

The Materialization of Nature (Part 2)

Preface

As a follow-up to my first essay from September 2017 where I attempted to introduce my interest in (in a broader sense) materiality based on historic developments that subsequently led to the collapse of distinctions between art and nature, this second essay is meant to be a continuation of my research focusing on “nature” as a medium in contemporary art practices. Here I will present my current studio work based on my research and interest in Conceptual Art, elaborate on specific topics which are of significant importance for my personal work and introduce different contemporary positions that embrace the concept of nature – with a focus on dioramas and a first approach to the philosophic complications regarding the correlation between art, nature, ecology and environment.

Background and Context

Conceptual Art, often considered as too obstructive, cerebral, and unemotional, has been in the focus of my interest for a long time. I developed a fascination for it at an early stage of my involvement in art and art history due to the exposure to the European art scene (especially in the Netherlands) as well as to the museum and gallery landscape that I was able to explore¹. My undergraduate education in the Netherlands was very much influenced by the practicing artists in the Rotterdam art scene such as *Atelier van Lieshout (AVL)* / *Joep van Lieshout*, *Karin Arink*, *Jan van den Langenberg*, *John Blake* and

¹ Many of the museums I often visited in Germany displayed substantial collections of – mostly American – Pop Art, Minimal Art and Conceptual Art, as well as the European counterparts such as Arte Povera or local adaptations of the American genres, inevitably shaping my interest in the aesthetics of 60s and 70s art.

members of *Foundation B.A.D.*², with many of them engaging in conceptual methods. Despite discerning and diverging opinions that I often – or better: *still* – encounter in dialogues with friends, fellow artists and colleagues, I usually regard these particular (subjective) signifiers of the conceptual *modus operandi* as part of the *Gesamtheit*³ of the direction's core terminology⁴. This includes the defiant aesthetical values that tend to challenge many viewers, which is surprising, because we do not only encounter these characteristics and complications in the realm of contemporary art, but also in modern/contemporary philosophy, (experimental) music and film, theater, and all of their dense intersections and amalgamations⁵. We certainly could debate about how conceptual “non-conceptual work” actually is – involving everything that does not directly conform to the classification of Conceptual Art. I am going to advance my point of view that any artwork created with serious intentions is built upon a significant conceptual support system. In today's (art)world all of the borders between distinctions are nevertheless vague and the era of Conceptual Art might be over, but the procedure of conceptualization has been fully absorbed into today's body of artistic practices.

Despite my attraction to the conceptual medium and its recurrently enciphered form of appearance, one aspect was however missing for me within the contextual framework of

² Atelier van Lieshout (AVL): <http://www.ateliervanlieshout.com>; Karin Arink: <http://dekko.nl/>; Jan van den Langenberg: www.janvandenlangenberg.nl/; John Blake: <http://www.studiojohnblake.com>; Foundation B.A.D.: <http://www.foundationbad.nl/>;

³ Gesamtheit [German] = a functional, collective multiplicity forming an entirety. Here: an accumulation of signifiers, indicators and idiosyncrasies within the universal body of a particular direction that communicates as a whole to the audience. It is an aggregator to understand the wide range of a particular form of expression. Not meant to be confused with *Gesamtkunstwerk* (= total work of art).

⁴ I am using a linguistic term on purpose to express the direction's descriptive fundamentals that often outweigh the visual importance within the whole conceptual body.

⁵ I am referring to literature partially used as material for my writing and research: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Jaques Ranciere, or the texts by Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord; in terms of music, everything that does not conform to conventional (“mainstream”) developments such as (contemporary) noise music, experimental ambient sound, or the - now classical - John Cage; contemporary choreographic theater, such as the politically charged and often ambivalent productions by Austrian director Johan Kresnik; (nonlinear) experimental film like those by Steve McQueen, Sally Potter or David Lynch; the intersections of all of these aforementioned directions which fuse, for example, in the work of Anne Imhof and – to a certain extent – in Jonathan Meese's *Gesamtkunstwerk* productions, who just created a very tense version of Wagner's Parsifal, “Mondparsifal, Beta 9-23” commissioned by the Vienna Festival.

