively

engaged with the ground plane) Providing benches for sitting during periods of longer contemplation, and drawing attention to the presence of wall mounted didactic elements is an integral part of these installation strategies. (Figure 2.1).

These methods of de-familiarization, re-contextualization, and disturbance can be employed throughout the many "spaces" in which artistic practice is expected (or not expected) to operate: The world at large, the urban commons, the gallery, the museum, the artist's website, the institutional archive, and so on. The remainder of this thesis will focus on one of these in particular: the art gallery context, where installations invite intimate interpretations from a viewing public. I believe that these artistic installations are capable of transcending the static limitations of mere documentation to take on their own reverberations and afterlife. If wonder is the product of first sight, then it is upon this sense of wonder that new ideas and relationships are built. As observed by curator Justine Ludwig:

> "Through artist intervention, a space of understanding and exchange is often created that can be really powerful. And often those exchanges unfold on an intimate, one-to-one level, so they can lead to ripples of small-scale change."

These ideas and methods described throughout this section are those that have, and will continue to drive my creative practice. They are also evidenced in my recent MFA thesis exhibition, *HERE*. The next section will further explore how these theories are employed in my work, and how my artistic practice informs these theories in return.

Figure 2.1 Multimedia installations from my mfa exhibition, here (2020). Note the relationship between installations on the gallery ground plane vs. Wall mounted didactics, with bench operating as an intermediary device which invites long-reflection and contemplation.

WORK

My MFA thesis exhibition, entitled *HERE*, comprises two multi-media landscape conditions and a physical artifact.

These works are intended to use the critical space of the gallery to point to larger interventions and phenomena that have taken place, are taking place or will eventually take place, *elsewhere*. Taken together, these works are intended to further complicate the spatial and temporal "locus" of the "site-specific", while raising new questions about the artist's agency, control, and

intention. Liberated from the constraints of mere documentation, I employ representation as a fantastical stand-in, virtually extending the sites of intervention into a new context to access a broader audience. This section will examine the poetics of intervention, documentation and representation that were employed to produce this thesis exhibition, which draws upon work I completed before and during my time as an MFA student (as well as speculative work that is forthcoming).

3.1 Suparichit Pile Study # 1 (Bangalore, India)

This project was staged before my time as a STAMPS MFA student, but it is included here as it helps further contextualize the interplay of operative and interpretive spaces in my work. The Suparichit site is a marginalized landscape in the northeastern periphery of Bangalore, India (Fig. 3.1). Constructed as the byproduct of a rapidly urbanizing megacity, it is a highly complex yet informal territory where excavated earth and construction rubble is illegally dumped on a regular basis, slowly filling in the wetland and lakebed beneath. Living at the margins of the lake are a multicultural patchwork of local and migrant families who subsist in temporary tarpaulin communities as they work to construct adjacent high rise apartment projects. My approach to this site was not based in an attempt to condemn, formalize or restore, but rather to better understand and embrace the informal and transient realities of this complex place and my own temporary positionality within it.

The stories told in the spaces on top of, and between the piles are as numerous as the piles themselves: Of traditional agricultural communities contemplating the return of the monsoons, of contemporary developers crunching their returns on investment, of mothers carrying the day's laundry back and forth. The sounds of human laughter mix with the stern thunder of cattle calls, the constant metallic clamour of nearby construction, the guttural cries of migratory cormorants, and the howling of feral urban dogs, all mixing together, yet never quite in harmony.

These identities are reflected in the daily life of the territory, where cows can still be seen grazing and swimming in the margins of the wetlands, overseen by local Cowboys ("Hasu Kayu-

Figure 3.1 Landscape anomaly at the edge of rachenahalll lake in the periphery of bangalore, india.

Figure 3.2: Vernacular material conditions of piles found at the suparichit site. Photos/layout: kim karlsrud

va") who now use the elevated promontory of the piles to keep prospect on their animals. Seeds dispersed by wind and birds and foot traffic are giving rise to spontaneous trees, shrubs and creepers, emerging in the rich substrates of discarded soil and rubble. To be on the lookout for cobras is a common warning.

