THIS APPARENT MAGNITUDE

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ABSTRACT

This support paper expands on ideas, research, and observations that have driven the production of my MFA Thesis Exhibition, *This Apparent Magnitude*. The exhibition consists of four new projects that represent the culmination of two years of research, travel, and creation, all centred around critical approaches to the depiction of physical environments. The title takes its name from the theory of apparent magnitude, credited to ancient Greek astronomer Hipparchus in the 2nd century BCE. Apparent magnitude was used to measure the brightness of celestial objects, and has evolved over the past two millennia to become a much more complex and integrated part of modern astrophysics. I am proposing that apparent magnitude can be thought of as a metaphor for the ways casual observations and depictions become embedded in culture and ideology – specifically in the context of how we represent physical environments.

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I would like to acknowledge that this work and research was completed on Treaty 7 territory, the traditional home of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Nakoda (Stoney), and Tsuut'ina.

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INTRODUCTION: *This Apparent Magnitude*

In the first quarter of the 21st century, we can no longer assume that everyone has had the opportunity to gaze at the stars on a clear night. With over half of the global population living in cities, getting to places beyond the range of light pollution, or "Urban Sky Glow," can take considerable planning and resources. The practice of astrophotography has become a specialized area of visual production and astrophotographers, like wildlife photographers, will travel great distances to remote locations in order to find the ideal shooting conditions for their fleeting subject matter. Before the common use of electric lighting in the early 20th century, the stars would readily be visible across the sky on any clear night. Historically, the stars enjoyed a much more significant cultural role as tools of navigation and storytelling. In premodern times, when peoples' lives were dictated by the seasons and the tides, rivers would dry and mountains would erode, but the stars would stay fixed in the same place from generation to generation.

The first stars to appear in the early evening form the eighty-eight primary constellations represented by zodiac signs in Western astrology, a tradition that comes to us from Greco-Roman interpretations of Babylonian astronomy. Significantly, the interpretation of constellations is far from universal; for instance, Ursa Minor (the little dipper) is identified as a twisted foot in Aztec culture, but as a wagon in ancient Babylon; Gemini is a set of twins in ancient Greece, but an igloo to the Inuit. The interpretation of these constellations enters the cultural imagination in ways that influence broader ideology, and by ideology I'm not referring to a political agenda, as the word is often used for today, but to a more archaic ideonomy, or "science of ideas" – a genealogy of knowledge, or "epistemology" that comes to shape a worldview.[1]

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[1] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 137.

Ideology is often used to cluster issues within political camps; for example, one might claim that censoring scientists is reminiscent of 20th century fascist ideology. In Foucauldian terms, I am thinking of ideology as part of a "history of ideas," that "then, is the discipline of beginnings and ends…it shows how problems, notions, themes may emigrate from the philosophical field where they were formulated to scientific or political discourses." In the context of this support paper, these things would emigrate from a tradition of observation and representation to the scientific or political discourses.

The constellations themselves remain the same cluster of stars, but they enter the imagination as images and representations, as secondary visual translations – be it Orion the hunter, both a Polynesian canoe and a Dakota hand; or Cassiopeia the vain queen, both an Arabian camel hump and a Pawnee turkey foot. Specifically, I am interested in how these representations enter ideology and influence ideas of Nature.[2] For that reason, my research and production has been focused on patterns of depiction and their relationship to ecological thought.

This support paper, *This Apparent Magnitude,* borrows its title from "apparent magnitude," a theory proposed in the 2nd century BCE by the ancient Greek astronomer Hipparchus. Little is known about Hipparchus except that he was likely born on the island of Rhodes where the famous Rhodes Observatory still exists. Like Socrates, who is known to Western Philosophy through the work of Plato, Hipparchus reaches us second-hand through the work of Ptolemy. The only preserved manuscript

[2] For this support paper, the word Nature will be referred to as a concept rather than as a physical *thing*, so for convenience and consistency, it will be capitalized rather than placed in quotations.

from Hipparchus' prolific career is a minor work; however, he is frequently cited as one of the most influential scientific thinkers of the ancient world.[3]

Apparent magnitude was established to measure the brightness of celestial bodies based on a scale of six increments, the brightest objects measuring 1 and the dimmest objects measuring 6.[4] The logarithm used to separate each measurement on the scale was based on a differentiation of 2.512x, meaning that an object with an apparent magnitude of 1 was 2.512x brighter than an object with an apparent magnitude of 2; therefore, an object measuring 6, barely visible to the naked eye, would be 100x dimmer than an object measuring 1. It is important to mention that Hipparchus' observations of the night sky predated the invention of the telescope, and that the implication of "apparent" reminds us that this scale was intended to measure only what *appears* to the human eye. This will be significant in later chapters when I discuss the contemporary problem of representing things we can't see.

With the advancement of optical lenses, including the invention of the telescope in the Netherlands in the 17th century, and a greater capacity for celestial observation, astronomers were required to expand Hipparchus' range, but they remained faithful to the logarithm of his original six-increment scale. Apparent magnitude was also expanded to measure objects in the night sky other than stars, including planets and distant nebulae. The following objects are paired with their place on the apparent magnitude scale: Venus (-4), a full moon (-12.7), the sun (-26.7); these figures tell us that the sun is approximately 400,000 times brighter than a full moon. Interesting trivia, but what does someone do with this information? The main limitation

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[3] Liba Taub, "Hipparchus." *Department of History and Philosophy of Science* (University of Cambridge, 1999). http://www.sites.hps.cam.ac.uk/starry/hipparchus.html

[4] Eyes on the Sky, "Stargazing Basics 2: Understanding star magnitude in astronomy." (*YouTube*. 13, July. 2012). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P8Veb_AlJ0

of apparent magnitude is that it tells us nothing about the size of the object or its distance from the earth. To answer these questions, absolute magnitude was developed as a way to measure how bright an object would appear if it was 10 parsecs (about 33 light years) away from earth. But not all objects are visible to us against a neutral backdrop – some are affected by the ambient "light pollution" of the galaxy; for this, integrated magnitude[5] was invented as a way to compensate for surrounding star clusters that might influence how an object is perceived. This brings us to present-day astronomy.

* * *

I've used the history of apparent magnitude epigraphically for the introduction of this support paper because it tells the story of an epistemology, a process of knowledge-building, that was rooted in the simple act of looking. Hipparchus' observations of the stars were translated into the language of mathematics, and his theoretical groundwork evolved with technology to become a cornerstone of modern astrophysics. The original six-increment scale, where 1 equals the brightest star in the sky, continues to be the standard scale of measurement even when new stars are discovered far beyond the heavenly conception of the ancient Greeks, and far beyond the range of the naked eye. The body of work I'm presenting for my Thesis Exhibition starts with the question of how images influence ideas of Nature in the popular imagination,[6] and how the popular imagination then influences ideology. In the same way that I've sketched out a simplified history of integrated magnitude, from the early stages of apparent magnitude dating back to the 2nd century BCE, the history of Nature

[5] John Donald Fernie, et al, "Star Cluster." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 02 Nov. 2018) https://www.britannica.com/science/star-cluster.
[6] By "popular imagination," I'm referring to the mental images and concepts shared by large cultural groups While acknowledging that each subjectivity may be unique in its formation of these images and concepts, there are still imaginative trends shared by people who experience day to day life in a shared physical reality.

can be traced back to various distinct origins of thought. Some of these origins are prehistoric, while others are relatively recent, including the philosophies of Romantics and Enlightenment thinkers whose ideas of Nature are dangerously incompatible with current ecological thought.[7] [8]

Part of the challenge for ecological thought is not being able to recognize the world in front of our eyes. One could compile an endless list of climate statistics, carbon data, and weather records, but how this information manifests in the physical world is often beyond the capacity of our senses; we cannot locate the causes and effects. In *Dark Ecology*, Timothy Morton writes that turning on the ignition of his car is, in itself, not harming the Earth; "my key turning is statistically meaningless."[9] Even if he knows that his car is producing carbon emissions, there is nothing to observe but a warm tailpipe. In the wake of 9-11, the United States Department of Defence declared an immanent Iraq invasion in order to locate what the department claimed were Weapons of Mass Destruction. On February 12, 2002, Donald Rumsfeld stated "there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. We also

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[7] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651) 78.
When referring to Nature in the poem "The World Is Too Much With Us," English Romantic poet William Wordsworth writes "[Nature] moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be/A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn," which not only draws a firm distinction between Nature and culture, but simultaneously reinforces the problematic idea of Primitivism, a racialized concept whereby non-European peoples are understood is less developed, and therefore closer to Nature. Many Romantic notions were a reaction to what they believed was an overdependence on scientific rationalism by Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes declares that without culture, there are "no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."
[8] Timothy Morton, Donna Haraway, and Greg Garrard are a few writers on "ecological thought" who I will introduce shortly.
[9] Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) 8.

know there are unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know."[10] In *A Field Guide to Wandering*, Rebecca Solnit adds a missing fourth term, the *unknown knowns*, the things you don't know you already know.[11] These are the things that can sometimes become clouded by ideological assumptions and taken for granted. Timothy Morton turning the key to his ignition every morning is an unknown known. This is the category that *This Apparent Magnitude* attempts to reveal and disassemble through various media and conceptual strategies.

It would be impossible to suggest that the theory of apparent magnitude evolved independently of ideology. The powers that dominate people also dominate our understanding of the cosmos – the most notorious example of this is the Copernican scientists who pursued truth against the dogma of the Catholic Church in the 16th century. Today, scientists aren't systematically executed as they were during the Inquisition, but governments, under the pressure of corporate lobbying, find other ways to mediate and repress the dissemination of scientific knowledge. In a globalist neoliberal society, science is professed to be the universal authority on the cosmos, but scientific data itself is malleable and often represented through the veil of partisan rhetoric. The urgency for the public to be able to decode this rhetoric isn't new; Walter Benjamin, in the "Little History of Photography" quotes painter and photographer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy nearly a hundred years ago saying, "The illiteracy of the future… will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography."[12] In a time of digital media ubiquity, image-literate artists sit at the juncture of representation and ideology.

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[10] CNN, "RUMSFELD / KNOWNS" (*YouTube*, 31 Mar. 2016). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REWeBzGuzCc

[11] Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005) 90.

[12] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, 1927-1934, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press, 1999) 527.

In thinking about the many forms of Nature representation, my research and production has circulated through a wide range of resources, subjects, and media. My hope is that this intellectual and material dissonance comes together in a final exhibition that conveys an overall syncretic holism; rather than an authoritative statement, I want to achieve a tone that is probing, critical, playful, and uncertain. This may be analogous to what poet William Wordsworth calls an "organic sensibility" in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, meaning a sensibility that spontaneously addresses a variety of subjects with an overall consideration for Nature, or what now would be called ecological thought.[13]

In the first chapter, I expand on a number of theoretical tangents that have been useful for thinking through the various intersections of visual culture and ecological thought. I in no way intend to illustrate theory with my work, so the inclusion of certain theoretical ideas can seem irrelevant at times. I find that studying theory is a productive way to build a vocabulary for discussing my work, because good theorists are particularly apt at applying language to abstract concepts. For example, Bertrand Westphal's theory of geocriticism[14] deals extensively with the idea of mapping in a traditional cartographical sense, but I find it useful in terms of abstract, conceptual mapping as well. Westphal's ideas may not directly appear in my work, but they resonate as rich footnotes. In addition to geocriticism, I discuss another relatively new branch of comparative analysis called ecocriticism.[15] Together, ecocriticism and geocriticism form a theoretical foundation to build on as I move forward with an artistic practice that is closely aligned with current strains of ecological thought. The first chapter will begin with an interrogation of the idea of Nature and its origins, as well as

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[13] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 273.
[14] Bertrand Westphal, *The Plausible World: A Geocritical Approach to Space, Place, and Maps* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[15] 15 Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between the arts and physical environments.

an articulation of the Anthropocene and what it means to have entered an epoch defined by human activity and the accumulation and representation of climate data.

The second chapter describes my methodology, starting with the process of drifting – what began as a disinterested act of walking evolved into a psychic approach to research and production. The walk, as a nightly activity to wind-down, was intended for thinking and reflecting; however, it grew into a generative practice when the things I came across on my walks started to integrate into the production of works. In this section, I include biographical details of recent artistic activity that highlight the moments and shifts that have led to my current methodology, as I understand it. One notable shift is how I've gravitated toward objects and lens-based media as my primary tools. Part of this is due to the artistic and photographic traditions, historical and contemporary, that I align myself with – the artists with whom I'm trying to have a conversation; so, the final part of the methodology section describes the artists, works, and exhibitions that have had a profound effect on my artistic trajectory.

The third and final chapter is dedicated to the production of the works in *This Apparent Magnitude*. In this section, each project is situated with respect to its origin, creation, art historical context, and connection to the aforementioned theoretical and methodological ideas in chapters I and II. Following the third chapter, the Appendix will include information about works that were completed during the course of my MFA, but were not included in the final Thesis Exhibition.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORY

1.1 The Idea of Nature and the Anthropocene

In *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, Murray Bookchin asks the question "what is Nature?" Bookchin is concerned that this seemingly mundane question is too often relegated to the remote and airy world of metaphysical speculation. Writing in the late 1980s, he understands that this is a critically multivalent question connected not only to the human domination of Nature, but also to the human domination of other humans, emphatically stating that the social can no longer be separated from the ecological.[16] Thirty-three years before the publication of the *Philosophy of Social Ecology*, a writer in a very different genre, Samuel Beckett, staged the play *Endgame*, in which Hamm, one of the two main characters, declares that "There is no more nature," an idea that sounds quizzically provocative even now.

Endgame, characteristic of late Modernist drama, is filled with ambiguity and absurdity, but with the set location in a bunker, Beckett is directly reflecting on the Cold War anxiety of the late 1950s. In an essay on ecocriticism, theorist Greg Garrard argues that *ecomimesis* - faithful depictions of Nature - have failed to properly represent ecological realities, so it's a worthwhile strategy for scholars to mine for ecological thought in unlikely places, such as the play *Endgame*.[17] The problem with ecomimesis and its attempt to accurately describe Nature with photographs, paintings, or nature writing is that it only serves to create an illusion of immediacy, and in doing so creates another thing that is *not* the thing that it aims to represent. As Timothy Morton writes, "the more I try to show you what lies beyond this page, the more of a page I have."[18]

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16 Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (New York: Black Rose, 1995) 20.
17 Greg Garrard, "Endgame: Beckett's Ecological Thought" (*Samuel Beckett Today/Aujord'jui*, vol 23, 2011) 385.
18 Timothy Morton. *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 30.

This can be a challenge for contemporary artists working site-specifically and engaging with the layered histories of place to communicate their work without falling into the routine of ecomimetic tropes; however, if one learns to identify these tropes - these patterns of representation - one can analyze and critique how certain depictions have come to represent physical environments in visual culture. Artists can even use these tropes in subversive ways to comment on the complex relationship between environment and representation. A starting point for this analysis goes back to Bookchin's question – what is Nature?

Let's begin with the assumption that Nature is an idea, not an ontological certainty. Structuralism and post-structuralism have pointed out that many social systems are constructed,[19] but Nature is unique in the sense that it is understood to exist beyond the social realm. The word "nature" operates in the contemporary vocabulary as a stand-in for many abstract concepts, specifically those considered in opposition to human technology and culture: natural environment versus urban, natural food versus processed, natural disaster versus human-caused. Nature exists outside of us, yet in the pastoral tradition we go into Nature to find our*selves*. Human nature is a euphemism for what is understood to be our animalistic faults and perversities. Humans strive for progress, but the way things progress is, generally, considered "the nature of things".[20] This dichotomy between Nature and culture was considered a reliable way to make meaning in the Western world until the twentieth century and the two World Wars,

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[19] Simon Blackburn, "Structuralism," *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 353.
"[Structuralism is] the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract structure."

[20] "On the Nature of Things" is a poem composed in the first-century BCE by Roman philosopher Lucretius (99-55 BCE). Lucretius attempts to convey Epicurean philosophy to a Roman audience and explores the principles of "atomism," the idea that clusters of smaller things bound together make up the macroscopic world.

culminating with the atomic bomb, and followed by the formation of the ecological sciences and the recognition of humanity's impact on geologic and biospheric systems.

The etymology of the word *culture* derives from the tradition of farming, so farming is likely where humans began to conceive of themselves as a class of species separate from Nature. The Latin *cultum* pertains to growing crops and Morton uses the term "agrilogistics" to define humanity's 12,000-year-old agricultural project, the "slowest and perhaps most effective weapon of mass destruction ever devised," as it was wholly predicated on seeing the physical environment as a resource for cultural consumption.[21] On the other side of the culture/Nature dichotomy, the world *wilderness* is believed to come from the Anglo-Saxon *wilddeoren* for "where the wild beasts live;" or, where the humans *don't* live. For the proliferation of large-scale farming, or "agrilogistics," it was imperative to create a rigid division between the human and non-human worlds for pragmatic reasons; livestock required boundaries and protection from predators, and crops needed to be separated from grazing animals and undesirable, inedible flora. In *Dark Ecology*, Morton uses a wheat reaping scene from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to illustrate via hedgerows the physical division of Nature and culture in the modern imagination. In the photographic series *Sentinel*, I attempted to identify where these boundaries exist in the city by showing the division between what remains visible and what disappears at night in Lethbridge.