Conceptual Art - and contemporary art in general: *nature*. For a long time, I perceived the engagement with nature to be the very antithesis to contemporary art. From my point of view dealing with nature, or reflecting on it, was unquestionably contrary to the debates in art, theory, and the ongoing critical advancements. Nature and the outdoors were regarded as romantic and therefore no longer qualified as being suitable to be addressed as a topic of the contemporary discourse. As such, they could only be considered as being part of art history studies. However, on closer inspection my previous assumption proved to be untenable; on the contrary, the exploration of nature attested to be a significant part of Conceptual Art since its beginnings in the 1960s, seemingly reaching a climax in recent years, transformed by the historical developments and the paradigm shift which I described in my first essay.

During my first forthright exposure to contemporary art⁶ I discovered the work of artists like Lois Weinberger, Roxy Paine or Mark Dion, thus artists who implicate the idea of nature in their work. A return to investigating even those artists who were already for a long time a major inspiration should consequently be the result of my current research. Luckily, I can call Mark my mentor and friend. His work is a relevant part of my ongoing exploration and as a fortunate coincidence a major survey⁷ of his art is currently up at the ICA Boston, hence a big part of his projects, installations and methods are displayed in one institution. Before I venture into a more elaborate introduction of certain works by him and other artists that are of importance for my studio practice and research, I will present a short introduction and an overview of my ongoing studio practice of my work for Semester #2.

⁶ In 2004, while preparing for my art history studies at the University of Bonn in Germany, I interned at the Bonner Kunstverein, a state funded non-profit institution with an extensive tradition of curating significant and acclaimed exhibitions of contemporary art since its establishment in the 1960s. Artists included Anselm Kiefer, Hanne Darboven, John Bock, Thomas Ruff, Kiki Smith, Dieter Roth and many more. As compensation for my work I received numerous publications and exhibition catalogs including those of Mark Dion and Lois Weinberger, who were exhibiting at the institution too. This marked my first exposure to work that was profoundly different from what I usually regarded as artistic – such as painting, sculpture, drawing etc. (Link to the website of the Bonner Kunstverein: www.bonner-kunstverein.de)

⁷ *Mark Dion: Misadventures of a 21st-Century Naturalist*. ICA Boston, October 4 – December 31, 2017.

Studio Practice

As I progress with my studio work and research I notice a growing interest in environmentalism and ecological questions, including systems that connect nature topics with the ability to disrupt the idea of nature as we are used to perceiving it. With hindsight, this development makes sense to me since I have previously referenced ideas like *infrastructure, periphery, architecture, transition*, hence artificial (human) invasiveness. It manifested within my work through the incorporation of highly processed materials such as concrete, plywood, prefabricated metal or plastic. Based on this perception, I grouped my studio work for semester #2 into categories that explore *anthropocentric* systems that are connected to my interest in systems and – to a certain extent – social interaction:



Fig. 1. Studio and garden location in Lowell, MA (Image taken from Google Maps)

- a) **Garden system** (working title: *Systemata Hortensium* - Hortus I: Garden System, Hortus II: Garden Language, Hortus III: Amateur Gardener's Seedbank)

During the summer months, I spend a lot of time outside of my studio space in what we could call a “garden”, to either read, work or to partake in gardening/social activities. Unlike my work from semester #1, which was mainly based on outsourcing and gathering information from a region that once used to be very

close to me (the region where I grew up), this new group of work pulls information from a location which – in contrast – is very close to my personal, current *habitat*.