In investing my own time and attention into this place, one impression began to emerge: a sense that although this site could be easily dismissed as a vacant wasteland from above, it is perhaps the closest thing this community has to a central park. Though its formation is entirely informal and undesigned, it is a vibrant urban commons nonetheless—one that is being intensely utilized every day by a multi-species range of local stakeholders (Fig. 3.2).

Suparichit pile study No.1 (2017) is an experimental socio-ecological landscape intervention which seeks to highlight the complex relationships between human activity and natural processes already underway within this territory. The intervention focused on a single pile along an existing informal path of travel through the site. A blanket of Marigold flower heads were methodically inserted to envelop this pile to a state of stark relief from its

Figure 3.3 Pile study #1, a landscape intervention at a dumpsite in bangalore, india (2017).

spectacle which invited immediate engagement with local communities, who (despite barriers of language, and culture) were compelled to actively participate in its construction (Figure 3.3).

In this work, I chose to highlight the particular role of the Marigold (Tagetes erecta) for it's striking visual qualities and deeply rooted cultural connotations. This flower holds a distinctive place in Indian cultural practices, used widely in rituals marking thresholds, attracting auspicious energy, and paying homage to the sacred aspects of daily life. With it's hearty green vertical vegetation, vibrant orange flowers, and prolific re-seeding habit as an annual plant, the Marigolds' aesthetic and ecological properties provide a means of visually mapping the afterlife of the intervention in both space and time as the site continues to evolve.

3.2 Eternal Return (2020)

Eternal Return offers a supplementary mixed-media representation of the Suparichit intervention. This work consists of a looped video projected onto sculpted earth on the ground plane of the STAMPS gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Although it has a tangential relationship with a site-specific work, it does not attempt to faithfully or objectively describe the original work to an outside audience. Instead, its resolution remains ambiguous and open-ended, evoking the spatial dimensions and artistic intentions of the original work without explicitly connecting or explaining them. It includes a representation of a blooming marigold flower, superimposed onto satellite imagery of the Suparichit site, and projected onto a landscape of piles measuring approximately 12'x15' (Figure 3.4). This creates a spatial condition which hovers between the cartographic and the fan-