Morton's theory of agrilogistics as the catalyst for the separation of Nature from culture dates back twelve millennia to the beginning of the Holocene and the end of an Ice Age. Glacial ice caps began to recede toward the poles and the global climate became opportune for growing crops. But this theory, as tenable as it is, begins almost eight thousand years before the first known works of literature. Addressing the idea of Nature with historiography, or a study of Nature in written history, Garrard points to

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[21] Morton, *Dark Ecology* 42.

many major texts that likely helped shape the idea of Nature in the Western imagination. In what is considered to be the earliest known work of literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the main antagonist in the plot is Nature itself, so from its inception in literature, Nature is not only separated from, but adversarial to humans.[22] In the Bible, the most widely-read work of literature in the world, the God of the Old Testament tells his newly-created humans in the Book of Genesis to: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."[23] In this later stage of agrilogistics when the Old Testament was composed, in roughly the 6th century BCE, the resources of Nature are understood to exist beyond the field and the pasture and to include every resource available to the culture. Another influence of the Bible on ideas of Nature comes from the Book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament in the form of the apocalyptic tradition.[24]

Garrard notes that the apocalyptic trope has been frequently appropriated by popular environmental movements that preach an ideology rooted in an end-of-times brand of ecology; however, the fallacy that we are “killing the planet” is more accurately that we are “altering our biosphere,” and this makes the apocalyptic trope, in many ways, Nature defending itself.[25] If the case is to be made that humans *are* a part of nature, a theorist who argues this convincingly is Murray Bookchin, who designates humanity’s rise to domination as the inevitable result of First Nature. First Nature was a concept used by Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero to describe the ability of a species to continuously develop toward increasing complexity. Bookchin argues that humanity’s awareness of itself places it beyond the realm of subjectivity that exists in

[22] Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 40-42.
[23] Genesis 1:28.
[24] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 93.
[25] TJ Demos. “Against the Anthropocene: The Many Names of Resistance.” *Vimeo*, April 2018, https://vimeo.com/251618816.

First Nature, and with this awareness comes the desire to control and dominate other species and lands. Examples of where humanity strayed from First Nature's evolutionary complexity include monocrop farming and the selective breeding and domestication of livestock and pets. This process of simplification and homogenization of natural development and evolutionary complexity places humanity in the category of Second Nature. The semantic problem with this solution to the question of Nature and culture is where exactly "culture" fits in. It seems that, like many binaries in the modern imagination (such as war and peace), the two terms are dependent on one other; they differentiate from each other in order to describe each other; peace is *not* war. War is *not* peace. There is no neutral condition without one negating the other.

The idea that Nature and culture are indivisible is propagated by various world religions and indigenous cosmologies, but the question of, not only what Nature *is*, but what Nature *isn't*, only shook the occidental worldview half way through the 20th century. Hegel and Kant debated over the existence of a knowable reality and the phenomenology of human subjectivity in the 1700s, but as Bookchin notes, these questions were an anthropocentric preoccupation for philosophers, not for the governments and industrialists rapidly altering the physical environment during the Industrial Revolution. The two World Wars provoked enormous skepticism about the course of so-called Western "development." The use and testing of atomic weapons further complicated the idea of human nature and our role as a species attempting to cohabit the earth with other forms of life.

But before the effects of nuclear proliferation and the spread of radiation were observed and measured on a global scale, environmental scientists had begun to notice that the climate itself was changing. The canary in the coal mine was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, a harbinger of the environmental effects of the insecticide Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, known as DDT. Carson begins *Silent*

Spring with "A Fable for Tomorrow" where she appropriates the American pastoral tradition to tell the story of a harmonious world in equilibrium until the intrusion of a dangerous, unnatural agent - DDT. By using the familiar tropes of pastoral ecomimesis, Carson connects on an emotional and ideological level with the American public, leading to the ban of DDT. Known primarily as a biologist and conservationist, Carson's artistic achievement would shift the idea of Nature in the popular imagination by illustrating, through the intersection of art and science, the influence of human activity on the physical environment.

The scientific body that confirmed not only the evidence, but the omnipresence of human impact on the Earth is the Working Group on the Anthropocene (WGA) established in 2009.[26] The WGA has focused decades of research, observations, and speculations into one coherent concept: "The Anthropocene," coined by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and diatom biologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000. The three main signifiers of the Anthropocene, or how humans have affected the earth on a geologically significant scale, are the recorded levels of nuclear fallout radiation, the presence of plastics in every navigable part of the world, and the fossil record of the domesticated chicken. The Anthropocene, which is gradually becoming a publicly acknowledged concept, has many precedents, including environmentalist Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature*, where he argues that by having changed the atmosphere, we have changed the weather, and by changing the weather, we have affected the existence of every plant and animal.[27]

While the Anthropocene is generally agreed upon as the unifying mode for the analysis and dissemination of recent ecological science and thought, it has a number of critics. There are, of course, the critics who deny the existence of climate change to

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[26] WGA. http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/
[27] Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989) 39.

begin with, but there are also critics who believe in the science, but disagree with the term Anthropocene. Two of the outspoken challengers against the term Anthropocene are feminist eco-critic Donna Haraway and art historian TJ Demos. Timothy Morton acknowledges the problematic nature of the term, but thinks it's more urgent for scientists and intellectuals to rally together and address the Anthropocene than it is for them to quibble over terminology.[28] Haraway subscribes to the term reluctantly, bringing up the issue that the root of Anthropocene (*anthropos*, Classical Greek for "human") implicates the entire species, when the responsibility for things like carbon emissions are far from equally distributed around the world.[29]

Following this criticism by Haraway, TJ Demos, in his lecture "Against the Anthropocene: The Many Names of Resistance," denounces the term Anthropocene for its regressive penchant to de-politicize. Demos argues that to date the Anthropocene purely based on geologic evidence, beginning with the first atomic test and ensuing fallout in 1945, is to absolve and ignore the 500-year-old European Colonial Project accompanied by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – the foundations of global capitalism and the acceleration of consumption-based carbon emissions. For this reason, Demos dates the Anthropocene to 1492 with the arrival of Columbus in the West Indies; Demos suggests that a more fitting name is Capitalocene. He goes on to list a number of worthy alternatives: these include Gynecene (for the rise of feminism), Plantationocene (for human slavery), Homogenocene (for monocrop agriculture), Plasticene (for the ubiquity of plastics), Pyrocene (for frequent wildfires), Catastrocene (for earthquakes

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[28] Morton, *Dark Ecology* 20.

[29] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulhucene," *Art in the Anthropocene*, Ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities, 2015) 258.

and hurricanes), and Necrocene (for mass extinctions). Demos also supports Haraway's suggestion of the Cthulhucene.[30]

The Cthulhucene is named after Cthulhu, science-fiction writer HP Lovecraft's otherworldly horror described as "A monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind."[31] The name itself is likely derived from *chthonic*, Classical Greek for "subterranean." For Haraway, Cthulhu is an amalgamation of many earthly critters and it distances us from thinking in the anthropocentric terms of speciesism; rather, it's about thinking of hybridity in biocentric terms. The Cthulhucene is an epoch of recognized interrelationships – not only between individual species, but also acknowledging the interdependence of our own bodies with certain bacterial cultures that live within us. So, while *anthropos* is the primary agent of global change, it is enmeshed in a much more complex network of living things than zoological classification systems may suggest. Haraway asserts that Nature and culture should never have been separated in the first place.[32] In the following section, I will expand on these and other issues brought to the fore by ecocriticism and other critical discourses that connect my work to the division of Nature and culture in the popular imagination.

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[30] TJ Demos, "Against the Anthropocene."
[31] H.P. Lovecraft. "The Call of Cthulhu," *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014) 385.
[32] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulhucene," 255.

1.2 Ecocriticism and Visual Culture

The origin of the word “ecology” is credited to naturalist-philosopher Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) who, in *The General Morphology of Organisms* (1966), wrote that “by ‘ecology’ we understand the comprehensive science of the relationships of the organism to its surrounding environment, where we can include, in the broader sense, all ‘conditions of existence.’”[33] Haeckel was primarily concerned with the evolutionary development of embryos and illustrating a genealogy of species, but his advocacy of Social Darwinism and scientific racism has made him a controversial figure in the ecological sciences, despite his contributions to the theory of evolution and introduction and popularization of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* to the German-speaking world.

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary critical framework used to study the arts as they relate to physical environments and the living things that co-inhabit them. Like Hipparchus’ apparent magnitude, ecocriticism is a shifting discourse constantly adapting itself to new developments in artistic production and ecological thought. Ecocriticism is inherently intertextual, meaning that each contribution impacts the greater whole in a dialectical accumulation of ideas that are shared by a global range of voices. Participation is not limited to the ecological sciences and literature, but includes indigenous, or what may be classified as “non-scientific” points of view. In this way, ecocriticism is itself a living and organic system of knowledge and criticism. Like Feminist theory and Postcolonial theory, ecocriticism developed out of poststructuralism and 1950-70s European comparative literature theory. Significant thinkers of this time include Theodor Adorno, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, whose *Of Grammatology* (1967) paved the way for deconstructive criticism and the challenging of grand narratives, the unstable foundations on which culture is

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[33] Ernst Haeckel, *The General Morphology of Organisms* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1866) 286.

constructed. Deconstruction happens when the reader dissects the relationship between text and meaning. One can extend this method to art when considering the relationship between a work of art and its meaning; what truths are assumed in its making, and how true are those assumptions? For my own practice, I am curious about what role the idea of Nature has to play in the assumed truths of visual culture and the problematic centrality of the European landscape genre. What expectations does the Western viewer have when looking at representations of physical space? And how do these assumptions and expectations impact mass culture on an ideological level? The work does not propose linear answers, but speculates on possible contradictions and missing pieces to the epistemological inquiry of Nature-versus-Culture as the predominant grand narrative of the Industrial Revolution and onward.

Timothy Morton writes that ecological thought must veer to art, because "art is thought from the future."[34] My interpretation of this somewhat oblique statement is that artists have the vocational permission to reflect on abstract concepts like time and process without the stakes of running experiments in a lab. Contemporary art is rarely forced upon the public. The maxim "Art is for anyone, it just isn't for everyone," attributed to art critic Jerry Saltz, but frequently used by artists, suggests a democratisation that probably isn't true; however, even a failed documenta[35] isn't going to have the same impact as a failed vaccination, jet engine, or suspension bridge. In a sense, art has permission to not only fail, but to use failure as a starting point – a privilege not as (at least deliberately) prominent in the domains of science, technology, and politics.

There is no shortage of statistics and data available to the public regarding anthropogenic impacts on physical environments; yet, sometimes the more this

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[34] Morton, *Dark Ecology* 3.
[35] documenta is an exhibition of contemporary art which takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany.

information is shared with the public, the more of a tendency there is for people to reject quantitative data in favour of “alternate facts.” This rejection of statistics and data is referred to as the Backfire Effect, a phenomenon that occurs when reprimanding someone with “the facts” causes them to take an antithetical, almost spiritually-inspired position and stand by it with even greater resolve than before.[36] The Backfire Effect is an extreme demonstration of confirmation bias, the logical fallacy of only accepting arguments that support one’s pre-established beliefs.

Greg Garrard observes that the failure of statistics and data to accurately describe the era of anxiety about climate change is due to the reality that climate change itself eludes both sensory apprehension and generic representation.[37] Climatologists can point to wildfires and hurricanes, but historically there have always been wildfires and hurricanes, and these isolated events do little to convey the magnitude of a global predicament to those who are not directly affected by them. Often, the method with which the mass media attempts to translate climate information to the public is with a rather conservative and traditional pictorial form that resembles landscape photography with the added spectacle of destruction, and some have referred to this as “disaster photography” for its fetishization of ruin. Ecocriticism is highly suspicious of this transformation of climate data to spectacular imagery for its dependence on the *sublime* power of Nature as a rhetorical appeal to the viewer’s emotions. The close bond between the sublime and the landscape genre is noted by WJT Mitchell to have developed out of 17th century Imperialism and the budding of Global Capitalism.[38] Even the English Romantics, whose naive return-to-Nature is sometimes interpreted as an early form of environmentalism, saw the New World as a tabula rasa from which a

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[36] B. Nyhan and J. Reifler, “When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions.” (*Political Behavior, 32*(2), 2010) 303-330.
[37] Garrard, “Endgame: Beckett’s Ecological Thought,” 383.
[38] WJT Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) viii.

new Utopia could be cultivated, with little regard for the approximately-500 indigenous groups facing rapid annihilation.

How then can Ecocriticsm be used as a theoretical framework for the evaluation and production of visual art?[39] One method used by Garrard that I have found useful as a way to organize a conglomerate of interwoven and complex ideas is to break things into tropes. The denotation of "trope" is simply the figurative or metaphorical use of a word or object, but it is more commonly understood as a pattern used for artistic effect. As a rhetorical device, the repetition of tropes is used to facilitate a sense of familiarity and conciliation with the viewer; for example, the Fool trope depicts a seemingly unwitting character who is, in fact, more keenly aware of the world he or she inhabits than anyone else, aside from the audience. This trope can be traced from Shakespeare's Falstaff (~1597), to Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928) (reprised in Steve McQueen's 1997 "Deadpan"), to Maurizio Cattelan's entire oeuvre.

For his predominantly literary concerns, Garrard divides *Ecocriticsm* into the following categories: Pastoral, Wilderness, Apocalypse, Dwellings, Animals, and Futures. In the works comprising *This Apparent Magnitude*, I have concentrated less on generic tropes and more on specific tropes, such as wind turbines, artificial flowers, and ticks. These are three examples that operate as synecdoches to the more general cultural tropes of renewable energy, petroleum products, and climate change. Wind turbines are symbolic of green energy incentives and as a growing industry, wind farming has reshaped the appearance of entire landscapes and caused controversy with regard to corporate land use and the fair distribution of energy and profit. White lilies are symbolic of the ritual of mourning, but, far from the traditional ritual intent, artificial

[39] By "visual art" I am referring to works inclusive of theatre and film that depend on visualization. For the purpose of this discussing, I am excluding works that remain exclusively in text format.

plastic flowers are little more than a benevolent form of littering. Ticks are the unsung victors of a warming northern hemisphere. The increasing migration of ticks into Canada is thanks to their parasitic attachment to warm blooded mammals enjoying a longer season to feed on leafy greens now competing with conifers at the edge of the receding Boreal forest. As subjects, breaking larger concepts into tropes opens up territory for research and experimentation when trying to understand ideas of Nature. As subjects, they can be worked and re-worked multiple times with various conceptual and media approaches.

Ecocriticism has also been valuable for introducing me to the theories of "Earth magnitude thought" and "hyperobjects," two concepts relating to problems of perception. In the First Thread of *Dark Ecology*, Morton describes Earth magnitude as "a scale sufficient to open the concept Earth to full amplitude."[40] Many theoretical paradigms, such as Marxism (which is wholly concerned with a human-flavoured version of historical materialism), make thinking of non-human life nearly impossible. In the case of Marxism, non-human creatures are merely an extension of a resource economy that includes things like limestone and pine trees. I imagine Earth magnitude as something like a giant microscope that transitions into a giant telescope, both beyond the actual *scope* of human technology and perception. Earth magnitude simultaneously focuses on the smallest matter possible, and the largest totality conceivable, making it a scale of thought that is both intimately specific and vastly universal. Important to Morton is that all of this happens at the level of the individual, not with an electron microscope or Hubel telescope, but with the imaginative capacity of the human mind. Thinking at Earth magnitude moves the artist away from pictorial depictions of landscapes, which are essentially a framed representation from the default vantage point of human eyes.

[40] Morton, *Dark Ecology* 24.