The area I am describing is primarily a communal gathering place for social interaction (Fig.1.). It is also an artificial construct; an accumulation of raised garden/vegetable beds located at the peripheral zone of a large, adjacent parking lot. This area provides individual spaces for the people in our community to grow their own yields (or flowers, if one choses). In the broader picture however, we are dealing with ecological micro-systems. These artificial systems are uneconomical at their very core and demand a lot of attention and care (water, fences against rodents/birds, partial protection from too much sun/heat, removal of weeds, fertilizing, time etc.). Due to their urbanized condition through placement in a predominantly industrialized location, these “nature-pods” are only sustainable during a certain time of the year. This observation led to my idea of attempting to recreate an artificial garden system with the purpose to keep part of the existing garden alive, while incorporating a *multiplicity* of direct and indirect systems that are interconnected. Some of the included parameters are:

1. Internal and external water circulation system
2. Air circulation system
3. Full spectrum light
4. Construction material (fiberglass / epoxy resin / MDF / Plexiglass)
5. Soil and seeds (sourced from garden area in Lowell, MA)
6. Plants (eventually)
7. Historic French and Dutch prints referencing plants / roots / gardening / tools

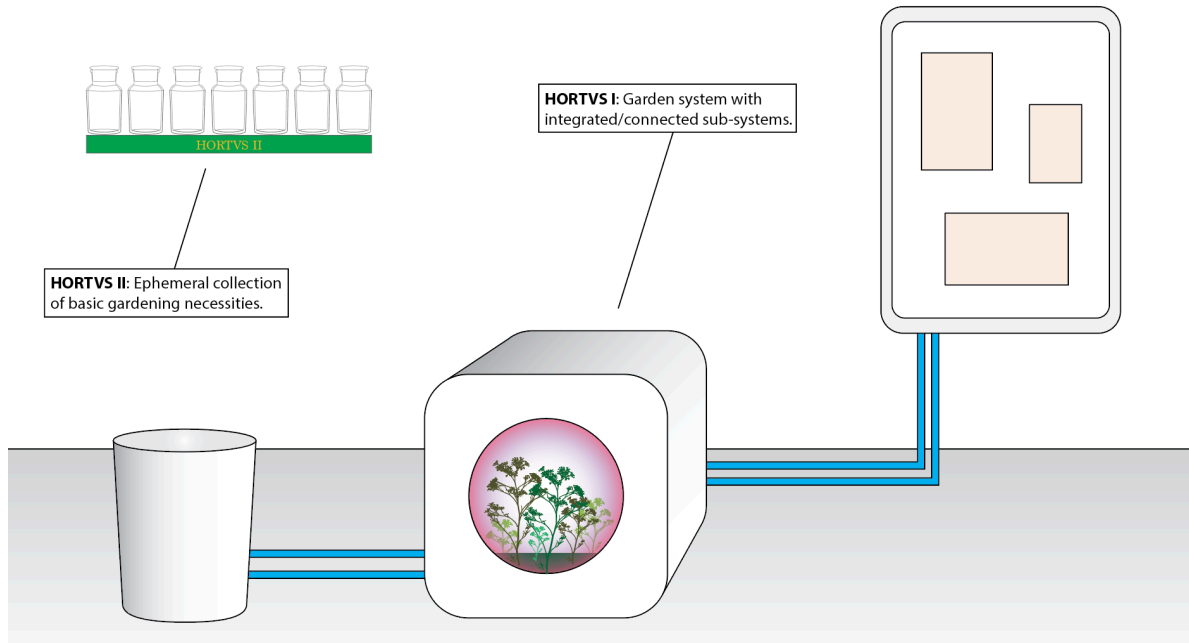


Fig. 2. Illustrator sketch of 'Garden System' installation (work in progress)

b) **Synathrope⁸ system** (working titles: Pigeon system, I Heart NY, Nest)