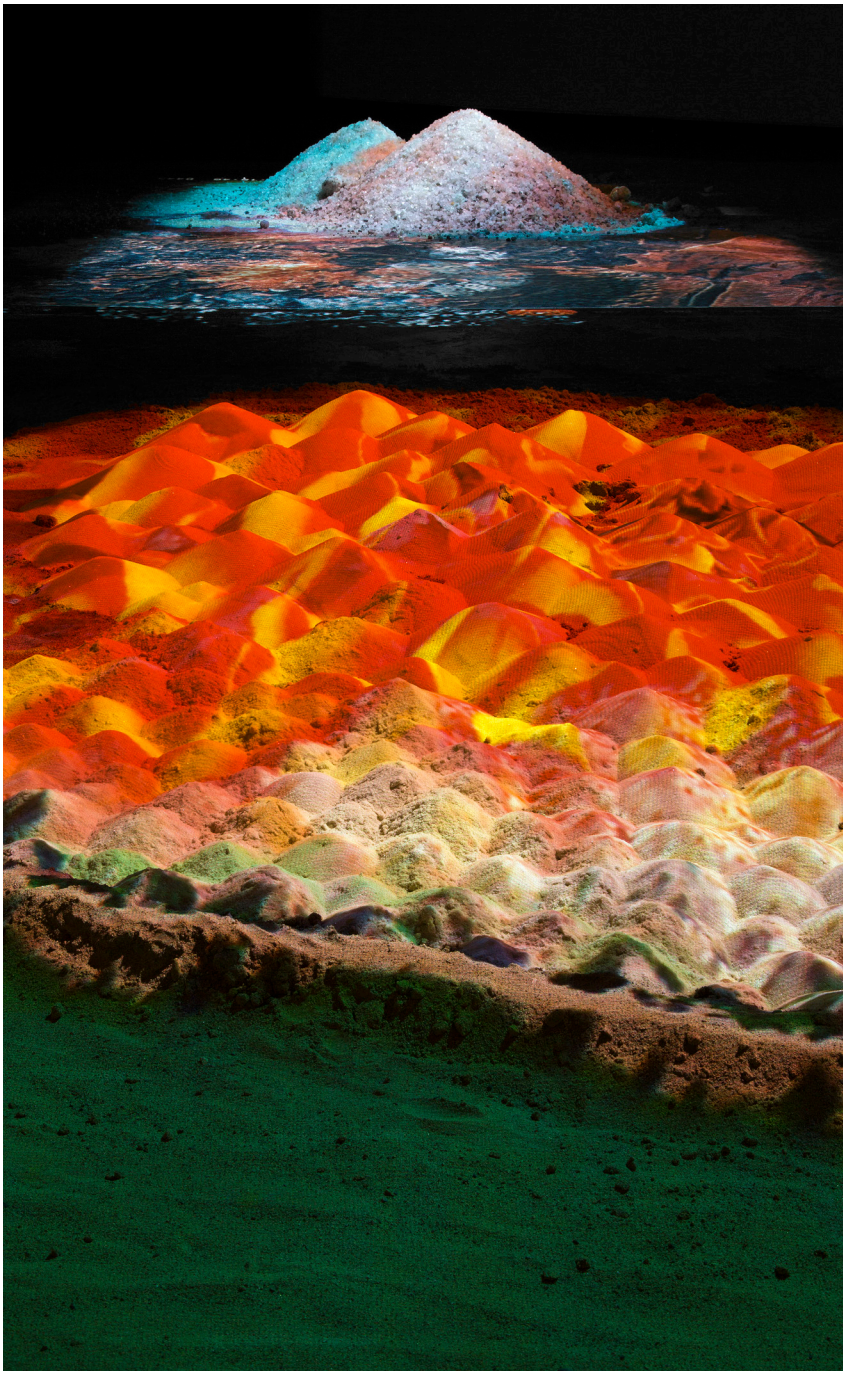


Figure 3.4 Kim Karlsrud, Eternal Return (2020). Detail of multimedia projection. Photo: Daniel Phillips

tastical. A virtual field of vibrant orange plant material expands and contracts, evoking cycles of growth, decay, and ecological succession over time. By looping these processes, the piece also resists the normative aesthetics and uses of live flowers as an artistic medium in a museum or gallery context. Whereas pieces such as Anya Gallaccio's Preserving Beauty (1991-2003) employ live plant material (and their intentionally decay over time) to evoke linear notions of entropy, *Eternal Return* presents a non-linear and cyclical aesthetic that promotes a more nuanced conception of ecological process. *Eternal Return* is accompanied in the gallery context with the following complicating text:

Suspended animation of a space, place and plant in rapid transition

Suparichit Dreamz Apartments

Rachanahalli Lake (adjacent)

Bangalore, India

> *Imagine a landscape, a thousand times larger than this room*
>
> *Imagine countless piles of displaced earth, extending into the horizon*
>
> *Imagine the echo of construction hammers, and distant cattle calls*
>
> *Imagine the sounds of birds*
>
> *Imagine walking amid this landscape and encountering a single pile*
>
> *Imagine it looks much different than the others*
>
> *Imagine it is blanketed with marigold heads, freshly severed*