I have attempted to think at Earth magnitude when photographing aerial stretches of land from planes with my cellphone and later printing and folding the images into the shape of road maps. I recorded wind turbines near Pincher Creek and slowed the video down to one frame per second. In collaboration with artist Grace Wirzba, I designed a series of plush deer ticks that were thousands of times larger than the actual species, but small enough for a child to play with. With *Windbreak*, a gallery wall was built in a field and abandoned for the duration of a year. The remains will visually demonstrate the effect of one year of wind and sun on the exact same materials used to construct the controlled space in which the work will be exhibited. By placing the work on an outdoor wall, I hope to comment on pictorial traditions (specifically landscape photography traditions of Western Canada and the US), as well as reflect on the on the art market and the enduring white cube design of commercial art galleries. These projects all engage with the expanding and contracting of space and time in ways that are both playful and speculative in the sense that I am unable to predict the associations and connections that will result until the final product is shown to an audience. I am always excited when these projects encourage a polarity of reactions from viewers; the ticks have been described as both cute and repulsive; *Chorus*, the wind turbine video, has been described as both calming and anxiety-inducing. These responses are much more fascinating to me than the consensus responses to things like disaster photography, where viewers are forced to witness the anthropogenic alternation of the planet, as was the case with Edward Burtynsky's photographs in the exhibition *Anthropocene* at the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario.[41]

Earth magnitude thinking is closely connected to the concept of Hyperobjects in Morton's ecocritical paradigm. If data, graphs, and news headlines are what we see

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[41] https://ago.ca/exhibitions/anthropocene

in the centre of our vision, writes Morton, Hyperobjects are what we sense out of the corner of our eyes.[42] Hyperobjects are things that exist so massively distributed in time and space, relative to humans, that we cannot perceive them in any form data. Examples would include things like the total volume of Styrofoam on earth, the annual emissions of the transportation industry, the hole in the Ozone layer, and even things as banal as a rainstorm. We can only feel the raindrops hit our skin, hear them ping against a tin roof, and see puddles accumulating on the ground; the shape and objecthood of the rainstorm is otherwise unperceivable except in meteorological data and satellite imagery. Morton notes that these Hyperobjects are not simply "mental (or ideal) constructs, but are real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans."[43] He continues "A thing is just a rift between what it is and how it appears,"[44] and the emphasis on appearance is central to art, and to *This Apparent Magnitude*.

Until the late 19th century, Western art was preoccupied with attempts to imitate Nature – what the Greeks referred to as mimesis. Modern art distanced itself from mimetic preoccupations, culminating in the pared down formalism of Clement Greenberg and Abstract Expressionism, and postmodernist movements rejected mimetic preoccupations outright, but the desire to imitate appearances persists in mainstream visual culture in the form of calendar photography (now computer desktop backgrounds and screensavers), commercial interior decorating, and community art classes. The significance of Hyperobjects, which have always been around and recognized by humans, is that they

> provoke irreductionist thinking, that is, they present us with scalar dilemmas in which ontotheological statements about which thing is the most real (ecosystem, world, environment, or, conversely, individual, become impossible.[45]

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[42] Ibid, 11.
[43] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 14.
[44] Ibid, 18.
[45] Ibid, 19.

In other words, the awareness of Hyperobjects forces us to question if the image we're seeing of El Capitan, the default screensaver for the Apple IOS (Internetwork Operating System) update 10.11.6, is actually El Capitan. This may sound like Semiotics 101 – of course, the image of El Capitan is only light being registered by a digital sensor, but we may ask "What is the boundary of El Capitan, and what authority made that decision? How many living creatures are contained within the frame of this image that we can't see? How would this mountain look during a different season? Why does ascending a mountain never look the way you imagined it to look?" And endless other questions could be generated by simply considering the Hyperobjects we can conceive of, but can't perceive within the photo of El Capitan. The word scalar itself, meaning "to have only magnitude, not direction" is an uncannily decentering idea that also plays into the title of *This Apparent Magnitude*. How shapeless, directionless, and enormous is our predicament?

My study of ecocriticism has only just begun, and each new work I come across is another rabbit hole into a network of scholarship that has been lurking under the surface of visual art discourse for half a century. At times, I find the writing of Morton, Haraway, Garrard, and Solnit to be stylized, ornate, rhetorical, and highly literary, but despite that observation, they have succeeded to get my serious and critical attention over and over again. I feel that there will always be a distance between theoretical texts and the embodied experience of art spectatorship, but many of the concepts, from Garrard's organization of tropes, to Haraway's Cthulhucene, to Morton's Earth Magnitude-thinking and Hyperobjects, are useful beacons for mapping out the complex terrain between physical spaces and how they are represented. In a review of Morton's early ecocritical writing, Steve Keoni Holmes writes

> To borrow a phrase from Slavoj Žižek, in Chapter 3 [of *Ecology Without Nature*] ("Imagining Ecology without Nature"), Morton would heal

> ecocriticism with the spear that smote it; that is, if art initially presented the problem, then art can best indicate future trajectories. If modernity's subject-object problem of nature and culture is never resolved but deferred, then Morton's new techniques of nature writing are those of deconstruction/reconstruction – juxtaposition, collage, montage, "mash up" – where empirical reality is accepted in fragmented forms and recombined in ways that transport the contingency of natural reality without resolving it into a higher unity.[46]

In this statement, the spear that smote ecocriticism was the idealization of Nature in the photographs of Ansel Adams. I want to substitute "art" for "photography;" *if photography initially presented the problem, then photography can best indicate future trajectories*. If photography was the colonial tool of Western civilian and military expansion, then it may be the most appropriate tool to critique that history and its ideological assumptions as well.

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[46] Steve Keoni Holmes, "Wither Ecocriticism in the Era of the Hyperobject? A Review of Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* and T*he Ecological Thought*." (*The Journal of Ecocriticism* 4(1) January 2012) 59.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 In Defence of Drifting

> Beware, O wanderer, the road is walking too
> said Rilke one day to no one in particular.[47]

In the years spent completing my Studio Art BA at the University of Guelph, my practice was predominantly studio-based involving text, objects, and sculpture, thinking about what a museum of humanity might look like if it was organized by an extraterrestrial team of curators. What would they choose to display, and how would the didactics explain the artifacts? So, unbeknownst to me at the time, I was developing a long-term fascination with depiction and representation as a vehicle for knowledge-building. I was stripping away the influence of cultural codes and trying to understand our material world from a blank slate position of direct analysis and interpretation.

After graduating from the program and no longer having the assets of a studio and shop, I moved to Harp Lake in Lake of Bays Township, Ontario where my grandfather had bought a small property back in the early 1970s. Without internet or cell phone reception, my first artistic endeavour was clearly a reflection of the conditions of my solitude. The project was a sculptural intervention called *Sven*. I constructed a life-size mannequin that resembled a Swedish retiree, and borrowed a twelve-foot aluminum boat, a boat that my father had sold years ago to another resident of the lake, and anchored Sven in a shallow bay for the duration of one year. I recorded single-shot 12-minute videos each season before towing him back to shore and calling an end to the project. I wanted to comment on ideas of sculpture in the public realm, and intervene with peoples' daily lives in a carnivalesque, prankster kind of way. Surprisingly, the permanent residents of the lake enjoyed being in on the prank and

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[47] Jim Harrison, *After Ikkyu* (Colorado: Shambhala, 1996) 37.

were sad to see Sven go; the American cottage-renters, on the other hand, were relieved to find out that he wasn't an actual cadaver.

Figure 01: Tyler Muzzin, *Sven*, Harp Lake, 2016.

When autumn fully made its arrival in mid-October with the changing of the leaves, busloads of tourists would come up from the Greater Toronto Area to experience the fall colours in Muskoka. The Algonquin Art Centre assembled an exhibition of blazing red and orange landscape paintings. Every flyer, brochure, and magazine had photographs of crimson maples and golden birch trees leaning over calm shores. The City of Huntsville had recently commissioned a series of large-scale reproductions of Tom Thomson and The Group of Seven paintings to be mounted outside of public buildings. Having spent a great deal of my childhood in Muskoka, I had more or less found the tourism industry to be a reflection of my reality. It wasn't until I moved there full-time that I learned of the struggling employment rate, high levels of alcoholism and drug use, a health care system strained by a rapidly-growing population of seniors, a real estate market inflated due to the proliferation of luxury

investment properties. I also learned that almost half of Algonquin Park is open to logging, making it the only commercially-harvested provincial park in Ontario.

I had read Roy MacGregor's meticulously-researched *Northern Light* (2010), an investigation compiling the evidence surrounding Tom Thomson's death, so while I was struggling to get a sense of social reality in Muskoka, I was simultaneously being seduced by its mysteries. A few years earlier in 2012 when I was working as a studio assistant for an artist in Toronto, I told him I was looking forward to the semester ending so I could go up to Muskoka. He looked befuddled – "Why?" he asked, "isn't it just mosquitos, rain, and bacteria up there?" I found his anti-Romantic sentiment to be off-putting, but true, so I asked him "What are *your* plans for the summer?" to which he replied, "Heading up to Algonquin Park as soon as possible." This confirmed to me that the sentimental and the skeptical are allowed to coexist.

Figure 02: Tyler Muzzin, *Resting Places Image 5, Tom Thomson's grave*, Canoe Lake 2016.

With the idea of "mosquitos, rain, and bacteria" in my mind, I began planning a canoe trip with the intent of documenting parts of Muskoka that would never be visible to weekend vacationers. This was not a search for the authentic - I was hyperaware of that Romantic trapping; it was a search for *another* kind of representation. My images would be no truer than the blazing leaves over pristine shores, but they would complicate the well-worn patterns of depiction. I would begin at the grave site of Tom Thomson on Canoe Lake and paddle south to the GTA (Greater Toronto Area), finishing at the Group of Seven cemetery at the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg. The project, called *Resting Places*, covered 340km and took place between June 10-24, 2016. I had underestimated the challenges of this project and in the end barely scraped together 130 print-worthy images for a photo book. I shot the entire trip on a Canon T2i, my cellphone, and a Polaroid action camera. The video was overexposed and completely unusable, and any ambition I had for spontaneous, socially-engaged work was crushed by the realisation that since school was still in session, I was mostly passing endless shores of vacant cottages abundantly decorated with "NO TRESPASSING" signs.

Figure 03: Tyler Muzzin, *Private Property signs,* Muskoka 2017.

Despite the many setbacks, I learned to appreciate drifting as a methodology for production, one that was far from the centripetal, studio-centric mentality of art school. It's not that the art instructors encouraged one way or another, but the habit of being stationary was simply a condition of attendance, deadlines, critiques, and being perpetually available for email correspondence. The physical activity of drifting has many art historical associations, from the problematic colonial/explorer dynamic, to the privileged and disinterested flâneur, to the anarchic Situationist dérive. As a methodology, I'm less interested in drifting as a physical experience, but as a mental experience: drifting as the intersection of the intellectual and the spatial with the aleatory. You can drift along your neighbourhood sidewalks, or in a hotel room. You can drift at the workplace or in your bed.

In many ways, drifting is like conducting an experiment without predicting the results. When art uses words like research and experiment in order to justify its role at institutions of higher learning, such as universities, people may think one is referring to

the steps of the Scientific Method that are often taught in education systems. This involves asking a question, doing background research, forming a hypothesis, conducting an experiment, recording observations, and analysing the results; however, from Scholasticism to the Renaissance, the word "experiment" was used interchangeably with the word "experience."[48] Drifting, then, as an *experience-experiment*, can be a methodology for artists who may not know enough about their subject (or media/materials) to confidently predict a conclusion. To me, this seems like a fitting methodology when working within physical environments that we are not experts in. Arguably, most humans living in the 21st century are too detached from their physical environments to claim expertise anyway; yet, this approach to drifting may serve as a better path to generating art through experience than an approach that seeks conclusions on the back of pre-established knowledge.

2.2 Images and Objects

Six months into the second year of my MFA, I realized that my focus on lens-based media and objects had eclipsed all of the other media and methods I had been enthusiastic about in the past, including text, drawing, and public intervention/performance-to-video. This was brought to my attention during a studio visit with two guest artist-curators. In unrelated comments, they first noticed a volume of Robert Smithson's writings and interviews on my bookshelf and brought up the concept of entropy, and then referred to Barthes' *Camera Lucida* with the idea of death as the *eidos*, or essence, of photography.[49] I noticed that much of what I was doing could be

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48 Elke Bippus, "Artistic Experiments as Research" (*Experimental Systems: Future Knowledge in Artistic Research*, Ed. Michael Schwab, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013) 121.
49 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981) 15.
"Death" as the momentary pausing of time.

seen as a push and pull between the slow process of decay and the momentary halting of this process with photographic technology.

In 2018, I prepared some anthotype photography experiments using the organic pigment found in wine to make images. The pigment is photodegradable and fades when exposed to sunlight. The experiments failed to yield what I had intended, but the idea of photo-degradation began to permeate other projects I was working on. Concurrent with the anthotypes, I began collecting rusted cans that had been dumped with various other garbage into the Frank Slide. Because of the specific geology of the slide, a field of tumbled limestone boulders averaging 13 metres deep, the tin and aluminum cans were essentially suspended above a giant filtration system. This allowed the cans to maintain their shape and not dissolve as quickly as they would if they had been left in a wet ditch. By gathering the cans and keeping them in dry storage, I was temporarily halting the process of oxidization. This process was not unlike fixing a photograph or hiding a fugitive pigment from the light.

In the context of ecocriticism, the objects wear a patina of the ecosystem from where they were sourced. The oil cans, some estimated to be from the 1970s, are indexical representations, in a Kraussian sense,[50] of approximately 50 years of weather in the Crowsnest Pass. In a sense, they are the footprint of multiple hyperobjects and the co-production of human detritus and regional climate. In her essay "Ruinophilia: Appreciation of Ruins," Svetlana Boym writes that "Ruins give us a shock of vanishing materiality. Suddenly our critical lens changes, and instead of marveling at grand projects and utopian designs, we begin to notice weeds and dandelions in the crevices of the stones."[51]

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[50] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," (*October*, Vol. 3, 1977) 68-81.
[51] Svetlana Boym, "Ruinophilia: Appreciation of Ruins" (*Atlas of Transformation*, 2011). http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-

2.3 Situating the Work

In his essay “The Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot concedes that the words “tradition” and “traditional” are most commonly used to describe things that adhere closely to their immediate predecessors, or to a long lineage of cultural production that hasn’t changed very much over time. These things, such as traditional cooking or traditional dance, are lauded for their faithful re-enactment of a ritual or practice that is important to cultural memory. This connotation is different in contemporary art. To say that someone’s media installation is “traditional” would likely be taken as a negative criticism, but outside of specific regions and cultures, the word “tradition” can be applied to artistic disciplines on a multinational, multitemporal level. For example, the tradition of abstract painting includes everything about abstract painting from Cezanne, to Kandinsky, to Sandra Meigs. Eliot argues, writing in the context of poetry, that a poet who understands the tradition in which he or she is working is able to channel many voices simultaneously without having to worry about the pitfalls of novelty and individualism. This poet is more likely to cultivate and sustain a complex body of work than the poet who pursues gimmickry or fashionable flash-in-the-pan type attention.[52] For this reason, it’s important for me to be able to situate my methodology within a “tradition,” and in the following I will describe four experiences of looking at exhibitions that have left a finger print on *This Apparent Magnitude* and the work I will continue to make going forward.

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transformation/html/r/ruinophilia/ruinophilia-appreciation-of-ruins-svetlana-boym.html

[52] T.S. Eliot. “The Tradition and the Individual Talent.” *Norton Anthology of Criticism*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 8th ed. Vol 2. (New York: Norton, 2006) 2319–25.

2012 *Mike Nelson: Amnesiac Hide* at The Power Plant, Toronto, followed by the 2012 Shenkman Lecture in Contemporary Art: Mike Nelson in conversation with Robert Enright at the University of Guelph.

To put this formative experience into perspective, it was scarcely a year earlier when a painting instructor asked everyone in the class who their favourite artist was and I replied "J.M.W. Turner." Things took a turn when I realized that the smell of linseed oil was enough to make me sick, let alone having to stand in front of my own nauseating efforts for four months. The instructor mercifully guided me down the hall to Laurel Woodcock's Extended Practices class where I immediately felt more at home with language and conceptual art. The volume of canon I digested was immense and the rate at which I digested it was rapid. This education was lasting and important, but in retrospect I now have a slight grudge against much of the neatly-resolved, aphoristic "conceptual" work that I was so excited about at the time.

Figure 04: Massey, Scott. *Mike Nelson's Gang of Seven*, The Power Plant, Toronto 2012.

Mike Nelson's work introduced me to a different conceptual approach that left me, as a viewer, lost and bewildered; nothing was resolved. At first, I struggled with this feeling, blaming my own critical faculties for failing to put the pieces together. In the main space, there was an installation of four connected Airstream trailers furnished as meticulously as a Kubrick set. In the adjoining galleries, there was a tall shelf with the belongings of Nelson's late friend and collaborator, Erlend Williamson, who died in a climbing accident in the Scottish Highlands, a slideshow projection of abandoned fire pits, and a room filled with provisional sculptures made from detritus collected from the West Coast of Canada. In the upstairs gallery was a number of office copiers with thousands of pages scattered across the floor like puzzle pieces of a fragmented manuscript. The didactic panels offered some information, but I admit to being borderline irritated about how much mental work I was expected to do.