This group of work originated from observing systems, rather than sourcing materials from a particular area like the garden. The idea to investigate the synanthropic nature of pigeons (rock dove – or rock pigeon – *Columba livia*) came to me while I was researching the area where I grew up, which led to discoveries about the importance of the pigeon for the social community of miners/workers in Germany. The pigeon – also referred to as the “poor man’s (race)horse” – was a staple of social life in postwar Germany. I still remember some of the pigeon clubs in the neighborhood where I lived. I also learned that pigeon breeding was a major activity in New York City, but it has almost vanished due to the gentrification of the boroughs and the overall perception of the pigeon as a nuisance, pest and/or carrier of diseases – which is nothing but a preconception about the bird as a symbol. The pigeon however represents a system that evolved from independent

⁸ Synathrope (Greek: syn [σύν] = “together with” + anthrop(os) [άνθρωπος] = “man”) = a member of wild, undomesticated organisms that adapt and benefit from artificially created, human habitats.

to dependent, by adapting to the ongoing urbanization of nature through human intervention. Due to the bird's unique characteristics (e.g. the skill to nest on very steep structures) their natural habitat has shifted from rocky cliffs into the concrete jungle of our cities. Sarah Gunawan depicts the synanthropic system in her Essay *Knowing the Synanthrope*, based on "[...] species which exist between domestic and wild, who benefit from living in close proximity to humans yet remain beyond their control. These animals have evolved to the patterns of transformation, consumption, and production exhibited by human civilizations. As a result, these opportunistic species have thrived and proliferated alongside human geographic expansion. They are most abundant in city landscapes where they occupy the streets, buildings, and infrastructural systems established and inhabited by humans."⁹

The idea, based on my findings, was to visualize the systematical dissonance of *nature vs. culture vs. environment* (= a first approach toward understanding a non-dualist perception of three major themes that inhabit a significant portion of our theoretical ecosystem, forming a symbiosis). The resulting installation is an assemblage that takes a critical look at both, the concept of building (= [infra]structure) and the subsequent attraction of non-human life-forms that display an interesting ambivalence (here: the bird as pest in opposition to the bird as pet) into the constructed, urban human ecosystem. All pieces in this installation are based on heavily processed materials that are normally used on construction sites. I also integrated specific "sophisticated" objects and materials that reference our refined visual culture (for example in regard to framing and displaying artwork, thus materials for longtime display and conservation):

⁹ Gunawan, Sarah – *Knowing the Synanthrope*. Article published on *Expanded Environment*. April 6, 2016 (Link: <http://www.expandedenvironment.org/knowning-the-synanthrope/>)

1. Plywood (partially sourced from a NYC construction site)
2. Anti-bird spikes, tar paper, found bird nest
3. Conservation Museum Glass and pH-neutral mat board
4. Custom made taxidermy pigeon (*Columba livia*)
5. Vintage German pigeon print
6. 5:00 min video loop of pigeons interacting with food in New York
7. Collection of 'I HEART NY' gadgets



Fig. 3. Photoshop Mockup of framed pigeon print, part of 'Pigeon System' installation (work in progress)



Fig. 4. Video still image from 5:00 min. looped video of pigeons in New York City