Imagine their wilting over time

Imagine their seeds taking root

Imagine their spread

Image their pulse across seasons

This open-ended and non-didactic text, taken in combination with the interpretive strategies employed in the projected video, is intended to provide an intentionally dislocated vantage point into the work regardless of the viewers' familiarity with the site and context in which it was originally produced. The video projection loops in an endless and slow cycle as it extends across a highly articulated, scaled surface condition on the gallery ground plane that reads as a relief model of the Rachenahalli lake bed in Bangalore. This produces a slow read that requires subjective investment by a viewing audience, who are invited to yield themselves to a hypnotic state of reflection. The dislocation from firstspace into second and thirdspace perspectives can serve to amplify tensions about how the work should be "read" or "understood" producing an entirely new fabric of meanings and resonances that arise from the viewer's own interpretation of the piece. For some, the gentle pulsing of the marigold imagery across an expanse of piled earth evokes visions of cyclical fire-regimes. For others, it might imitate the spread of a novel virus. My personal relationship to this piece extends from my own intimate relationship with this place as a form of memory, and my ongoing desire to interrogate the nature of VM, ecological change, locational identity, artistic agency, and impermanence. These themes were brought with me into my MFA work while in residence at STAMPS.

3.4 Amounting a salt (2019)

The first socio-ecological spatial intervention I completed during my MFA experience was entitled *Amounting a salt*. It was a temporary and site specific piece comprising 30 tons of de-icing salt, delivered within the University of Michigan's Green Road Fine Arts facilities for six weeks. The community within this institutional commons was invited to engage with the material in whatever way they wished. All human-salt interactions were documented via timelapse video, as well as a text-based log which was updated over the duration of the intervention.

Simultaneously 100 percent natural, and 100 percent artificial, road salt was engaged in as a form of VM. It is understood as a ubiquitious, utilitarian feature of the everyday landscape in Southeast Michigan, intended to ease human mobility on paved surfaces throughout the region during the winter months. De-contextualizing and redirecting the flow of this substance to an unfamiliar interior setting, and divorcing it from its utilitarian status allows deeper reflection on its agency, meanings, complexities, and contradictions. The de-icing salt which is regularly spread by the truckload across the roads and parking lots in southeast Michigan is a combination of locally harvested "detroit" salt (an icy blue color), and an earthy brown variety which is mined and moved from Morocco. Acquiring this quantity of salt necessitated engagement with the complex material flows and metabolisms of the larger urban ecosystem, and the hidden infrastructure of its private and public maintenance regimes.

This gesture was intended to highlight the interplay of human agency and natural process while inviting critical reflection on common overlooked landscape materials. The phenomenology of this material became unavoidable and multisensory. Its pres-

Figure 3.3 Kim karlsrud, amounting a salt (2018-19). 30 Tons of de-icing salt from detroit and morocco.

ence could be registered through sight, taste, touch, smell, and sound. Rather than offering a static object of aesthetic contemplation, the salt piles were intended to produce an active spatial presence and ever-shifting territory with which subjects either interact with or consciously chose to avoid. These phenomena ultimately reflected tensions and realities that exist in the place in which the intervention was staged: Frictions between the collective and the individual, the private and the public, and the simultaneity of creation and destruction.

3.5 At this point in Time, 2020-ongoing

Recognizing that *Amounting a Salt* was intended as a temporary site-specific intervention, (limited to a duration of six weeks and accessible to a limited audience), the goal of this project was to extend the vantage point of the work beyond the original constraints of its creation, and further into second and third-space perspectives. *At This Point in Time* therefore is conceived as a representational or interpretive project that incorporates timelapse footage derived from the original *Amounting a Salt* intervention, juxtaposed and overlaid with additional found footage which further complicates the reading of the work. It visually represents multiple spatial and temporal scales simultaneously: From an aerial image of salt mining in the Atlas mountains of Morocco (where much of Michigan's de-icing salt is derived), to microscopic imagery of salt crystal formation. The piece is projected onto a ground plane that is covered in a thin layer of crystalized salt, and two prominent mounds of de-icing salt (which mimic the piles formed by the original intervention). This approach allows the piece to represent multiple scales of time and space simultaneously while producing a novel landscape

Kim Karlsrud
***At This Point in Time*, Ongoing**

Documentation of public intervention with 30 tons of de-icing salt sourced
from Detroit and Morocco, Green Road Studio,
6 weeks