After visiting The Power Plant, I followed up with some research on Nelson and his best-known project, *I, Imposter*, housed at the British Pavilion during the 2011 Venice Biennale. I learned about the Amnesiacs, a fictional biker gang that drifts through a parallel modern dystopia, leaving only material traces throughout Nelson's installations. The Amnesiacs were the ones who beachcombed the West Coast and constructed the scavenged sculptures at The Power Plant. Piece by piece, I began to see that Nelson's entire practice was one ongoing commitment to speculative fiction. This was confirmed in a conversation with art critic and journalist Robert Enright at the 2012 Shenkman Lecture when Nelson was asked what branches of art theory he looks to. He replied that since leaving school he mostly gleans from science fiction novels. This literary richness struck a chord with me and I began to see Nelson's practice as one singular, amorphous and intertextual weaving of reality and fiction. Why, then, shouldn't he just commit to writing stories? The answer, for me, is in the immediacy of

the objects and the way they transcend language and enter the viewer both phenomenologically and imaginatively. I can still remember one of the Airstream trailers with its sepia tint of nicotine and musty, coffee-stained cupboards. To me, this experience was tactile, theatrical, conceptual, visual, but most of all, lasting. If language, in postmodernity, is metaphorical at best, this encounter bridged something between me and its creator in a way that literature can never fully achieve.

On a considerably more modest scale, I hope to replicate elements of this experience with *Windbreak*. I am similarly giving very little narrative explanation of where or when this wall is from, what happened to it, or who it belongs to. Thinking of speculative fiction as an approach (also known as "philosophy fiction"), the explanation for this wall exists outside of the viewer's ability to make empirical deductions.[53] Was this wall part of a larger gallery? It has all of the signifiers of a white cube wall, but why the support structure? Was it originally from the Trianon, or was it moved from another gallery? These are some of the questions I hope to raise.

Nelson's practice of scavenging from sites also led me to Robert Smithson's "Provisional Theory of Non-Sites" in which he describes the non-site as non-expressive, yet abstract; not a site, yet the representation of a site.[54] *Windbreak* operates like a reverse non-site in this sense, because it leaves the control of the studio space for an outdoor location where it is subject to the conditions of the site, and then re-enters the control of the gallery. This double-displacement mirrors the double-displacement of the traditional lifecycle of an artwork from studio to gallery to collector, but in an illogical order. The details regarding the transition between

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[53] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 9.

[54] Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites," *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 364.

locations remains unrevealed, as if the work itself has the ability to teleport, connecting it to ideas of speculative fiction.

Figure 05: Hafkensheid, Toni. *Mike Nelson's Amnesiac Hide*,
The Power Plant, Toronto 2012.

2012 Pierre Huyghe, *Untilled*, Documenta 13, Kassel.

Figure 06: Huyghe, Pierre. *Untilled*, Documenta 13, Kassel 2011-12.
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

A few months after Mike Nelson's visit to Canada, I had the fortune of visiting Documenta 13. The director, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, had put forth a curatorial thesis based on the legacy of *arte povera*, which I was excited to learn more about. I was also meeting up with two close friends who happened to be in Germany at the time. Neither of them were artists, nor particularly interested in contemporary art, so I could sense that the long queues, stuffy atmosphere, and unrewarding returns, were quickly starting to fatigue them. On the second day of our four-day trip, we decided to take a break and head to the 1.50 km^2 Karlsaue Park, consisting of Baroque gardens mixed with unmanicured Nature areas. A few exhibition works were scattered throughout the park, including Song Dong's *Doing Nothing Garden* and Giuseppe Penone's *Ideas of Stone*. There was a work on the map located in the park's compost location by the artist Pierre Huyghe, whose name we all terribly mispronounced. I recognized him from art history as the artist who sanded down gallery walls, revealing a stratigraphy of paint layers. When Sabrina and Mathieu had finished their beers and bratwursts, we headed over to see his new project *Untilled*.

The compost location was contained within in a ring of conifers and had one designated entrance that we neglected, and in attempting to pass through the ring of trees, found our legs entwined with stinging nettles. We eventually broke through to the centre of the ring, startling a number of spectators. The entire atmosphere of the park seemed to shift, as if entering the Zone in Tarkovsky's meditative sci-fi film *Stalker*; everything was the same, but different. An emaciated-looked dog, pure white, save for one fuchsia leg ambled by, completely indifferent to our presence. Large, strange tropical weeds stretched over our heads, stone tiles were stacked in irregular, yet seemingly intentional piles, and at the epicentre of the ring was a stone sculpture of a reclining nude whose head was completely engulfed by a colony of bees.

In the following two days, I returned to *Untilled* three times. Having come to terms with letting things remain "unresolved" in Mike Nelson's installation, I was much more at ease with simply experiencing the work and letting the various associations come and go like a network of firing synapses. In a conversation with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Huyghe describes his methodology as thinking about the exhibition space as an ecosystem.[55] He has achieved this not only by introducing living plants and animals into his work, but by organizing the space so that elements will inevitably change in unpredictable ways over the course of the exhibition. This surrendering of artistic agency is a reminder to the viewer that the idea of the exhibition space as a sterilized vacuum is only a modernist myth, and even though the technological infrastructure of galleries is able to minimize the effects of things like chromogenic decay and oxidization, everything is in a state of perpetual change, or what Smithson would refer to as entropy.[56]

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[55] "Pierre Huyghe in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist." *YouTube*, 17 Oct 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emYOOVRzG8E&t=1854s.
[56] Robert Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible" 1973.
"Entropy" definition: lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.

The most direct appropriation of this methodology (which is not Huyghe's discovery and owes much of its theoretical groundwork to Institutional Critique) is with my project *Windbreak*. Having constructed the wall in the summer of 2018 with the sole condition that I ignore it for 12 months, anything that alters it will be beyond my control. The first major incident happened within the first two months when the wall blew over in a wind storm. The second incident was the accumulation of bird droppings that possibly occurred because of the presence of insects that surrendered their camouflage in the field to bask on the smooth white surface of the wall. The third incident was the detachment and coiling of the drywall tape, likely due to the wind and temperature fluctuation in December. As I write this section, the wall still has three more months in the field before I relocate it to the Trianon Gallery. I am both excited and nervous to see the results.

Refined Pallets is another project in *This Apparent Magnitude* involving the methodology of extending the work beyond the control of the gallery. Six wooden pallets will be stacked in the alley behind the gallery. They will each be painted a different hue of green based on softwood trees that have become appropriated into pantone names, including "Pine Bough" and "Spruce Grove." This upscaling of the pallet reflects current trends in DIY decorating made popular by websites likes Pinterest and Etsy. The conclusion of this project will be the return of the pallets into circulation (as functional objects, not artworks), but there is a chance that some will be taken prior to the closing of the exhibition. As with many elements of Huyghe's *Untilled*, there is a constant questioning of value in terms of what belongs to the art and what belongs to the site.

2013 Hans-Peter Feldmann, *HANS-PETER FELDMANN*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg.

Figure 07: Rogge, Henning. *Hans Peter-Feldmann at Deichtorhallen*, Hamburg 2013.

At the time of Hans-Peter Feldmann's retrospective at the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, I was completing a student residency at the Hochschule für Künste in Bremen. Until then, I had only known of Feldmann's artist books and had occasionally seen collections of his found photographs in museum photography surveys. I remember it being a beautiful day in May when I took the train up to the famous port city that had nearly put Bremen out of business a thousand years ago. The 4000m² Deichtorhallen, which used to be a market square, had a few partition walls for this exhibition, but it was not organized in any sequential, chronological, or thematic way. The dispersion of the work seemed to represent, rather chaotically, Feldmann's spontaneous and intuitive practice. I spent hours pinballing through the exhibition from photos, to objects, to kinetic sculptures, and back to photos, yet the most exciting moment was when leaving the Deichtorhallen after a few hours of joyful spectating – in the parking lot, in one of

the parking spaces, there was an upside down blue Volvo. The car fit perfectly and deliberately in the space. There was no damage, it was simply upside down.

My takeaway from the exhibition *HANS-PETER FELDMANN* is directly related to the artist's own name (in capital letters) being used for the title of his retrospective; the work was all about Hans-Peter Feldmann and his peculiar sensibility. "Sensibility" is a foggy word to describe it, but it was as if the individual works had both everything and nothing to do with each other, and were unified by this conflicting relationship of unity and dissonance. I sensed no commitment to one particular historical moment or school of thought. It was simultaneously Dada-Fluxus-Pop-Photo-Conceptual, and this, in a sense, made the attempt to categorize his practice feel like a frivolous and pedantic game.

I have felt this way about many artists, including Martin Kippenberger, Fischli & Weiss, and Kelly Mark. With them, there is a defiant refusal to be pigeonholed, yet a submissiveness to be branded by the art world, as long as that brand is exclusively their own.[57] In my own practice, it's been necessary to have up to a dozen different projects on the go at once, since I have not yet had the opportunity to focus on something monumental or financially-committed. As with most emerging artists (another form of branding), there is a great likelihood that the work will be documented, proposed for exhibition for a couple years, rejected, and then thrown out. Part of this is due to storage limitations and frequently relocating, but part is also due to the shifting way the practice develops. To think of this kind of a studio practice in a positive light, one could argue

[57] Of course, this brand is not exclusively the artist's, but the willingness to defend it made *Toronto Star* news headlines in 2015 when Kelly Mark delivered a cease and desist to Old School, a pub in Dundas West, Toronto for appropriating Mark's neon work "I called shotgun infinity when I was twelve" (2006). https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2015/08/20/artists-claim-dundas-west-restaurant-copied-their-art.html

that it is a dialectical process through which works build upon, and eventually replace each other.

I have not yet come to the formulaic John Baldessari crisis where I torch all of my existing work in a whisky-addled bonfire, so the changes in my overall *sensibility* have evolved gradually. Even though concepts and media choices may change suddenly based on immediate curiosities, many have commented that there's something oddly consistent throughout the last five years of my work. En masse, it may look like a cacophonic mess, but eventually the pieces start to come together, and I think this methodology of works building from on to the next can be an interesting way to make a single exhibition as well, not just a way of thinking about an entire practice.

Figure 08: Deichtorhallen Hamburg. Hans Peter-Feldmann, Deichtorhallen Hamburg 2013.

2017 Louise Lawler, *WHY PICTURES NOW*, MoMA, New York City.

Figure 09: MoMA Archive. Louise Lawler, *WHY PICTURES NOW*,
MoMA New York 2017.

Louise Lawler is best known for her photographs that appropriate the work of other artists. As members of The Pictures Generation, a group of artist-photographers who were part of an eponymously-named exhibition at the MET in 2009,[58] Lawler and artists Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince have become textbook names in conversations about the controversial and meta-artistic strategy of appropriation. Upon entering the exhibition WHY PICTURES NOW, I had the same question in my mind – why now?; the digital camera had been a tool for me, but I didn't consider what I did with it to be

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58 *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art was curated by Douglas Eklund in 2009. The show made reference to the 1977 exhibition *Pictures* organized by art historian and critic Douglas Crimp at New York's Artists Space gallery in 1977.

photography. What quickly struck me was how Lawler also re-appropriated her own work, not just the work of others. By integrating herself into the art market, her work became fair game, and this produced a series of works of re-appropriated appropriation, the snake eating its own tail, to the point where identifying the "original" photograph became a moot endeavour. An example is her 1988 *Does Marilyn Monroe Make You Cry?,* a photograph of an Andy Warhol print being sold at auction, which is often paired somewhere else in the gallery with an identical photograph by Lawler titled *Does Andy Warhol Make You Cry?,* the only difference being the title. This playful attention to context places Lawler within the second generation of Institutional Critique,[59] the first being frequently associated with artists Michael Asher and Hans Haacke in the 1970s.[60]

Figure 10: Lawler, Louise. *Does Marilyn Monroe Make You Cry?* 1988.

[59] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/institutional-critique
Institutional critique is the act of critiquing an institution as artistic practice, the institution usually being a museum or an art gallery.
[60] Peter Schjeldahl, "Louise Lawler's Beguiling Institutional Critique" (*The New Yorker*, 01 May. 2017).

Walking through WHY PICTURES NOW felt like walking through a quiz where the answers were given and it was your job to come up with the right questions – perhaps why the enigmatic title lacks a question mark at the end. Lawler wasn't asking you; she was offering you possible explanations, answers that she was granted access to via the auction houses, the museum archives, and the dining rooms of mega-collectors. All of a sudden, a photo of a photo wasn't just a cheeky gesture, but a metaphor for the entire cyclical nature of art and the art market, and various other networks of dissemination. If art is in any way a reflection of our society, then Lawler's photos represent the vanity and fetishization of luxury commodities.

Lawler is also known for printing her images in unconventional, non-archival formats, such as under glass paperweights, and on ephemeral wall vinyl. This made me realize the potential of the photograph as an object; in fact, it made me realize that every photograph is an object in some capacity, whether as printed material, or as digital information. Photographs can be archived and conserved, but the slow march of degradation continues on, as it does to anything under the sun. There are many instances in *This Apparent Magnitude* where I play with the objecthood of the photograph; with *Windbreak*, I purchase a stock photo, which is like purchasing an idea. The physical print becomes nearly unrecognizable after one year outside, but my ownership extends far beyond that single print. I can continue to print the image for the rest of my life. I can also print it commercially up to 2000 times. Yet, even with this seeming image-immortality, the digital file itself slowly loses information over time – not to mention the obsolescence of the technology used to store, replicate, and print it. One day, accessing the PDF will seem as archaic as accessing microfiche in the dusty basement of a library.

In *The Impossibility of Rain*, I re-photograph the work of the preceding exhibition and vinyl-mount my image on the exact 48" x 36" of the wall, printed to

scale. Adjacent this image is a photograph printed on vinyl and laminated on a piece of aluminum composite material. The image was exposed to high heat, and the vinyl began to peel from the substrate. Across the room, a 48” x 36” sheet of laminate is adhered to the wall, ostensibly extending the archival life of the wall paint pigment for approximately 100 years. All of these exercises and experiments derive from the consideration of the photograph as an object, an idea that was central to Louise Lawler’s exhibition WHY PICTURES NOW.

CHAPTER THREE: PRODUCTION

3.1 *Blairmore Plaque* [Image 01]

This is a plaster cast for a hypothetical plaque that could one day be cast in bronze. When I was a resident at the Gushul Writer's Cottage in Blairmore, I noticed that there were plaques made for nearly everything in town, but they were only from a very specific historical window of time, which was from the incorporation of the town in 1898 and the first Post Office in 1899 to roughly the post-WWII era and the beginning of the post-historical, post-coal mining Blairmore that we know today. Coal mining stopped in 1937. The abundance of plaques came about as part of the Heritage Inventory Project of September 2014 for the towns of Blairmore and Frank.[61]

The Introduction to the project reads: "Rich in human history, and complimented by a wealth of heritage resources, the Municipality recognizes the importance of its historic assets and the stewardship responsibilities that accompany them." Among the historic assets to be plaqued was: a sauna, a horse stable, and a grocery store. No mention is made of the 11,000-year-old artifacts of Clovis culture found in Frank, or the Crow, Kootenay and Blackfoot peoples who frequented the region freely until the mid 19th century, the impact of the Fur Trade, or the longest lasting Communist municipal government in Canadian history, which was in Blairmore from 1933 to 1936.

The bronze plaque, as an historical marker, asserts an authority that something like a Wikipedia article does not. By authority, I'm referring to a single and uncontested authorship over how a site/location is represented. A Wikipedia article has multiple contributors and can be modified to accommodate revisions and new information.

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[61] Heritage Inventory Project for the towns of Blairmore and Frank https://www.crowsnestpass.com/public/download/documents/13945

When a plaque becomes outdated, it has to be replaced, so it takes enormous trust in one's comprehension of history to commit to making a plaque in the first place.

Since even the most mundane things in Blairmore have been given plaques, I started to wonder what couldn't be plaqued. I came up with this declaration, that "On June 12, 2018, this plaque was stolen from the town of Blairmore, AB." This situation is clearly impossible because of the order of events. An object's theft cannot be commemorated before its own creation. This attempt to confuse chronology is a response to the historical plaque and its function as a cultural monologue and an oversimplified form of textual representation.

3.2 ***2017, 2018, 2019*** [Image 02]

paper road maps reduced to only the roads I had travelled on up to that year.

This began as a simple conceptual exercise that was originally going to be pinned up like an insect, but after completing the first map and allowing the paper to wilt, I noticed that there was a subtle quality of movement that responded to what was happening in its environment (a door opening or closing, someone walking by, someone talking or breathing). This reference to the body was doubled by the major roadways being represented in red and blue, the same colours used to represent the circulatory system in medical diagrams. The form itself also came to resemble the pathways that make up nervous and pulmonary systems in humans and many other organisms – the main arteries and corridors branching off into nerve fibres or "tertiary roads."