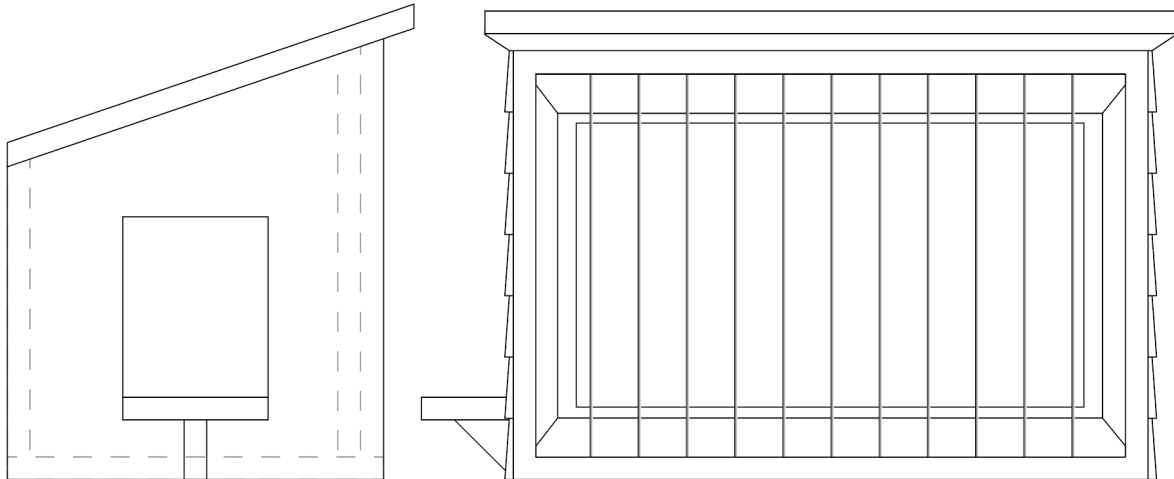


Fig. 5. Illustrator sketch of 'Nest', a scale model pigeon coop made from construction material (work in progress)

Research:

From the Domain of the Museum to a Philosophy of Multiplicity

From Plato¹⁰ to Deleuze/Guattari¹¹ and many other critical thinkers, we have always scrutinized our position within our ecological domain, trying to identify the status quo of the socio-economic and geopolitical landscape, including the ideal image of what we want to call *nature*. Our sensitivity, recognition, and awareness directed toward our opinion about nature has therefore always been influenced by our political, environmental, philosophical, and artistic concepts and interests.

In conjunction with my research for this semester I found myself visiting numerous museums that do not primarily display art, unless it is in any way tied to the subject matter of their respective institutional emphasis. These museums nevertheless focus on representations of certain economical, ecological, cultural and/or environmental concentrations¹², leading me to the following assumption: many connotations regarding the perception of nature were created by the interaction of – as mentioned above – political, environmental, philosophical and artistic motifs, resulting in a distorted (biased) perception of our ecosphere. This effect can still be experienced in even those institutions that, until this date, withstand our urge to modernize and exchange existing collections for the virtual and digital spectacle¹³ by refusing to cater to a society that seemingly

¹⁰ When Plato talks of the divine he refers to the complex idea of *logos* (Greek: λόγος), which by its very translation means “reason” but also “word”, “debate” and “consideration”. It is a principle that organizes the entirety based on preexisting matter, which also includes nature. It stands in contrast to the common polytheistic belief system of his time and can be seen as a form of nondualist thinking. The cornerstones of Plato’s theories are categorized into four subjects: logical, moral, epistemological, and metaphysical ideas. These categories inspired Neoplatonic philosophy, which, based on modern-day nondualism, bridges into the more complex philosophies of Deluze and Guattari – especially on the theme of metaphysics.

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari’s writings are insofar interesting for my research because they stimulated a radical re-thinking of themes that are normally perceived as dualisms: nature – culture / natural – artificial / technology – biology. I came across a copy of a book that focuses on the investigation of those concepts, approaching them from a non-dualist / materialist point of view. This book has been added to my running bibliography: Bernd (Author/Editor) – *An (Un)Likely Alliance: Thinking Environment(s) with Deleuze/Guattari*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing; new edition (January 12, 2008). ISBN: 1-4438-0036-8

¹² New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, MA; Harvard Museum of Natural History, Cambridge, MA; Museum for Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, MA; American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY;

¹³ Claire Bishop makes an interesting point regarding the contemporary spectacle: “More recently, Boris Groys has suggested that in today’s culture of self-exhibitionism (in Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, which he provocatively compares to the text/image compositions of conceptual art) we have a spectacle without

unlearned how to look for the wonders of the past which have been preserved as a visual and stylistic dialog between research-science and artistic presentation. These institutions are in a way time-capsules, ultimately allowing work like that of Roxy Paine or Mark Dion to succeed by establishing *simulation of nature*.