Documentation of rock salt mining,
Ait-Daod (Atlas Mountains) Morocco,
35 years

Documentation of microscopic salt formation,
Unknown,
1 hour

Crystalized salt deposit,
Here,
Today

Deposited Sodium Chloride (NaCl),
Approximately 500 miles north of here,
Approximately 400 million years

Figure 3.4 Kim karlsrud, at this point in time (2020-ongoing). Multimedia projection on crystallized salt. Photo: sarah rose sharp

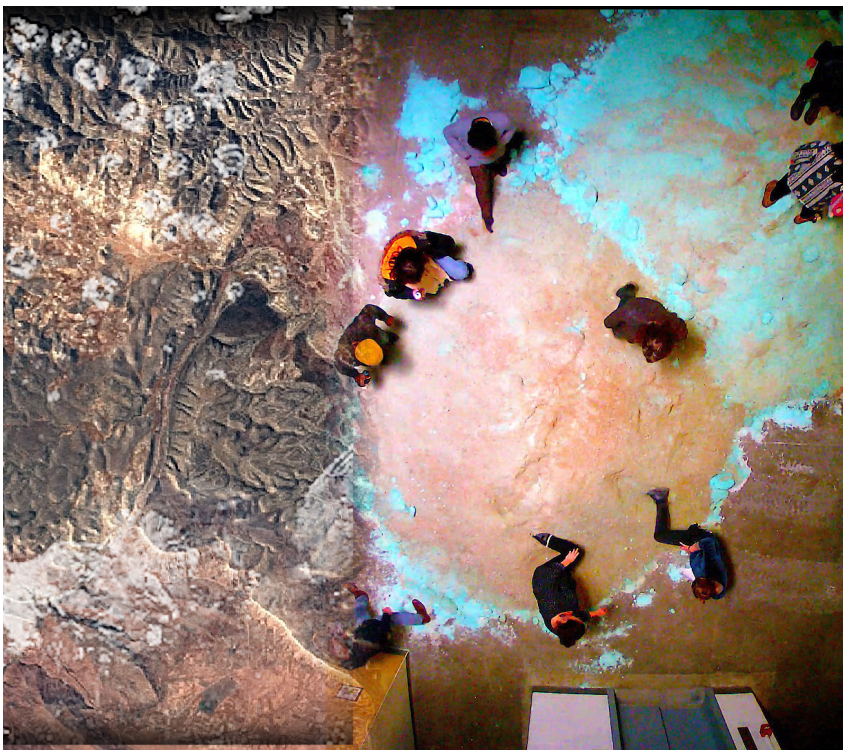


Figure 3.5 Still from the projection of at this point in time (2020-ongoing). Showing various spatial and temporal scales.

condition in the context of the gallery ground plane. The work is once again liberated from the spatial and temporal constraints of it's original creation (in "firstspace") in a way that can be displayed or exhibited in any number of locations and contexts. As with the previously mentioned project, this work reinforces its intentionally multi-centered status with complicating, quasi-didactic text, which reads:

> "Documentation of public intervention with 30 tons of de-icing salt sourced from Detroit and Morocco,
>
> Green Road Studio,
>
> 6 weeks
>
> Documentation of rock salt mining,
>
> Ait-Daoud (Atlas Mountains) Morocco,
>
> 35 years
>
> Documentation of microscopic salt formation,
>
> Unknown,
>
> 1 hour
>
> Crystallized salt deposit,
>
> Here,
>
> Today

Deposited Sodium Chloride (NaCl),

Approximately 500 miles north of here,

Approximately 400 million years”

Including this text is intended to reinforce the major themes of the work, while emphasizing the role of time from both a personal and geological perspective. There are many moments in the video projection where these simultaneous conditions are rendered in vivid clarity, yet the pace of the projection is such that they blur into a transitory cacophony (Figure 3.5). The fast pace of this piece was intended to act as a counterpoint to the slowness of *Eternal Return*, which was located immediately adjacent to it. *At This Point in Time* uses speed and magnification to register spatial temporal scales that are typically inaccessible to the human senses. From the geological to the microscopic, processes that are extremely slow are compressed to seconds. In contrast, Eternal return defamiliarizes the process of flowering as a slow pulse

3.6 Mine (Present, Near Future)

In addition to using this expanded field as an opportunity to further explore past and present work, I have also employed it to playfully anticipate future interventions that have not yet taken place. This final piece, entitled Mine is an example of a work that is more speculative in its relation to places that are currently unknown, and unknowable (Fig. 3.6).