The micro referencing the macro in seemingly unrelated structures (i.e. Circulatory system and provincial roadways) is in line with Timothy Morton's concept of "Human Thought at Earth Magnitude," which goes far beyond the "think globally, act locally" and stretches our capacity to think of everything, on all scales, happening at

once. Geocritically, these maps are also an intervention on the authority of printed road maps, reducing a universalized map into a personalized map. In Guy Debord's Situationist vocabulary, this would be a psycho-geographic map, and one could imagine expanding this conceptual strategy with any number of other subjectivities, producing infinite variations based on the same map.

3.3 ***Tick Scan*** [Image 03]

I found this tick crawling on my arm while I was working at my computer in Innerkip, Ontario in May 2018. Incidentally, I was photocopying forms for the University, so I incorporated the tick into the activity I was doing by placing it on the scanner and taking its portrait. This is one of a few works I've done that compares human technologies of replication and dissemination with the growing expansion of tick territory. This includes a series of plush ticks based on a simple sewing pattern that could be reproduced by beginner level sewers. My intent was to offer the template to high school Home Economics classes as a way to use voluntary student labour to produce a collection of ticks, but that hasn't happened yet. This installation method is meant to give a provisional, dark room or lab-like feel to the scans. It's mounted lower than standard gallery height to imply an ergonomic accessibility for handling, to be able to move and rearrange the photos in a way that suggests some kind of forensic investigation. I have placed it near the title vinyl as a microscopic counterpoint to the words "apparent magnitude." A tiny creature with an massive impact on both ecosystems and imaginations.

3.4 ***Spalding Wall Intervention*** [Image 04]

This mural was started by Jeffrey Spalding in 2009. Each exhibiting artist following the group show *New Works* was invited to add a layer of paint from their

installation to the wall, creating a hidden stratification, a reversal of Pierre Huyghe's *Timekeeper* series in which the artist gently sands away the gallery walls, revealing layers of previous colours. It's also a systematic formal approach reminiscent of John Baldessari's "Six Colourful Inside Jobs" from 1971 and, of course, Sol Lewitt's instructional wall drawings. Speaking about Spalding's project, Eric Cameron writes that "it's a layered mural harking back to the 1970s… history folds in on itself and, once again, 'All is Always Now.'"[62] I was happy to comply and join this decade-old tradition, but mostly because I wanted to mask the awful yellow from the previous contributor. I was already working with "Pine"-named colours with the *Refined Pallets* in the alleys, so I wanted to make this into a work of its own rather than just follow the prescribed formula. While looking at paint chips in Home Depot, I came across a colour called "Climate Change" produced by the company BEHR. I had to take a second glance to be sure that this was, in fact, approved by BEHR's marketing division. I took a handful of chips to the studio and did a Google search to see if this was itself an artist's project. I also looked to see if much work or writing had been done on this strange semiotic-chromatic anomaly. I found nothing. Except for a link to a "Coordinated Palette for Climate Change," which, if you're interested, includes the colours Monet, White Cliffs, and Back to Nature. I mentioned the significance of drifting as a methodology in my support paper. Sometimes when you're drifting, the art gods just hand you these things. The final work attempts to both interrupt Spalding's instructions, while also referencing the work of Garry Neil Kennedy, a Canadian conceptual artist who had a massive impact on language-based art from the late 60s onward.

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[62] Eric Cameron, "Geoffrey Spalding Then and Now," August 2009. https://www.umanitoba.ca/schools/art/content/galleryoneoneone/js02.html

3.5 *Looking Back At Us* [Images 05, 06]

inkjet print on archival paper, 22”x16”

Standing in front of the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise and facing the Victoria Glacier is the most photographed vantage point in Alberta, and one of the most iconic landscape images in the Canadian cultural imagination.[63] Formally, this is because of the turquoise waters, resulting from the sun reflecting off of the “rock flour” which drains into the lake after the weight of the melting glacier has caused enormous grinding pressure on the rocks beneath it. Secondly, the composition that can be photographically achieved is a geological symmetry that rarely happens naturally. This symmetrical composition was especially popular in Romantic landscape paintings, guiding the viewer to a distant, primordial horizon far from the smokestacks of places like Sheffield. The Lake Louise vantage point could be thought of as a landscape painter’s readymade composition. Jin-Mi Yoon took advantage of this with her *Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise)* (1991-2000) where every perspective line leads directly to her less-than-enthusiastic facial expression.

Lake Louise was named after Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, and the glacier that watches over the lake was named after none other than Princess Louise’s mother, Queen Victoria. So, it’s convenient that the paragon of Canadian landscape imagery has, in its namesake, a direct connection to its European colonial history. This photograph wasn’t planned, even though it looks somewhat choreographed. In that sense, it is more reminiscent of Martin Parr’s tourist photos in the photobook *Small World* than it is to Jeff Wall’s or Stan Douglas’ staged images.

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[63] Lake Louise ranked on Travel Alberta https://www.travelalberta.com/ca/articles/eight-of-albertas-photography-hot-spots-719/

3.6 ***Windbreak*** [Images 07-11]

Windbreak is the primary work in this exhibition. It consists of a stock photo framed and mounted on a wall and placed in a field for one year, commencing on July 8th, 2018. The remains of the photo and wall are then exhibited within the gallery in the orientation and condition they are found. The stock photo depicts a sunset from the vantage point of a turbine farm looking west from somewhere near Pincher Creek, Alberta. The digital image was originally posted by istockphoto.com user dan_prat and I purchased the Extended Rights to this photo for $243.00 CAD. With this purchase, I am legally permitted to reproduce the image up to 2000 times for commercial purposes, and print the image infinitely for personal use. The wall I constructed was built to the specifications that would be required for most temporary gallery exhibitions – with 2x4 studs spaced 16" apart, dry walled, mudded, taped, and painted white. The wall stands 8'6" high and 16' wide. Thirteen angled supports, along with two nylon ropes staked to the ground were used to fortify the wall, but the entire structure collapsed during a windstorm in December 2018. The winds near Lethbridge Alberta frequently have gusts over 80kph.

The wall had been erected with its face oriented slightly north of due west so that the image of the sunset would mirror the actual sunset every evening. When the wall collapsed, it fell backwards and was blown approximately twenty feet from its original position. From then on, the image was left facing up to the sky.

Svetlana Boym writes about ruinophilia as a relatively recent phenomenon, partly because it's hard to imagine much of our contemporary material culture of planned obsolescence lasting long enough to become a ruin. We celebrate the ruins of Tintern Abbe and the surviving columns of the Parthanon. We even fantasize about Atlantis, a ruin we haven't found yet. But it's not without immense effort and funds that these artifacts can remain as ruins. There's something darkly ironic about the Notre

Dame Cathedral Fire being caused by a $150 million-Euro renovation project that started in 2017.

In Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*, he quotes a farmer, who says that if you want to tear down a barn all you have to do is cut an eighteen-inch hole in the roof, then stand back and watch.[64] This made me think of the white cube and the enormous amount of labour and money that goes into maintaining an artificial sense of neutrality and sterility. As a kind of speculative tableaux, the Wall allows you to imagine what would happen to everything else in this space, made of the same materials: wood, gypsum, nails, screws, paint if, say, the roof suddenly disappeared and every surface was exposed to the sun, wind, and rain for a year. I chose one year, thinking about some of the projects by Ken Nicol and Kelly Mark that use arbitrary units of time as pseudo-scientific control metrics, implying that, like a scientific experiment, the project could be completed again and again systematically. This project has a strong connection to Institutional Critique and the work and teaching of Michael Asher and his "dissection of the assumptions that govern how we perceive art." Artists often explore ideas about the ephemerality of the artwork, but wall this explores the ephemerality of the exhibition space itself. It also plays with the viewer's expectations in a way that reminds me of Ed Ruscha's rule that "Bad art makes you say 'Wow. Huh?' and Good art makes you say 'Huh? Wow.'"[65] I hope that effect is achieved once the story of what happened to the wall is revealed.

While completing this project, I was thinking a lot about Abbas Akhavan's *Variations on Ghost* that I saw at the 2018 Liverpool Biennial. The sculpture consists of

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[64] Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*, (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007), 113.
[65] Jonathon Keats, "Huh? Wow! This Exhibit Reveals The Secret To Being As Great An Artist As Ed Ruscha," *forbes.com*, 16, Nov 2016. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathonkeats/2015/11/16/huh-wow-this-exhibit-reveals-the-secret-to-being-as-great-an-artist-as-ed-ruscha/#1552edf2f1a8

a replica of an Assyrian statue destroyed by ISIS. It's made with the technique of "dirt-ramming" using only soil and water. Over the course of the exhibition, the sculpture dries out and starts to fall apart. I was captivated by the gesture of memorializing something with a deliberately temporary method, acknowledging that even if ISIS had spared the statue, it would still face inevitable entropy, and I find this thought very humbling.

The use of a stock photo came to mind when I was having a hard time deciding what image I should use, knowing that even though the project is more about materiality than content, the content would still have to be considered. A friend asked me if it was important that I used my own image, which let me off the hook. I chose this image by dan_prat of Calgary Alberta, because it both references the sun and the wind, the primary hyperobjects that the wall would have to contend with. Given that the image is of a wind farm near Pincher Creek, about 100km west of the wall's location, there is a process of mirroring – the image reflects its referent in real space. The idea of mirroring was often used by Robert Smithson with his work on non-sites (the abstracted relocation of materials from a specific site), an important reference in conversation about site and the displacement/re-placement of objects to and from the exhibition space.

3.7 ***personal correspondence*** [Image 12]

> you know what's nuts – the opening scene of terminator when the nuclear bomb goes off – that scene… the really sunny day... it's something I always think about and always have... like it really left an impression on me. it's so weird. I don't even remember that movie but I remember like… a playground and it's so fucking sunny you can't even see when the bomb goes off. whenever it's sunny I day dream about that. weird. (personal correspondence, June 2018)

This text is from a conversation I had with my sister in mid-June last year when it was extremely hot in both Blairmore and Toronto, where we were living. It struck me

as significant that someone who would never intentionally watch a movie like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* would forever associate a hot summer day with the detonation of a nuclear bomb in central LA. It made me realize the significance of visual culture on shaping our ideas about ecological phenomena as mundane as hot, sunny days. I then thought about this statement in relationship to the wall, how the blast from an atomic bomb is similar to being exposed to the sun for a year, but much quicker and much closer. The sun is essentially a perpetually exploding hydrogen bomb, so maybe if someone was to take a time-lapse video of the wall in the field for 12 months and accelerated it to a few seconds, you'd have something like the image of Linda Hamilton watching the bomb go off – the image that has been burned into Lisa's imagination since childhood. I placed the vinyl text high on the window so that it would function almost like a thought bubble as the viewer simultaneously looks out at people in the park, drawing parallels with that moment in the film.

3.8 ***Emergency Combustion Kit*** [Image 13]

Emergency Combustion Kit is a wall-mounted station that resembles an Emergency Fire Extinguisher station, but is stocked with fire-igniting accessories instead. Beyond anarchic first impressions, this is a response to the annual forest and grass fires that have affected Alberta in recent years. Some of these fires occur due to natural causes, but they are frequently started by human activities including overheated ATV exhaust pipes, forestry and mining machinery, neglected campfires, and improperly extinguished cigarette butts. With so many ways to start accidental fires, it can seem absurd that such an expansive "survival/recreation" market exists for the purpose of starting fires with hardly any effort.

This work is my take on the Fluxus-era Flux kits, artist multiples often made up of store-bought or commercially-customized objects. It plays with ideas of humour and

consumerism, but with a dark twist. This wall-mounted work was complemented by an edition called the *Matchbox Multiple* that I offered for free during the course of the exhibition. The *Matchbox Multiple* (2013, edition of 2500) is a small paper matchbox containing a single match, as well as brief instructions on how to use that match to light the multiple on fire.

3.9 ***The Impossibility of Rain*** [Images 14-16]

inkjet print on vinyl (3), aluminum composite material, UV laminate, cans from the Frank Slide, plinth

Historical Note: At 4:10am on April 29, 1903, 110 million tonnes of limestone detached from the east face of Turtle Mountain, burying half of the coal-mining town of Frank and killing 90 people. The average depth of the landslide is approximately 13 metres. Blackfoot and Kutenai peoples had warned the settlers of the mountain's instability, referring to Turtle Mountain as "the mountain that moves," but industrialist efforts would continue, leading to the Hillcrest Mine Disaster of June 19, 1914, which killed 189. Mining operations continued until 1939.

When I attended an MFA conference this past winter at the University of Calgary, I noticed that nearly every artist used the word "parsing" at one time or another in their discussion. I believe they meant it in the sense that they were trying to extract something, or to sift and sort through information. But the word itself means "to analyze a sentence into its parts and describe their syntactic roles." I half-jokingly wondered if you could parse a photograph in ways other than analyzing the content and describing the colour, composition, and things like that. I decided to parse this photograph because it already hints at stratification: the tire rests on the limestone landslide, which covers the town of Frank, which was built on top of the remains of

First Nations camps, which were within the original river valley. Keeping with the idea of the photograph as material, I've tried to parse the various layers, including the image and the substrate it is mounted on, the trace of the previous exhibition and what was on the wall before, the UV laminate used to protect the image, and I also included the section omitted from the composition – the top of Turtle Mountain and the sky. The sky is folded into three dimensions, refusing the standard verticality of photos and even mimicking a James Turrell architectural intervention. And, finally, keeping with the 4:3 standard television ratio, a collection if physical objects from the Slide. I chose only cylindrical objects to allow their similarity in shape to match their similarity in materiality.

The Frank Slide, like a hyperobject, cannot be accurately represented in its totality. The sum of 110 million tonnes of limestone is historical trivia. Phenomenologically, it means nothing to the human body/mind, as there's no frame of reference. By breaking the image into multiple forms of representation, I've tried to put a crack in the typical aerial postcard shot of the slide, one that only glimpses the surface and fails to represent the true magnitude of the landslide, which is up to 45m (150 feet) deep in some places. For the sculptural objects, I thought of Tony Cragg's and Louise Nevelson's chromatic organization of everyday objects, but I incorporated the plinth to separate the objects from the body of the viewer and imply a museum-like preciousness. With regard to entropy, their material sameness suggests a physical egalitarianism that erases all markers of branding and purpose. They can no longer be fetishized for their historical significance or their nostalgic collectability, as they're on the verge of returning to base metals that they were mined out of.

3.10 *45 in Yellow Grass* (2019) [Images 17-19]

35mm scanned prints (10), dirt (3kgs), pine box

Yellow Grass, Saskatchewan currently holds the record for hottest day in Canadian history. In 1937, the town reached the temperature of 45 degrees Celsius. I took the photographs on the wall with my father's Pentax A-1 35mm film camera, the same camera that introduced me to what I imagined the past to look like before I was born. Three kilograms of dirt were extracted from ground squirrel holes using a straw brush and dustpan. It's worth noting how our perception of records may change over time. The record for hottest day in Canada may have once been a joyous thing to boast about when visiting Winnipeg in the dead of winter, but today, this record seems unsettling. Watching multiple heat wave records break in Europe this summer, it's only a matter of time before this record is broken too.

This body of work imitates the archive, thinking of the ways that we catalogue and exhibit the remains of significant events. Holding the record for hottest day in Canadian history really only contributes to small-town chauvinism and notoriety. I was born in Woodstock, Ontario, in Oxford County, the Dairy Capital of Canada. in 1933, a Holstein cow named The Springbank Snow Countess broke the record for most butterfat production in one year. There's a life-size statue of the cow when you enter the city. Yet, despite the triviality of these records, they can be seen as evidence pointing in the direction of the looming threat of Global Warming and the ways that we are addressing, or failing to address it. It's also interesting that both records, Yellow Grass and the Springbank Snow Countess, are related to Agrilogistics and the 12,000-year-old history of farming and agriculture, possibly the first accelerator of Global Warming according to Timothy Morton.[66] Things tend to happen in loops.

The climate and region surrounding Yellow Grass is indicative of more than

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[66] Morton, *Dark Ecology* 42.

just occasional blasts of summer heat. While this part of the Great Plains receives just enough precipitation to support crops, a sustained drought could be devastating, as there are no natural water tributaries and the few shallow lakes are prone to drying up and disappearing in the middle of the summer.[67] As the climate warms, these droughts will occur more frequently and pose a greater challenge to farmers in the area. This change in climate, which occurs gradually and out of sight, is referred to by Rob Nixon as "slow violence," a phenomenon that tends to affect the most vulnerable part of the population and remains "outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media."[68] This is not an earthquake or a volcano, but a slow, warming erosion. The town itself still hosts a modest number of permanent residents, but there is no economic core to the city, and many people have to commute either south to Weyburn or north to Regina for work. Nixon explains that one of the first marks of these attritional violences is the displacement of humans,[69] and while Canada is still a very resource-rich nation, we can see this displacement happening at a massive and tragic rate in parts of North Africa and the Near East as millions of migrants flee the drought and Civil War-ridden country of Syria.