In conclusion, our perception of nature is nothing else but a composition of cultural intervention and preservation, contingent upon epistemological conditions that we, the contemporary society, constantly construct, deconstruct and reconstruct – in the finest fashion of the seemingly never-ending postmodernist Möbius strip. This is where I locate my general interest for my research. It is not at all about the precise representation and recreation of nature, for example as in a landscape painting or a scientific illustration. My interest is based on the system that predefines the idea of what nature has to be, the persisting conclusions after it materializes into a fundamental principle – or key concept – within the jurisprudence of contemporary art and how I can use nature as theoretical aggregator, based on the problem that art poses in particular. Art demonstrates that it cannot be nature, because art does not expose the viewer directly to nature - only to its own perception of the *idea of nature*. Let us just recall a certain word: *artificial*. At the same time, claiming that something *is* nature while stating that something else *is not* nature is a binary approach to the subject. This is a paradox that can only be unraveled by incorporating a nondualist and non-anthropocentric dialog.

1 - The Great Indoors:

The Museum (of Natural History) as Catalyst - the Diorama as Aggregator

As the name appropriately suggests, the Museum for Natural History is a type of museum that surveys the historical perception of natural concepts, based on historical verification. In conjunction with my research I now want to take an exemplary look at one of the poster

spectators [...] In other words, one of the central requirements of art is that it is given to be seen and reflected upon, by a spectator.” Bishop, Claire – *Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?*, in: Thompson, Nato (Editor) – *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. The MIT Press; reprint edition (August 11, 2017). p. 36

children of the natural history museum: the *diorama*. It is an archetype of our perception of nature; a stylized, artificial mini-ecosphere presented as a compact container of



Fig. 6. Roxy Paine – Checkpoint (2014)

ephemeral knowledge. It is a projection suggesting how reality should look, a creation based on the status quo of scientific research, rendered by artistic interpretation. While proposing an ideal of environmental representation, the diorama is however often far-fetched from reality but manages to insinuate its truth onto the viewer.

In his recent installations, artist **Roxy Paine** reflects on the essence of dioramic representation. While his investigation is directed toward the advancing industrialization of the human condition, he primarily examines meeting points of human interaction. Paine exchanges the classic dioramic perspective that usually presents dense accumulations of life-forms in an exaggerated manner (e.g. animals and plants) for empty office spaces, airport check-ins or control rooms, which purposely lack the physical presence of life. But just as their counterparts from the natural history museum, these rooms “emerge as psychological, constructed realities of universal habitats”, where a fast-food counter now

“becomes a fixed point of quiet meditation, a site whose everyday normality rests uneasily alongside the looming suggestion of larger social anxieties.”¹⁴

Of course, Paine’s work would lack its powerful and eerie message without the museums’ pioneering work in dioramic representation: his sterile environments are seemingly missing nature as the predominant, visual theme, but without the preexisting original *idea* of the diorama his works would merely be desaturated scale models of signifiers that we perceive as ordinary reality. Nature – based on the representation of the *idea of nature* originating from the museum landscape – materialized through its removal, while its representational spirit resides. Ultimately, we (sub)consciously know, based on the manifested history of the featured object: the purpose of the diorama should be to represent nature, not office furniture, x-ray scanners or food counters, although Paine’s dioramas depict what is de facto the habitat of the contemporary individual and maybe the dioramic content of the future.



Fig. 7. Mark Dion - Landfill (1999-2000)

¹⁴ From Roxy Paine’s artist statement, to be found under the following link: <http://roxypaine.com/about/>

The *idea of nature* can again be experienced as a mantra within the work of artist **Mark Dion**. By posing questions regarding how we develop our image of nature in the first place, how our desires, understandings, and cultural requirements influence our concept of perceiving nature at all, Dion analyzes the forms of historical and social constructions and how they lead to the representation of nature within the museum.