Mine (2020-present, near future) is a custom built mobile kit to examine and process urban soils as a local intervention tactic. It is accompanied by the following set of instructions:

Figure 3.6 Kim karlsrud, mine (2020-ongoing).

1. Locate a site of exposed, compacted, non-vegetated urban soil, anywhere in the

world.

2. Excavate, describe, and collect soil.

3. Identify a local easily recognizable object or form to be replicated with soil.

4. Create mold(s) of the object identified in step 3.

5. Cast multiples of the object from step 3, using the mold(s) from step 4 and the soil

from step 2.

6. Aggregate and arrange the cast multiples from step 5 to create a novel landscape

condition.

7. Reflect. Interpret the resulting impact on the place, space, and self.

8. Move to a new site, and repeat steps 1-8.

Table 3: Merriam Webster's definition of Mine

1. **Noun**	2. **Pronoun**
a. *A pit or excavation in the earth from which mineral substances are taken.* b. *A subterranean passage under an enemy position.* c. *An encased explosive that is placed in the ground or in water and set to explode when disturbed.* d. *A rich source of supply.*	a. *That which belongs to me.*

Table 3

This project is intended to playfully anticipate future interventions that have not yet taken place in my personal place-based practice. As indicated by the dating of the project in didactic materials, it evokes a future perfect tense, ("present, near future") which is a self-conscious reference to the Harrison Sudio's "ongoing" trope. The kit is modelled after an artists crate, built from common materials and specifications for the transport of original artwork. Despite its generic outward appearance, the "crate" can be subsequently transformed into an active condition to become a workstation in the field. It contains a number of tools and materials which enable me to examine and manipulate urban soil through various casting processes. It currently exists in an unused state, before ever having been actively brought into the field. Mine represents a pristine and unfulfilled promise, a theme that is further reflected in its very materiality. The use of copper surfaces and copper-plated tools presents an initial condition of preciousness. The material serves to defamiliarize and recontextualize everyday objects such as clamps, the individual objects are carefully fit into foam cabinets like museum artifacts. Yet the use of copper also foreshadows an ironic inversion of the precious. The tools and surfaces adorned in copper are also intended to absorb the palimpsest of its active use over time, registering fingerprints, scratches, oxidation and wear as it travels throughout the world. It will serve as an active tool for my creative process, as well as a representational device which can be periodically displayed in a gallery context as an independent artifact. Its wear and tear will be intended to reflect the impossibility of returning to "pristine" states (in Art and in Nature).

Mine is therefore simultaneously site-specific, and siteless. As observed by Rosie Sharp in a recent review of the MFA thesis show, "Something about the station's relationship to the works and the materials suggests a kind of stand-in for the artist, who

meditates on the interactions of humans and materials, especially with regard to nature and landscape." (Sharp 2020). This observation on *Mine* as a personal yet spatial artifact is apt, as even the title of the work is intended to evoke a double meaning. *Mine* operates as both space and idea - a territory for material manipulation, as well as a possessive pronoun connoting "*that which belongs to me*" (see table 3).

As with the other pieces in the exhibition, *Mine*, is an attempt to extend place-based epistemologies that I have cultivated over many years in my personal practice.

Taken together, the three installation pieces I completed for HERE are intended to further complicate the spatial and temporal locus of the site-specific, while disrupting ideas of nature and place. HERE consists of two multimedia microcosmic landscape conditions and one physical artifact that use the interpretive space of the gallery to point to larger interventions and phenomena that have taken place, are taking place or will eventually take place, *elsewhere*. I see these three pieces as a triad that may be read in a combinatory way, or interpreted individually. Liberated from the constraints of mere documentation, HERE employs representation as a fantastical stand-in, virtually extending the "sites" of intervention into a new context to reach a broader audience.