I've used elements of the archive to reveal the challenge of representing things like slow violence and hyperobjects. I am not attempting to represent climate change, but to represent the "record." The record is something we can measure, and in its viability as a statistic, it is a spectacle. It stands out from the imperceptibility of slow violence by being one isolated moment of violence as we commonly think of it – fast and damaging. At 45 degrees Celsius, insects die, crops die, even people can die. By representing the record for hottest day, I am bringing attention to the hyperobject of

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[67] George Hoffman, "The Arid Years," *Legion Magazine*, 01 March 1997 https://legionmagazine.com/en/1997/03/the-arid-years/

[68] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: First Harvard University Press, 2013) 2-6.

[69] Ibid, 7.

climate change; the archival photos are documentary-style and deliberately ambiguous with regard to when they were taken. The pile of dirt was measured out to exactly three kilograms, an appropriate amount for a standard soil sample. I expect that these forms of evidence would be similar to what one might find in a natural history museum if an archivist was to sift through an archive and attempt to represent this record. Peter C. Van Wyck found in his journal the following line: "an emphatic geography creates the language for its own expression,"[70] and this has happened in my work as the various forms of representation assume the reality of the geography; the pile of dirt was left with a ring of dust around it as the ash-like mound began to settle, implying erosion, and the 35mm images, nearly over-exposed, suggest a tactile chemistry between the sun and the film that may not have happened if I was taking photos with a digital sensor. I think that by mimicking the archive and its intimate materiality, I am getting closer to representing Yellow Grass as a victim of slow violence than I would have gotten by using the conventional means of a photo-documentary practice.

3.11 *46 in Red Rock* (2019) [Image 20]

HD Video, 1080p, AAC Stereo sound

Red Rock Coulee was once the bottom of an ancient sea. Bedrock lies close beneath the surface and large red concretions appear sporadically like misplaced boulders amidst the banks of shale and sandstone. The concretions are formed by calcite and iron oxide that built up in layers around clusters of leaves, shells, and bones on the bottom of the sea millions of years ago. Some of the concretions have a diameter

[70] Peter C. Van Wyck, *The Highway of the Atom* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens Press) 2010.

of nearly three metres.[71] This part of the Alberta badlands is home to rattlesnakes, scorpions, and horned lizards; yet, despite its desert features, Red Rock Coulee does not hold the record for hottest day in Canadian history.

This "false documentary" is a meta-documentary about the structure of documentaries and the rhetorical methods they use in order to present themselves as authoritative sources of truth and information. The idea for this project has no roots in any artist/artwork that I'm aware of, other than Melanie Smith's video *Maria Elena* because of the use of strategic montage without any actual narration, but was truly inspired by a Monty Python sketch in the TV series *Flying Circus* called "An Interview with a Duck, a Cat, and a Lizard" where Terry Jones, playing the role of a BBC television host, asks his three guests their opinion on customs officers being able to carry loaded firearms. The taxidermal animals give no response, but Jones continues the interview like a professional automaton, making it a sketch about the structure of the BBC broadcast interview and how it can be transposed on any situation or subject.

46 in Red Rock functions like a readymade documentary that could be stashed away and conveniently retrieved in the event that Red Rock Coulee one day breaks the heat record.

3.12 ***Refined Pallets* (2019)** [Image 21]

Found pine pallets (7), mistint paint coloured with Dulux brand pigment:

Pine Trail, Misty Pines, Ponderosa, Pine Garland, Pale Pine, Winter Pine, Pine Ridge

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[71] Andrew Penner, "Dodging snakes at Red Rock Coulee," *Calgary Herald*, 08, November 2014.
https://calgaryherald.com/life/dodging-snakes-at-red-rock-coulee

Immediately, *Refined Pallets* harkens back to the height of text-based conceptual art in the late 1960s and onward in the United States and Canada. Specifically, this work refers to Garry Neill Kennedy, who completed a number of projects based on industrial paint colours, including *You Scratch My Back and I'll Scratch Yours in the Colonial Room* at galerie articule, Montreal in 2004, which included "Colonial"-named colours from various commercial paint brands. I was thinking of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's claim that the semiotic relationship between signified and signifier is completely arbitrary; there is nothing connecting *dog* and *chien* to the canine species other than a general consensus on the part of Anglophones in one case and Francophones in the other. And what better way to exemplify this idea than with the naming of industrial paint colours. While Garry Neill Kennedy's conceptual works usually exist as largescale sign paintings on internal and external walls, I thought about applying the paint to the material that the paint represents in its nomenclature. In this case, I chose wooden pine pallets, noting that most are made out of yellow pine (ponderosa pine).

I was also thinking of the pallet as it's used in upscaled furniture design, a popular trend found on websites like Pinterest and Etsy, where users search for ideas that integrate industrial materials into furniture and décor. It's easy to see the connections between this trend and trends in the Minimalist works of artists in the 60s. While the Minimalists in the 60s may have been refuting the purist dogma of late Abstract Expressionism, which would have eschewed the use of industrial materials for their inherent connection to the workplace, I question what the consumers of upscaled industrial material furniture are refuting–possibly it's the laminated compressed wood-chips of IKEA furniture, or, on the other side of the durability spectrum, the heritage carpentry of bygone days when families would custom-order 600lb oak dining sets with the intention that they would last generations.

It may also be a response to consumer guilt. If you've ever lived in a university or college town, you've seen the parade of gently-used, nearly compostable furniture on the boulevards every spring, while slumlords across the city swap inventory (student tenants, not furniture). There is an aspect of self-reliance in upscaled furniture, an ethics of "waste not, want not," except not all of the materials needed are necessarily being salvaged, repurposed, or recycled. The lengths taken to imitate "distressed" timber probably takes more energy and resources than just buying fresh timber. And if your plan is to make a clothing rack out of plumbing, I can only assume you don't want to be using someone else's previously-used pipes and fittings. This is not to mock the good intentions of consumers who see this aesthetic as representing their lifestyle, but I question whether it's really as Green as it may seem.

I was also responding to the alleyways in commercial, domestic, and industrial Lethbridge that I'd frequently walk through. Cities like Lethbridge were designed after the invention of the automobile, and they reflect this with their excessively wide roads and spacious alleys. It seems that the back of nearly every business in downtown Lethbridge has at least a few wooden pallets nudged up against the wall. The pallet is interesting to me as a kind of commodity/non-commodity that both moves commercial goods, and is a commercial good itself. The pallet carries with it no history; there is no barcode or insignia; we don't know its origin, or what it has transported in the past. It could have once moved diapers from Pittsburgh, brake rotors from Silao, Mexico, or core samples from Cape Dorset, Nunavut. When I was sanding one of the pallets, a few dried up insect larvae fell out of an empty knot, suggesting that pallets can also harbour invasive and unwanted cargo.

The pallets were installed behind the Trianon Gallery in the back alley for two days. On the third morning, I went to document them, and to my great pleasure they had

disappeared, presumably to fellow upscalers who realized that I had done most of the hard work for them.

CONCLUSION

4.1 Support Paper Conclusion

I began to write this support paper eight months before installing the exhibition. With the exception of *Windbreak*, which had already been out in the field for four months, I had only a vague idea of what the exhibition might look like. Within those eight months, both the work and the support paper took a number of unexpected turns. I had never worked within this kind of academic framework before, so it was interesting to see the paper affect the work and the work affect the paper. When thinking of research methods, this section of the paper feels like the end of a scientific experiment, where I analyze the results and come up a conclusion, but as an artist, I feel unqualified to analyze the work with that level of authority. Without feedback from the viewer, I can't make any "conclusive" deductions, but I can discuss a few things that happened along the way.

I chose not to exhibit at the Penny Building for a number of logistical reasons, including the strict door policy where visitors must sign in and out. I was given access to the Trianon Gallery, which also came with a limitation regarding the use of audio/visual media, a limitation that I would have also faced at the Penny. For that reason, I moved away from some film and video work and decided to focus on photographic and material projects. This is where the most momentous shift of my MFA happened: I spent the final six months of my degree immersed nearly exclusively in photography and photo theory. I had dodged the question of whether or not I considered myself a photographer, saying that I was interested in conceptual art and that the camera was just a tool. This was brought up early in my Thesis Defence, when I was asked if I still refrain from the title "photographer" to which I answered, no, I accept it. This is partly because I have come to believe that if you shoot photographs with intention, be it artistic or journalistic, you are joining a 150-year-old discipline

whether you like it or not. The camera is not a screwdriver or a wrench. Its history is connected to a history of power, visibility/invisibility, and representation. Being a "photographer" demands a willingness to take responsibility for the images you disseminate into the public sphere.

In terms of understanding my own practice, that was important, but even more important was the idea of the materiality of the photograph, expanding this concept beyond the materiality of the paper object and considering everything from the fleeting pigmentation, to the depreciation of digital information, to the long-term futility of preservation methods. The photograph may "capture" light, but it doesn't hold it for very long. The digital image file can postpone its inevitable fate by floating around cyberspace, but as soon as it's revealed, like the Picture of Dorian Gray, it rapidly begins to die.

This is significant to my support paper, because much of the Theory chapter discusses the problem of the idea of Nature and culture as being separate ontological entities in the popular imagination. This is a problem of ecology, and one that is reaffirmed constantly through marketing and pop culture. In the context of photography, Nature would be the referent (the scenery, landscape, or non-human subject), and culture would be the photographic document (the record, the archive, the proof). This argument begins to crumble when the photograph, in its materiality, is also subject to the ecological forces of Nature, that being photo-degradation, oxidization, material erosion. This thinking takes the photograph from the domain of culture and returns it to the domain of Nature, revealing a critical flaw in the construction of that binary. We tend to think of culture as a collection, an archive, knowledge building on knowledge, but it's not a stable teleology; culture depends on material things to support it and those things are themselves in various states of decomposition and obsolescence. For this reason, some thinkers are eschewing the term "the contemporary" in favour of

the term "the current," because like the current of a body of water, it's always in motion.[72] I've tried to convey this sense of transience with *Windbreak* and *The Impossibility of Rain*, where images are brought into the gallery at various stages of decay. The stock photo printed on archival paper in *Windbreak* is nearly indecipherable after one year in the sun. The vinyl image in the back room is slowly peeling off the substrate, while the newly-framed archival photograph *Looking Back At Us* has only just begun its slow death.

Ecocriticism has been a valuable theoretical foundation for these ideas; I've noticed the concept of the hyperobject coming up in many exhibitions and art publications over the past two years because it poses a serious problem for artists: how to represent the un-seeable, un-hearable, and un-touchable. That question will continue to help generate interesting art as artists employ new technologies and strategies of representation. My only reservation with Ecocriticism is that it's so heavily rooted in comparative literature that it sometimes reads, not surprisingly, as too "literary." Two of the theorists I frequently refer to, Timothy Morton and Greg Garrard, are both literature professors. I'm not doubting their capacity as brilliant and pluralistic thinkers and writers, but going forward, I hope to follow the Ecocritical discussion into ideas of the posthuman and New Materialism as they relate to visual art and materiality, specifically the materiality of the photograph.

The photograph and the object were the most logical media for *This Apparent Magnitude* when considering the methodology of drifting. As a post-studio practice, much of the work begins at specific locations. The camera is lightweight, portable, and the more I use the device, the more quickly and accurately I can depict my subject matter the way I intend to. When the Situationists reacted to the disciplinary

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[72] Rick Dolphijn, "What, of Art, Belongs to the Present?" *YouTube*, 27 March 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzV0khgtKBE

functionalism of modern grid maps, they created their own psycho-geographic maps;[73] in the same way, I am reacting to the traditional patterns of landscape representation by making my own representations. I think it's fitting that the critique of media be done with the same media in order to expose the routine tropes that are often overlooked and embedded within visual culture.

Going forward, I feel that this exhibition offers a number of tangents on which to build; while each work in *This Apparent Magnitude* has been resolved to a point, each can be taken further or replicated at different geographical sites. I hope that this methodology will be useful in the near future for maintaining an active practice with a semi-nomadic lifestyle. I anticipate that proposing this work to a wider audience and applying for international residencies will be the next step. I began this paper with Hipparchus's theory of Apparent Magnitude as an allegory for the way casual observations can evolve into complex systems of thought. Reflecting on the work in this exhibition, I see this allegory being put into practice, such as a snapshot or a piece of trivia becoming part of an expanded web of observations and representations, all propelled by a sensibility rooted in the act of drifting. I hope that this allegory will continue to be a generative approach to art-making and an interesting idea for others to consider.

[73] New Architectures of Spatial Justice, McGill School of Architecture: https://architecturesofspatialjustice.wordpress.com/2012/10/18/125/

4.2 Thesis Defence Introduction

> Everything I ever done I've thought of as "as if." Every single thing I have offered to the public has been offered as a suggestion of work. Now, "as if" is club lingo. The verbal equivalent of a shrug. But it's nothing like what I mean by "as if," which is that my work is a sketch, a line of thinking, a possibility.[74]

The root of the Greek word "thesis" (meaning "proposition") is the verb *tithenai*, which means "to place." As a thesis defence, I'm going to attempt to defend why I placed what I did where I placed it. A proposition is defined as a "plan of action," or an "expression of judgment." This exhibition is not a plan of action, but it is an expression of judgment about patterns of representation. Susan Sontag writes that "Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one."[75] I hope that this work reinforces a critical position about the ways that we look at and represent physical environments.

Most of the work in this exhibition was made on Treaty 7 Territory, within the Canadian province of Alberta, but some of the images and objects also come from Treaty 4 Territory in Saskatchewan, as well as unceded territory in British Columbia. The Crow tribe, who frequented southern BC mostly live within the Yellowstone River Valley, extending from what is now Montana, through Wyoming, to North Dakota. The region of the Blackfoot Confederacy extends from Eastern BC to Saskatchewan and dips substantially into Montana. Traditional Kutenai territory includes mountainous parts of BC, Alberta, Montana, and Washington State. I've just illustrated a cartographical palimpsest of three different maps that have all existed within the past 145 years, roughly the same age as the telephone. We don't call it cartosophy, the wisdom of maps, or cartology, the study of maps, but cartography, the drawing of maps. Nearly all of the work in this exhibition, beginning from Sparwood BC, to Yellow

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[74] "Deinstrumentalizing Knowledge: Interview with Martha Rosler," interview with Stephen Wright, *Martha Rosler Library*, eds. Paul Domela and John Byrne, (Liverpool: Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, 2008), 7.
[75] Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 17.

Grass Saskatchewan, falls within 0.12 degrees latitude south of the 50th parallel according to the Mercator Projection of 1569. That's a fourth map.

Bertrand Westphal, in *The Plausible World*, writes that "the world of modernity, a support for the 'objective' reality, is fragmented in a constellation of possible worlds whose representation constitutes, at best, an approximation."[76] Westphal goes on to explain that the truest map is not the most objective map, but the summation of all the maps, at all the same time. Not all of these maps will get you from the Trianon Gallery to Bed Bath & Beyond in nine minutes by car, but the Google Map, the geometrically precise map, is often the "interested map," that, despite its precision, is often distorted by an "interested point of view."[77]

Can we not use this way of looking at the fluidity of maps to also critique photographic representations of place? To find the most popular and purportedly "objective" representations available and challenge them on the basis of their *interestedness*? And to propose alternative representations of these places, not for the virtue of some kind of subjective or greater authenticity, but to put a crack into some of the monolithic representations that shape contemporary ideas, in this case, ideas about Nature and Culture and the boundaries they have in the imagination.

In many of these works, I attempt to put a crack in the idea of the photograph as a fixed object. Michel Serres notes that

> [o]bjects have been installed to stop time, to prevent change from happening. From the totem (in religion) to money (in state-capitalism) its sole purpose is to protect those in power. Art has often been captured by the object, in the church or in the museum.[78]

And to those institutions, I would add art documentation in art history books and catalogues.

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[76] Westphal, *The Plausible World*, 3.
[77] Ibid, 145.
[78] Rick Dolphijn, "What, of Art, Belongs to the Present?" *YouTube.*

The crack, or the cracking up of the contemporary, is a concept used by Rick Dolphijn, Professor of Philosophy at Utrecht University. For the crack to happen, we have to first accept that time is an abstract measurement of material change that has been tailored for human convenience and productivity, which is why, in cinema studies, it's often referred to as a 'crack in time.' Dolphijn writes, "at the crack, art unveils a new future and a new history."[79] The crack happens with the attentive participation of the viewer – it doesn't need to be loud, but can be nuanced. It can sit with the viewer for a long time and reveal itself later, as was my experience with Mike Nelson's work. I've been thinking about the crack as being analogous to Barthes' *punctum*, the sharp point that pierces. *Studium* is the culturally determined context, and the source of the viewer's "polite interest" in the photograph, which would include wind turbines, renewable energy, golden hour, Rocky Mountain foothills, sunsets. But the *punctum* cannot be casually observed.[80] Andy Grundberg writes that "the ultimate effect of punctum is the intimation of death."[81] In the context of *Camera Lucida*, it happens when Barthes looks at a childhood photo of his recently deceased mother. If the *eidos*, or "essence" of the content of a photograph is death, I think we can extend that also to the materiality of the photograph as well. When we understand that the photograph, in any of its material forms, whether printed on acid-free archival paper or as data in a hard drive, is itself slowly deteriorating, cracks in the contemporary abound. Ideas of authorship (in terms of knowledge-authority), ideas of knowledge-archiving, of possessing, of freezing a moment, of capturing time, of history as linear, all start to crumble. In its essence, I think the crack is ecological.