Furthermore, Dion surveys socioeconomic and sociopolitical inclinations and justifications toward the exploitation of nature based on our societal desires. In his extensive body of work, the artist also investigates the idea of the diorama, but contrary to Paine's work, his approach is questioning the actual accuracy of representation of the kind of simulated nature we normally experience in the museum. By appropriating the same visual factors the museum diorama provides us, Dion creates a mimesis that incorporates a painted background, props mimicking the environment, and taxidermy animals. Highlighting the endangerment of a disappearing kind of presentation, his assemblage *Landfill* is presented in a shipping crate, mounted on casters. The question remains what will disappear first, the discussed animals through the disruptive and destructive intervention of humans into their natural habitat, or the diorama from the museum display due to the ongoing modernization of institutions.

2 - Toward a Nondualist Approach: **Challenging the Anthropocentric Perspective**

“What we observe is not Nature itself, but Nature exposed to our method of questioning”
- Werner Heisenberg¹⁵

The concept of *potential relationality* is evident in both Dion's and Paine's work. Eleni Ikoniadou describes this philosophical approach as a position where “heterogeneous realities beyond the limits of possibility and the concreteness of actuality” come together,

¹⁵ Heisenberg, Werner - *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007. p. 78

arguing that an “opposition between nature and culture reduces the world to a function of human understanding [...] that we problematically reduce to the domain of the living.”¹⁶ Let us take another look at some of Roxy Paine’s art that deliberately positions itself in opposition to the influence of the artist’s authority on the resulting artwork by incorporating fully automatized production procedures which are rooted in outsourced creation based on non-linear engineering. By doing so the relation between artist, artwork and the making of art gets challenged and *creation* as well as *selection* – a subject heavy on (social) Darwinist theory – will inevitably come to the fore of a discussion that includes art, nature and ecology. In this context Paine’s sculpture-making machine *SCUMAK* (*Auto Sculpture Maker*) is an interesting example, which connects directions of his naturalistic work - Paine is also known for work that displays meticulously created reproductions of natural objects like mushrooms, plants or poppies - to his interest in mechanized applications. Paine’s machine creates one-of-a-kind sculptures by melting pigmented plastic and extruding them onto a conveyor belt, hence creating multiplicities originating from a primary standard (the material). Art History Professor Emeritus from the University of Illinois and author of the popular art history textbook *Art after 1940*, Jonathan Fineberg, notes about Paine’s automatization process that the artist “positions [...] his machines at



Fig. 7. Roxy Paine – *SCUMAK* (*Auto Sculpture Maker*) (1998-2001) and an example for an extruded *SCUMAK* sculpture

¹⁶ Ikoniadu, Eleni – *Rhythmic Topology: The Affective Stretching of Nature*, in: Herzogenrath, Bernd (Author/Editor) – *An (Un)Likely Alliance: Thinking Environment(s) with Deleuze/Guattari*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing; new edition (January 12, 2008). p.163

a fluid interface of man, nature, and science; [taking] the viewer to an intuitive experience of the liminal place at which scientists have arrived as they begin to redesign the human genome and connect living neurons with silicon chips.”¹⁷

In Paine’s work the borders between art, science, nature, and ethics merge indeed into an abstract construct, questioning the integrity of art and technology with work that carries a deep meaning, masqueraded as a seemingly absurdist automated installation. It also requires from us to rethink our perception of natural processes in abstract terms. While Paine’s machine still creates objects made from inorganic materials, it closes in on the notion that the distinctions and transitions between nature (reproduction) culture (production) and art (the liminal) are increasingly merging. Elizabeth Grosz, Professor of Literature at Duke University and an expert in the field of French philosophy, describes this tendency from a Deleuzian perspective: “Art is the means by which nature deviates itself from givenness, comes to function in other terms than the useful or the manageable: art is thus the space in which the natural and the material is the most attenuated, rendered the most visible and tangible for living beings; and these qualities and properties, attractive to various forms of life become art only to the extent that they can be moved, transferred outside of where they are found, sent on a deterritorializing trajectory, able to function elsewhere than where they originate or are found: while the conditions and raw materials for art are located within territory, as part of the earth, they become transportable elsewhere, only to the extent that they intensify bodies that circulate, move, change, only to the extent that they too become subject to evolutionary transformation and spatial movement.”¹⁸