CONCLUSIONS AND CODA

The projects mentioned herein demonstrate an ongoing fascination with a range of topics related to the complexities of nature and place. I have been particularly interested in interrogating how spatial and temporal scales are represented in dynamic and engaging ways to a public audience.

Since its inception with the earthworks of the 1970's, engaging in site-specific landscape interventions has always implied the

problematics of dislocation and representation. If the work *only* exists at a single site, how do these works come to be understood through non-sites, websites, and other modes of representation which document their existence and evolution over time? Rather than offering an impartial, objective, mode of representing the development of a project, I argue that it may be more accurate to consider the process of documentation and representation *itself* as a mode of secondary intervention into oth-

er, discursive forms of space. I believe this can be an evolving, multi-centered, and reflexive process that invites deeper intimacy with a broader viewing audience. However it requires artists to embrace this process of dislocation, and effectively reimagine the "locus" of the work in question. By combining notions of Vernacular Materiality (VM), operative and interpretive space, spatial trialectics, and a contemporary sociology of "the commons", the goal of this work has been to extend the purview of the "site-specific" into these newly discursive spaces - the space of ideas, and places and timescales both real and imagined.

This thesis process has provided a critical opportunity to deepen my site-specific artistic practice and explore new expressive and representational horizons. Now more than ever before, I understand my work as a reflexive mode of engagement and constant negotiation within specific places. I have benefited immensely from pursuing an expanded definition of Nature, Place, Intervention, and installation by carefully considering the work of others as well as my own. I look forward to continuing to challenge the conventional binaries of here and there, inside and outside, nature and culture, core and periphery, here and there, while inviting the development of new spatial and ecological imaginaries in my work. With this in mind, I would like to offer a handful of loosely arranged piles of insight that drive my thinking and practice from the perspective of here, today. These piles are incomplete, and subject to continued transition as I continue to pursue an itinerant and multi-centered mode of artistic practice in the future.

CODA, Kim Karlsrud

April, 2020

Ann Arbor, MI, USA

If Place is personal,

Then it is a constant and strange negotiation.

More than a space, site, or a territory, place is *a commons*.

A commons which you act upon, while in turn it acts upon you.

Ours is just one of many stories in a place, held together with others in constant friction.

So play with place. Even the banal or vernacular can be seen with first sight if disturbed and defamiliarized.

Being here and being elsewhere are not incompatible. They can exist in simultaneous or grey areas of inbetween.

Just as the *here* can contain many *elsewheres*, all the elsewheres contain many *heres*. Seeking a *there* becomes a *here*.

If Nature is a *thing*

It's also the ideas we have about it's *thingness*.

Both an amorphous thing and an equally amorphous idea.

Ideas and things produce one another in a constant feedback loop.

But not all natures will be pristine, and not all un-pristine natures are tragedies

We cannot go back, but we can move forward, toward new exciting natures that resist binaries.

The artist has agency,

But there are many things she cannot do.

She cannot "save the planet", or halt the inevitable pace of ecological change

She can't cure the relentless spread of a global virus, because she's not a first responder.

But then again maybe the opposite of omnipotence is not the sound of nihilism, or entropy or defeat.

We can instead embrace our role as a third responder, or a fourth or perhaps even a fifth or sixth responder.

Relentlessly (re)framing questions in beautiful and intimate ways, and finding new questions hidden within answers.

If the work is never *finished*,

the artist is only the start of an unfolding process.

The artist can only ever *invite*, rather than *prescribe*.

Then she must embrace the other forces and agents that will act upon it.

This agency is biological, chemical, spatial, temporal, cultural and ideological.

She can try to capture and represent these forces, knowing that all attempts will remain inadequate.

Rather than attempt to faithfully document or remake, she accepts the inaccuracy of representation as liberation.

Embracing it's expressive power as a ripple that extends the resonance of the work further across distant boundaries.

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