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[79] Ibid, 00:07:55.
[80] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 42.
[81] Andy Grundberg, "Death in the Photograph," *The New York Times*, 23, August 1981.
https://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/23/books/death-in-the-photograph.html

It doesn't take a scholar of visual culture to recognize the frequent disparity between physical spaces and the ways they are represented. This came to my attention when I was in Grade Five and someone told me about a hole in the ozone layer. On days when the sky was clear, I would look south toward Antarctica and try to make out a stratospheric halo missing in the sky. This disparity between representation and referent was also on my mind when I moved to Huntsville, Ontario and realized that, despite the many lakes and trees, the social, political, economic, and environmental realities looked nothing like a Tom Thomson canvas. This led to the project *Resting Places*, where I paddled from Thomson's grave on Canoe Lake to the Group of Seven cemetery, 340km away, at the McMichael gallery in Kleinburg, photographing, among other things, porta potties, infestations of cormorants, and Modernist mega-cottages. The legacy of impressionistic landscape painting in Ontario still has an enormous influence on the public imagination – the rugged, empty, depoliticized landscape may not be used as often as it once was by the government as a rhetorical strategy for unifying the country, even though my license plate still says "Ontario, Yours To Discover," but it has been coopted in marketing by companies trying to sell antidotes to the alienating doldrums of urban wage labour with the promise of a more authentic reality found in Nature. In my support paper, I discuss Hipparchus's theory of Apparent Magnitude as a simple act of observing the brightness of stars that would later become central to an entire branch of astronomy and astrophysics, leading to Absolute Magnitude and calculating the mass and brightness of objects that the human eye can't even see. In the same way, landscape painting developed as part of a regional movement in the Netherlands in the 17th century because of a growing mercantile class that was interested in the observations and depictions of everyday life; and today, in the 21st century, that mercantile class is using the same landscape genre to sell everything

from Jeep Wranglers to coffee. The curious act of depicting land with a formal set of guidelines grew into a globalized cultural convention.

In the West, it's mostly the legacy of landscape photography that persists in the public imagination, epitomized by the mid-20th century work of Ansel Adams, Minor White, and Edward Weston, who explored Romantic notions of the sublime within photography. There is a very persistent idea in American pastoralism that wilderness spaces exist in harmony and balance and we, as stewards, have the responsibility of preserving these spaces. In ecocriticism, this is called *equilibrium ecology* and we are now living in a post-equilibrium moment, understanding that ecosystems are far more chaotic and complex, even without our meddling.[82] The relationship between Western landscape photography and the idea of balance in nature was disrupted in 1975 with the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. There's no doubt that these photographs put a crack in the epic and sentimental tradition of Ansel Adams and his contemporaries, but even then, New Topographics photographer Lewis Baltz claimed "I want my work to be neutral and free from aesthetic or ideological posturing,"[83] and New Topographics curator William Jenkins asserted that the photographers "take great pains to prevent the slightest trace of judgment or opinion from entering their work,"[84] which today, sounds brutally naïve.

"Everything is a text," said Derrida.[85] Despite the intentions of Baltz and Jenkins, all photos, as texts, are political; if not for the content, then for the history of

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82 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 176.
83 Deborah Bright, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography," *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1989) 133.
84 Ibid, 134.
85 Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida,* Ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996).

the camera itself and the role it's played in the North American military-industrial complex, in the mapping and surveying of the Western "frontier" and its many exploitable resources, and in the continued shift toward a surveillance society that keeps a watchful eye on citizens' activities and locations through their own participation in various social media platforms.

So, in thinking of an approach to photographic representations of physical environments as texts, I have referred to Ecocriticism, a predominantly literary discourse coming out of post-Structuralist comparative literature. My work is not about ecology, but rather, it reveals an awareness of the ecological factors that change and influence it. When thinking about the material objecthood of photographs, two concepts were especially useful: the idea of the hyperobject from Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*,[86] and the idea of Human Thought at Earth Magnitude from Morton's *Dark Ecology*.[87] The hyperobject describes an object that is so massively distributed in time and space that it transcends spatiotemporal specificity, things such as global warming, styrofoam, and radioactive plutonium. The effects of hyperobjects can be felt, but they can only be accurately represented in the form of data and statistics. Thinking of solar photo-degradation as a hyperobject, something that affects nearly everything on the earth in some way, I exposed an archival photograph to the sun for one year. Thinking about the impossibility of representing Climate Change in its totality, I began working with a Dulux paint hue called Climate Change. Hyperobjects like sunlight, radiation, and atmospheric moisture help take us out of humanistic and anthropocentric models of time and material, and reveal to us that even the photographs locked in the vault of the MET[88] are subject to slow change. If there's one thing that nearly escapes the effect of hyperobjects, it's the online stock photo, a tiny pocket of digital

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[86] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 11.
[87] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 24.
[88] Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

information that can virtually teleport, making it placeless and infinitely reproducible; but even the gradual march of technology suggests that one day the .tif, the .pdf, and the .jpg will become obsolete and the online stock photo will either have to take on another, superior form, or vanish like everything else under the sun.

Related to hyperobjects is the idea of Human Thought at Earth Magnitude. This involves stretching your mind to think of both the microscopic and the macroscopic at the same time. Thinking of the Frank Slide, 110 million tonnes of dislodged limestone, at Earth Magnitude, is really just another day on Earth probably accompanied by other landslides, earth quakes, avalanches, and hurricanes both noticed and unnoticed by humans. Even more trivial is the record for the hottest day in Canadian history: the warmest day that happened in an arbitrary political boundary within the span of 152 years, about 1/30 millionth of the age of the planet. I don't truly believe that Human Thought at Earth Magnitude is possible, but it emphasizes the need to put some things into a broader posthuman perspective.

The methodology that has developed over these two years of study has become a kind of dialectic, in the Hegelian sense, meaning that there is a thesis that is met with an antithesis, which forms a synthesis, and that synthesis becomes a new thesis, that is met with an antithesis, et cetera. This way of working was also influenced by Murray Bookchin's theory of dialectical naturalism, where things in the world tend to evolve in the direction of greater complexity. *In The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, Bookchin uses dialectical naturalism to explain that humanity's course was a natural one, and that, despite our self-awareness as environmental influencers, we are a natural evolution of that environment, thus bridging the highly problematic Nature/Culture divide.[89]

The works in this exhibition bounce off of each other in a constellation of ideas and materials. A series of anthotype photographs I completed gave me the idea to

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[89] Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 68.

expose a digital photograph to the sun as a kind of reverse photography (or un-photography), which reminded me of the adverse reaction that vinyl has when exposed to intense heat (that I demonstrated in *The Impossibility of Rain)*. The naming of a paint chip “Climate Change” made me think of the arbitrary nature of sign systems and language, leading to a series of pine pallets all painted in pine-named colours that have no relationship to pine trees other than being a variation of green. In this way, the works coexist as an expression of a sensibility rather than as isolated manifestations of complete and resolved thoughts. I had made two trips to Lake Louise in the past year, trying to respond to the phenomenon of eco-tourism, but it wasn’t until the third trip, when I was chaperoning my parents, that I took an unplanned snapshot without much deliberation and it ended up creating the crack in the monolithic representation of Lake Louise that I was looking for all along. In my support paper, I describe this methodology as drifting – not in the boxcar beatnik sense of the drifter, nor with the cold gaze of Baudelaire’s flâneur, but with a receptiveness to unforeseen moments that might serve to express ideas and observations in ways that are interesting to viewers, but more importantly, to myself and the various themes and concerns of my practice.

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APPENDIX

5.1 *Flower Arrangements for the Hillcrest Mine Disaster Cemetery*

[Image 22-23]

For the month of June 2018, I had the privilege of attending the Gushul Writer's Cottage residency annually awarded to art students by the University of Lethbridge. I would frequently walk along the paved path from the town of Blairmore, where the cottage is, to the neighbouring towns of Coleman, Frank, Bellevue, and Hillcrest. Together, these towns make up the Crowsnest Pass, a highly trafficked route between the Southern Rockies of BC and Alberta. Once a major centre for coal mining, the Crowsnest Pass now boasts a predominantly tourist economy with many outdoor recreation opportunities and historic sites. The most famous historical site is the Frank Slide. The Slide is the sprawling result of 82 million tonnes of rock that fell from Turtle Mountain in 1903, destroying the town of Frank and killing 90 people. Just over a decade later, a second mining-related disaster occurred when a subterranean explosion in the Hillcrest Mine killed 189 of the 235 below ground. The mountain was known to be unstable; Blackfoot and Kutenai peoples warned the settlers, referring to Turtle Mountain as "the mountain that moves," but the demand for coal leading up to WWI only drove Industrialists deeper into the mountain.

The Hillcrest Mine Disaster Cemetery is located between the Frank Slide and the town of Hillcrest and commemorates the miners killed and the families left destitute from the disaster. People continue to place flowers on the graves, but the Crowsnest Pass endures winds too ravaging for live flowers; instead, mourners use varieties of artificial flowers ranging in botanical accuracy and craftsmanship. Despite their hardy, plastic composition, even the artificial flowers get strewn across the cemetery and end up in the surrounding fences and ditches. Over time, exposure to the wind, dust, and sun gives them a patina that uncannily seems to imitate the decomposition of living flowers.

I contacted the cemetery groundskeeper at the Crowsnest Heritage Society to see what is done with these forlorn flowers. He told me they get thrown out and I was welcome to take them. Over the course of six months, I made a number of visits to the cemetery and collected about two garbage bags of flowers (note: none were taken from graves or even from within the inner vicinity of the cemetery).

I decided that I wanted to remake a number of arrangements with all the bits and pieces, but I had no understanding of flower arranging. I contacted a designer in Lethbridge named Jennifer Babits who had studied interior decorating and had worked for many years at a floral arranger. She was enthusiastic about the project and over the course of three hours, she sifted through the pile of flowers that I had organized chromatically and divided the sum into seven potential arrangements. The idea for a series of seven was the result of a body of work I wanted to do based on the colour spectrum. Conveniently, the collected flowers divided neatly into seven groups with hardly any left over. The flowers were to be reassembled in various vessels that I had also sourced from the cemetery, ranging from wicker baskets to cracked plastic pots. As soon as Jennifer began arranging, her mastery of the art became apparent with the speed and dexterity with which she worked, knowing exactly how to handle the flowers as if they were alive and delicate. Thankfully, I had recorded the session at 120 frames per second, because when I began editing the footage, her quickness caused the arrangements to tremble and shake in a way that was very unpleasant to watch. I had no intention of making this project about the digital media itself, as Bill Viola has made a career of doing with video, but when slowed to 20%, I became mesmerised by the expressive gestures of Babits' hands that I failed to recognize in normal time. The entire trajectory of the project changed from being about plastics and ritual detritus to being about care and the dexterous precision that goes into making something with one's

hands. I had anticipated the arrangements to look quite scraggly and pathetic, but the final products were surprisingly beautiful and formally complete.

5.2 ***Sentinel*** [Image 24-25]

Lethbridge is an ideal city for walking, with its many parks, undulating coulees, and sometimes not much else to do. In the summer of 2018, I adopted the habit of late afternoon walks along the Old Man River, but when the daylight hours started to diminish in autumn, I curtailed my route to be within the urban boundary of streetlights. I remember walking along Scenic Drive at night, with its serpentine LED glow, and looking out across the river valley to the University, a strip of light floating in total darkness. It looked as out of place and surreal as one of Arthur C. Clarke's moon bases. The first time I experienced this feeling of uncanny spacelessness was while driving between the towns of Waterton and Pincher Creek at about ten o'clock on an overcast night. There was a spread of highway devoid of cars, with no streetlights, road signs, reflectors, or even a distant ranch house light for a sense of perspective. It only lasted for a minute or two, but without any reference point except the yellow line on the road, I could have very well been driving through Marianas Trench.

The saturation of darkness in the Southern Alberta prairies is new to me. Coming from Ontario, I was accustomed to denser urban populations, meaning more light pollution. In the more remote places, there would be trees, leaves and lakes reflecting light; in the winter after the leaves had fallen, there would be radiant snow. Experiencing the prairie darkness made me wonder about the role darkness has in our understanding of natural boundaries. Theorists seem to have unanimously dispensed with the Cartesian division of Nature and culture, but its persistence in the cultural imagination likely has a lot to do with light and darkness. John A Livingston, in *Rogue Primate*, suggests that our dependence on light sources, from the earliest Promethean

flames to gas lanterns, may be due to our relatively poor senses as a species that owes its survival to abstract problem solving and culturing rather than to the acuity of our five senses.[90]

Northrop Frye, eminent Canadian literary scholar, observes a trend spanning across a vast survey of Canadian literature, both Anglo and Francophone, that he refers to as “garrison mentality.”[91] Garrison mentality is the tendency of characters to build metaphorical walls against the outside world; this is partly due to the constant worry of invasion, culturally and militarily, from the populous and heavily armed United States, and partly due to a fear of the incomprehensibly vast Canadian landscape. Unlike the frontier mentality popular in American literature, garrison mentality involves settling, constructing forts, seeking isolation and setting oneself apart from the threats of the world.

I began thinking of Frye’s garrison mentality and Livingston’s idea of light as a human prosthetic on my nightly walks. The new streetlights, steel, slender and straight, hunching over at the top, emitting clean LED light were so far removed from the warm glow of the halogen streetlights I remember from my childhood – the rows of orange orbs that barely illuminated anything and only served to indicate where the road might be. The LEDs of today radiate with the deliberate clarity of a prison spotlight in a slapstick comedy. The fixtures are spaced with calculation so that no gaps of darkness are allowed to penetrate the boundary of visibility, and in this way, they mimic a surveillance circuit; whether or not the area is being monitored, it remains visible. The streetlights become symbolic of sentry guards. With every new subdivision and industrial development, they uniformly extend the boundary of the city, cancelling out

[90] John A. Livingston, *Rogue Primate: An Exploration of Human Domestication*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1994. 13.
[91] Northrop Frye. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. (Toronto: Anansi, 1971) 73.

sections of darkness. Once a new light is constructed, the area covered by its luminosity may never experience total darkness for centuries (that is, darkness as we perceive it).

This process of colonizing darkness and adopting space for the convenience and comfort of human vision closely connects to Frye's theory of garrison mentality, and as a form of barrier-making, leads me to wonder if the prevalence of streetlights in urban spaces may have something to do with the division of Nature and culture in the public imagination. The mentality of a surveillance society promotes the idea that threats are neutralized when they can be seen – as evidenced by CCTV and home security systems. That which can't be seen remains a possible threat, an uncivilized Other, and beckons back to Pleistocene humans with their backs to the campfire and their eyes and ears straining to decipher if the noise in the bush was a predator or a broken branch.

5.3 ***To the Sea*** [Image 26]

In the summer of 2018 I found a 16mm copy of Bill Mason's film *Paddle to the Sea*. I bought it at a yard sale for five dollars in a bin with other films by the National Film Board that had been offloaded from a local library. The film was made in 1966 for the NFB and went on to be nominated for Best Short Film (Live Action) at the Academy Awards in 1968. Bill Mason (1929-1988) was a renaissance man of sorts, best known for his outdoor films and wildlife advocacy, but also well-respected for his paddling expertise, painting, graphic design, animation, and writing. His predominantly Eastern Canada-based work continues the tradition of national landscape portraiture made famous by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven; however, Mason's depiction of vast, remote wilderness often includes a didactic component that promotes environmentalist attitudes regarding pollution and habitat loss. For this reason, his work has found a home in public schools and libraries across the country.

Since its release in 1966, *Paddle to the Sea* has become one of the most popular works of Canadian content in the education system, even though the original story was written by American author and illustrator Holling C. Holling in 1941. The film tells the story of a young boy in Northern Ontario who carves a figure into a canoe called "Paddle to the Sea." The boy releases it into Lake Superior, and the following 28 minutes follows the path of the canoe as it traverses the Great Lakes and filters out the Saint Lawrence into the Atlantic Ocean. Along the way, Mason films the canoe's various interactions with wildlife, tourists, commercial fishermen, and cargo ships as it passes through winter freeze, forest fires, and islands of industrial sludge. The overall purpose of the film is to make the audience aware of human impact on environmental systems that are interconnected – in this case, by waterways.