In the case of Mark Dion’s work the critique of anthropocentric positions within the realm of art and nature becomes clear in his installation *Scala Naturae*¹⁹. Representing the

¹⁷ Fineburg, Jonathan - *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being*. Pearson; 3 edition (July 2, 2010). p. 498ff

¹⁸ Grosz, Elizabeth – *Eight Deleuzian Theses on Art*, in: Herzogenrath, Bernd (Author/Editor) – *An (Un)Likely Alliance: Thinking Environment(s) with Deleuze/Guattari*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing; new edition (January 12, 2008). p.50

¹⁹ In the Summer of 2017, on the occasion of his exhibition at the ICA Boston, Dion created a second, larger version of this piece titled *The Classical Mind (Scala Naturae and Cosmic Cabinet)*

destructive ways in which ancient philosophies influenced our understanding of the world, an oversized stairway characterizes the idea of the *Great Chain of Being*, an arboreal (= hierarchical) scheme for organizing nature into accessible categories. The origins for this system can be traced back to Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose bust thrones on top of Dion's stair, representing the all-encompassing magnificence of humanity, while each level of the stairway progresses upward from basic life forms – sponges and fungi – to more complex organisms. The original idea of the Great Chain is indeed an ascending principle from foundational elements to the definitive object of highest perfection – or in other words – a divine entity (god). This particular concept gained momentum and a questionable reputation throughout the evolution of the sciences, not least established by



Fig. 8. Mark Dion – *Scala Naturae* (1994)

Darwinist theories. This concept infiltrated taxonomy, museum presentations and displays, as well as notions regarding cultural classifications about race, gender, and class. Dion did not remove the human from the scale, nor did he mix up the order of the elements, but by displaying it in the old-fashioned way of antiquated perception, he criticizes the overall influence of this theory on our general sensitivity. According to Dion, his installation represents the “persistent and pernicious concept, that places humankind on the throne of the animal kingdom”, a concept that only persists due to a dualist ideology. Dion’s images of nature infiltrate even the most consumerist aspects of our civilization, pointing out that not a single known object in our ecosystem has been left untouched by human intervention. His art summarizes an astounding array of emotional and intellectual reactions, evoking a feeling of pessimism which get counterbalanced by a wonder about nature that verges on hope and optimism initiated by the collision of ideologies, preserving a complicated moment in environmental history.

Even though very different in appearance, we can notice a fundamental, reoccurring thematic structure in these works of Paine and Dion which are of importance for my current research. It is a critique of the mimetic concept backing the theory of evolution-production as described by Deleuze and Guattari: “Nature is conceived as an enormous mimesis: either in the form of a chain of beings perpetually imitating one another, progressively and regressively, and tending toward the divine higher term they all imitate by graduated resemblance, as the model for and principle behind the series; or in the form of a mirror imitation with nothing left to imitate because it itself is the model everything else imitates, this time by ordered difference.”²⁰

²⁰ *Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible. Becoming—Three aspects of sorcery: multiplicity; the Anomalous, or the Outsider; transformations—Individuation and Haecceity: five o'clock in the evening—Longitude, latitude, and the plane of consistency—The two planes, or the two conceptions of the plane— Becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-molecular: zones of proximity—Becoming imperceptible—The secret—Majority, minority, minoritarian—The minoritarian character and dissymmetry of becoming: double becoming—Point and line, memory and becoming— Becoming and block— The opposition between punctual systems and multilineal systems—Music, painting, and becomings— The refrain— Theorems of deterritorialization continued—Becoming versus imitation.* In: Deleuze, Gilles / Guattari, Felix – *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* University of Minnesota Press; 2 edition (December 21, 1987). p.234-235