The 16mm copy I purchased had gone through some serious chromogenic decay, leaving me with a very magenta-saturated product. I digitized the film by projecting it onto a rear-projection screen and digitally recording it on the other side. I corrected for the film flicker by using an exposure time of 1/15th of a second, slightly slower than the camera's 24 FPS frame rate. I then omitted every part of the diegesis, leaving me with 4'47" of Mason's filler footage comprised of landscape and wildlife shots. I'm specifically interested in the use of these inessential shots as a strategy to convey a unified sense of space – a complete Canadian landscape that is both wild and familiar. Like the work of Thomson and the Group of Seven, *Paddle to the Sea* enters the popular imagination on a demographically wide-scale, inevitably creating a very homogenous representation of Nature.

When the filler footage is stitched together in the order that it appears in the film, the result is uncannily harmonious with a flow of shot-duration and sequencing that's surprisingly easy to watch. Even though the filming took place across the span of 2000km, the re-assemblage compresses that distance into one imagined locality in the

same way that continuity editing is used to compresses time. The ability of the viewer to interpret and make sense of a variety of images is referred to by Russian theorist and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein as "rhythmic montage." In the context of Geocriticism, this remapping of space is a way to artificially construct a single location using film and video. As its own 5-minute short, *To the Sea* operates like a memory probe – mining the popular imagination for the raw materials that were used to construct a national portrait for many Canadians since 1966.

5.4 ***Chorus*** *(from the proposal for THIRD SHIFT Festival of Public Contemporary Art, Saint John, NB, 2018)* [Image 27-28]

Chorus is a 30-minute single-channel video projection with a 4-speaker audio accompaniment. The video is composed of stationary shots of turbines slowed to one frame per second. The audio track is a recording of an amplified wall clock. The ideal presentation of this video would be a large-scale outdoor projection with speakers arranged in a surround-sound layout encompassing the audience. The video would play on loop for the duration of the evening.

Chorus developed out of researching the Pincher Creek wind farms in Southern Alberta. The incentive for renewable power has fostered an ongoing debate about turbine efficiency, structural longevity, energy storage, and wildlife safety. This video expands on normative scales of human time and considers alternative scales – from animal time, to geologic time. It's been posited that the effects of this year's carbon expenditure won't be fully experienced for another 40 years, half a human lifespan. To think ecocritically is to think with this level of earth-scale relativity, and is mostly incompatible with the day-to-day function of human-scale politics and economics. It's my intention that the video can be

experienced for any amount of time with equal efficacy, making it suitable for a night-long event. The final video will be 30-minutes long.

IMAGES

Image 01: Tyler Muzzin, *Blairmore Plaque,* 2019.

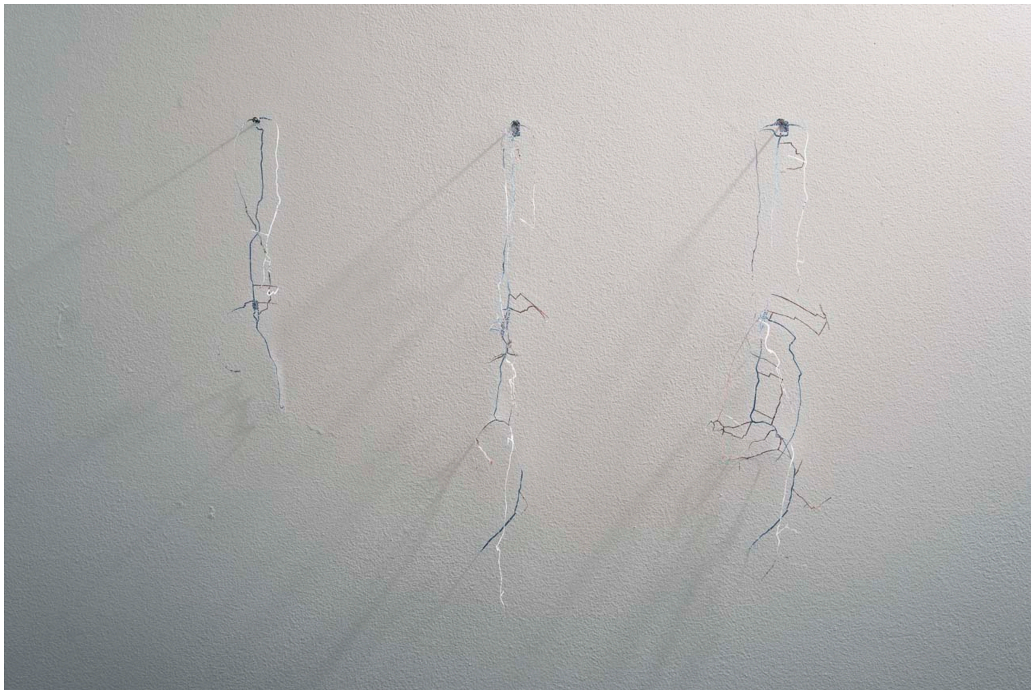

Image 02: Tyler Muzzin, *2017, 2018, 2019,* 2017-2019.

Image 03: Tyler Muzzin, *Tick Scan,* 2019.

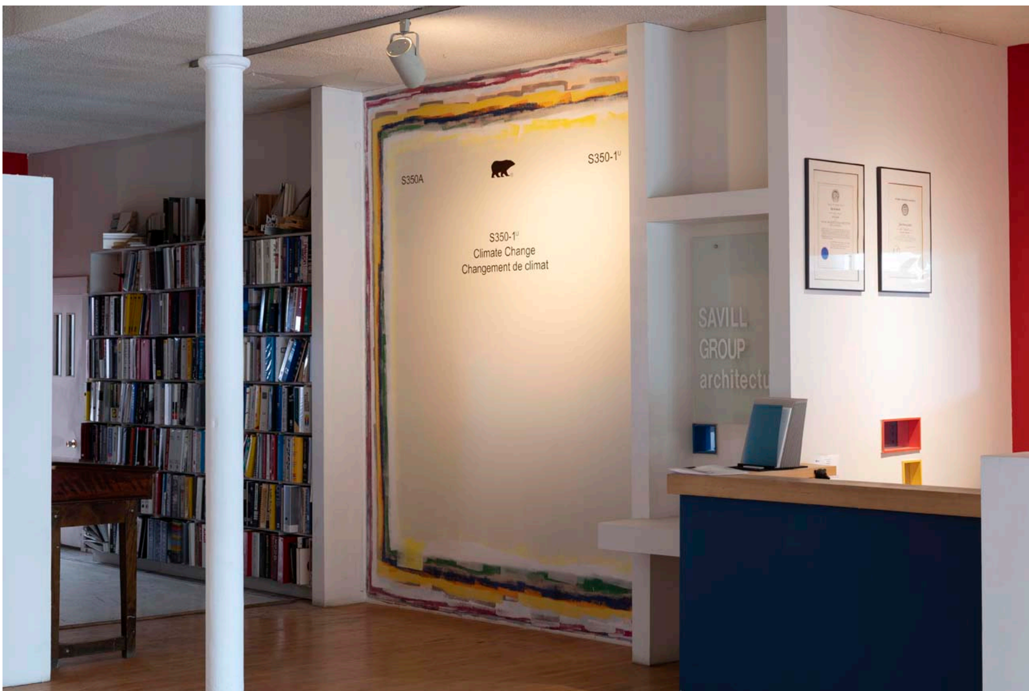

Image 04: Tyler Muzzin, *Spalding Mural Intervention,* 2019*.*

Image 05: Tyler Muzzin, *Looking Back At Us* (installation view), 2019.

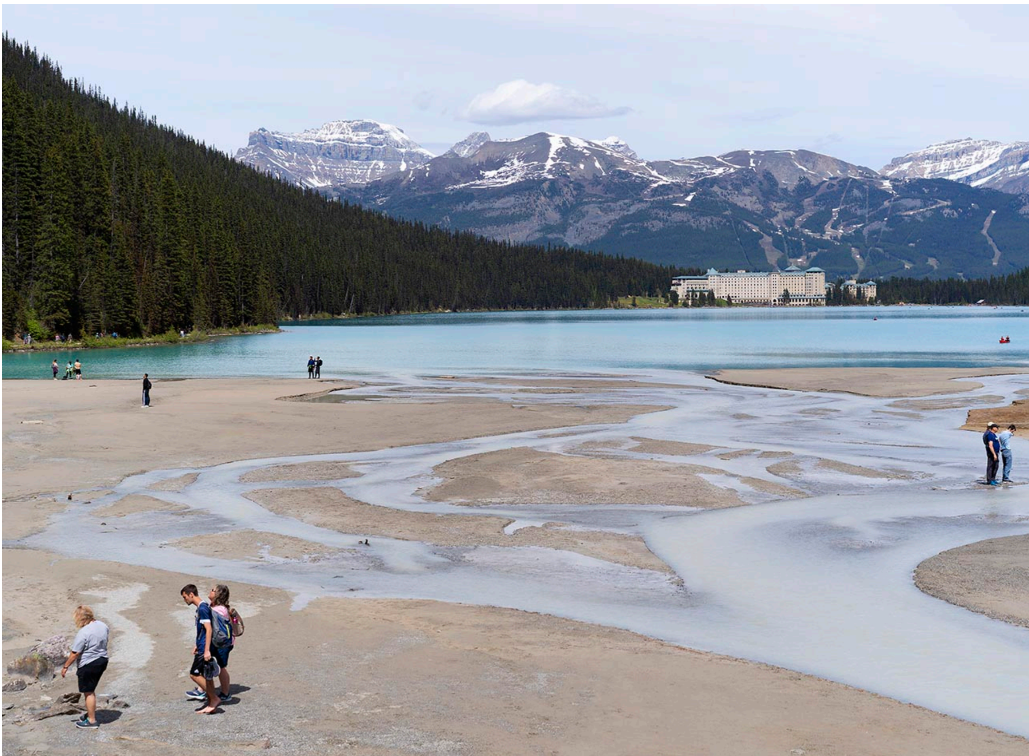

Image 06: Tyler Muzzin, *Looking Back At Us,* 2019.

Image 07: Tyler Muzzin, *Windbreak* (photograph), 2019.

Image 08: Tyler Muzzin, *Windbreak* (installation view), 2019.

Image 09: Tyler Muzzin, *Windbreak* (installation view), 2019.

Image 10: Tyler Muzzin, *Windbreak* (detail), 2019.

Image 11: Tyler Muzzin, *Windbreak*, 2019.

Image 12: Tyler Muzzin, *personal correspondence* (installation view), 2019.

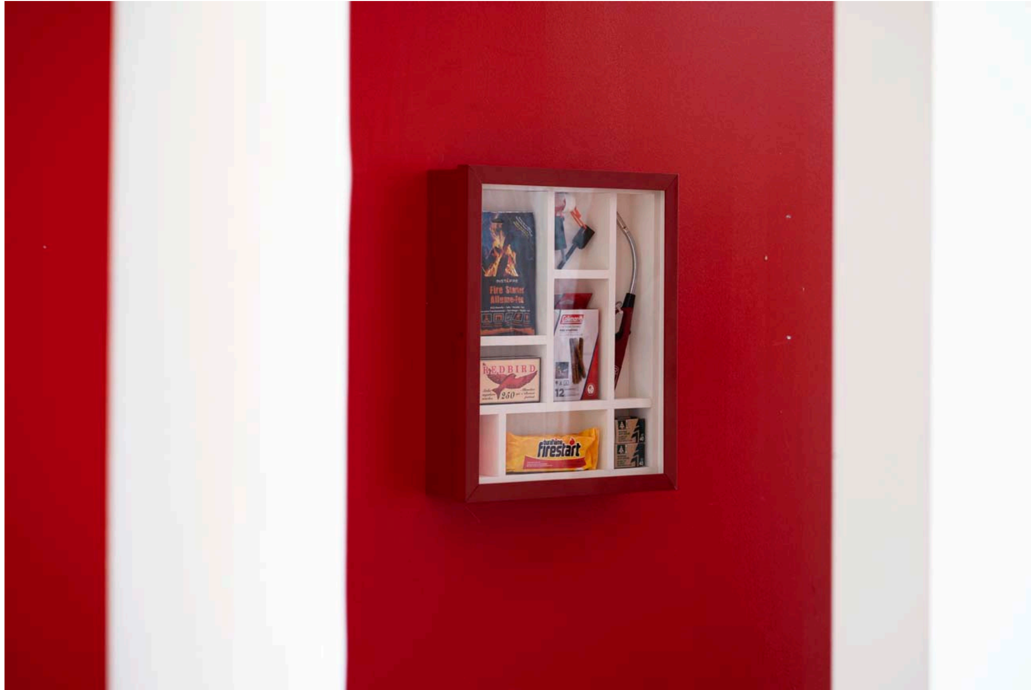

Image 13: Tyler Muzzin, *Emergency Combustion Kit* (installation view), 2019.

Image 14: Tyler Muzzin, *The Impossibility of Rain,* cans found in the Frank Slide (detail), 2019.

Image 15: Tyler Muzzin, *The Impossibility of Rain* (installation view), 2019.

Image 16: Tyler Muzzin, *The Impossibility of Rain,* UV laminate (detail), 2019.

Image 17: Tyler Muzzin, *45 in Yellow Grass* (installation view), 2019.

Image 18: Tyler Muzzin, *45 in Yellow Grass* (detail), 2019.

Image 19: Tyler Muzzin, *45 in Yellow Grass* (detail), 2019.

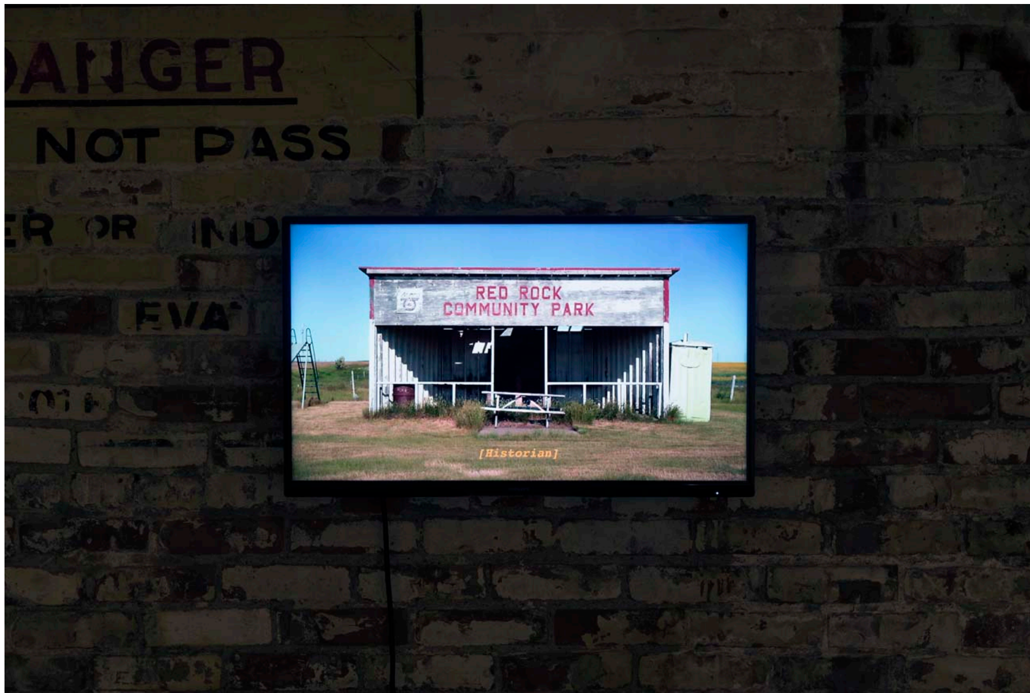

Image 20: Tyler Muzzin, *46 in Red Rock* (installation view), 2019.
Vimeo link to video: https://vimeo.com/347425718

Image 21: Tyler Muzzin, *Refined Pallets* (installation view), 2019.

(Images from the Appendix)

Image 22: Tyler Muzzin, *Flower Arrangements for the Hillcrest Mine Disaster* (video still), 2019. Vimeo link: https://vimeo.com/302602196

Image 23: Tyler Muzzin, *Flower Arrangements for the Hillcrest Mine Disaster Cemetery*, 2019.

Image 24: Tyler Muzzin, *Sentinel* (Series of 60), 2019.

Image 25: Tyler Muzzin, *Sentinel* (installation view), 2019.
Exhibition: *Of Surroundings* at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery
Photo: Jaime Vedres

Image 26: Tyler Muzzin, *To the Sea* (video still), 2019.
Vimeo link: https://vimeo.com/324911697

Image 27: Tyler Muzzin, *Chorus* (video still), 2019.

Image 28: Tyler Muzzin, *Chorus* (installation view), 2019.
2018 Third Shift Festival of Public Contemporary Art
Saint John, New Brunswick
Vimeo link: https://vimeo.com/287153765