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SANTA CRUZ

**A CRYSTALLINE QUILT FOR THE THICK PRESENT**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

In

DIGITAL ARTS AND NEW MEDIA

by

**Ann Altstatt**

September 2018

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## **Abstract**

**Ann Altstatt**

### **A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present**

*A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present (CQTP)* is a larger-than-body scale sculptural installation centered on an assemblage of materials salvaged from the Dimeo Lane landfill in Santa Cruz. *CQTP* is composed of a multi-level tessellated geometric array of repeating triangular forms arranged on the gallery floor, mirrored by large, chaotic assemblage of tangled linear elements suspended overhead. Through the formal metaphors of the tangle, the crystal lattice and a textile quilt, this work uses the landfill site as a case-study in the layered, entangled, superimposed nature of time, and proposes the ordering and reordering of matter as a record of these complex temporalities. *CQTP* challenges the viewer to join and be implicated in this investigation of the material histories of trash, and more broadly to consider the implications of waste and consumption, humans in relationship to the more-than-human world, and creative re-thinkings of our changing futures in the Anthropocene.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who supported my work and helped make this project possible: Santa Cruz City Arts for the opportunity to spend time at Dimeo Lane, DANM faculty and staff for their support and mentorship, my thesis committee for their guidance and belief in me, my cohort for their comradere and collaboration, my editors for cleaning up my act and my friends and family for their love and understanding. Lastly, I would like to especially thank my partner Josh for putting in innumerable extra hours with the dog and the kiddo these past two years, tolerating the piles of trash I would drag home from the dump, and for putting up with the growing stacks of books next to the bed. No one does anything alone.

## Introduction

*A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present (CQTP)* uses the site of the Dimeo Lane landfill as a case study in the complex temporalities in the landscape of the Anthropocene, a term used to designate our current moment as “a new geologic epoch, defined by unprecedented human disturbance of the earth’s ecosystems.”<sup>1 2</sup> Anthropocene here is intended not in a techno-futurist sense, or as part of the debate as to the correctness of this word in a sea of other possible terms, but rather to demarcate the dangerous and uncharted nature of this moment. Doing so is urgently necessary as the dangers of this moment are of a qualitatively different character from those of the past: this is a moment in which continuing on with “business as usual,” as Anna Tsing suggests, “is going to kill us.”<sup>3</sup>

Karen Barad uses the term “thick present” to posit that our perceived present is complicated by many different simultaneous pasts and futures, both in a literal and figurative sense.<sup>4</sup> As implied through the title of this work, *CQTP* expands upon the concept of the thick-present, positing that the past is tangibly present in the current moment through the traces of the time-based processes which order and reorder

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<sup>1</sup> Noteworthy alternatives to the term Anthropocene have been suggested (“Capitalocene”, “Plantationocene”, “Chthulucene”). This diversification of terminology is motivated by the anthropocentric and reductionist implication in the root Anthro— blame for global climate catastrophe cannot be evenly distributed to all of humanity, nor are humans the lone isolated victims. Each of these variously articulated terms stakes out important claims as to the root causes of this moment of catastrophe and the most appropriate responses. In this paper I have chosen to use “Anthropocene” in the widest sense as a catch-all to include these various correctives, except where otherwise noted

<sup>2</sup> Aarhus University, “Living in the Anthropocene”, AURA: Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene, accessed 5/19/2018. <http://anthropocene.au.dk/profile/>

<sup>3</sup> Anna Tsing, “The Best of End Times: A Conversation with Anna Tsing”, Edge Effects, accessed 8/28/2018. <http://edgeeffects.net/anna-tsing/>

<sup>4</sup> Karen Michelle Barad, “Troubling time/s, Undoing the Future”, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University YouTube Channel, 12/8/2016. Accessed 7/18/2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBnOJioYNHU>



matter. This work hopes to reframe human relationship with the non-human by making visible the deep, tangled, and all-at-onceness of time through addressing questions such as: What are the implications of material transformation? What is the interplay between order and disorder? And how is time coded into the structure of matter?

From my background in geology I have become attuned to the traces of past events in the current landscape. From this perspective, time can be imagined as layered strata, yet these layers are also transparent, allowing one to see pasts stacked and superimposed onto each other in the shape and composition of the present world. Any point in space has been many different places at different points in time, and traces of those places are visible through the landforms and the geologic record they leave. In this work, I explore several formal metaphors borrowed from time-based geologic processes, and argue that this temporal logic can be extended to apply to matter broadly, positioning all of the material world as a time-fossil.

What better place to study complex temporalities in the landscape of the Anthropocene than the landfill? *CQTP* examines the processes of the landfill through the figures of the quilt, where disparate fragments are brought together to form a new whole informed by traces of their past stories, and the tangle, characterized by material and temporal mixing, superposition, and unconformity. These two forms mirror one another and together constitute the additional formal metaphors of layered strata and landscape/cityscape.

*CQTP* exists in conversation with different intersecting histories of found object and minimalist sculpture, land art, conceptual art, and the associated tradition of the non-site. This work is positioned at the interstices between these histories,

presenting textiles made of wood, metal and plastic, an artificial geology made of trash; the definition of anthropocene in a stratigraphic sense.

As anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, “reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death.”<sup>5</sup> As an installation composed of refuse, *CQTP* invites viewers to contemplate our relationship to dirt and soil, waste and consumption, the built and natural world, and to consider our actions in relationship to a complex, enveloping past, present, and future. In not allowing time or matter to collapse into neatly bivalent categories, I hope to share both the sublime horror of deep time and the overwhelming exuberance of being situated amongst this impossibility, an impossibility described by Donna Haraway as the “this-ness here-ness matter-ness and sheer improbability of it all”.<sup>6 7</sup>

From our position on the brink of unprecedented human-caused environmental catastrophe, the context of deep and entangled time puts us in our place. The intimate presence of many different pasts in the here-and-now positions us to question how we regard ourselves in relation to the more-than-human world, creates a rupture through which different futures may be possible, and I argue is central to “the arts of living (and dying) on a damaged planet”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen J. Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: myth and metaphor in the discovery of geological time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 62.

<sup>7</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, “A Public Conversation with Donna Haraway and Starhawk: Magic, Figuration & Speculative Fiction as Calls to Action” (presentation, Center for Creative Ecologies, University of California, Santa Cruz, 10/18/2017).

<sup>8</sup> Anna Tsing, with parenthetical addition by Donna Haraway, as discussed in Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 37-8.

## Historical Framework and Literature Review

*A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present* exists in conversation with the intersecting histories of found object sculpture, conceptual art and minimalism, land art and contemporary environmental art perspectives. While *CQTP* is distinct in the ways it recombines approaches and deviates from former precedents, this work can be viewed as an extension of these lineages.

Found object sculpture has been used by many artists throughout the 20th century, from the early “ready-made”s of Duchamp and other Dada workers, to artists such as Bruce Conner and Wallace Berman working in assemblage in the 1950’s, and beyond.<sup>9</sup> Being driven by concept and process, *CQTP* follows the lineage of Conceptual Art and Arte Povera, especially temporally focused tree-derived works of Giuseppe Penone. For instance, in *Cedro di Versailles* (2000-2003), Penone painstakingly excavated the structure of a sapling from deep inside a large felled tree, the adult the inner sapling eventually grew into, setting up a powerful image of compressed time.<sup>10</sup> As an addition to this lineage of found object sculpture, *CQTP* combines assemblagist urges towards recontextualizing recognizable manufactured objects (the ready-made, as seen in the tangled mass of landfill materials) with minimalist informed sensibility (an ordering and “additive, serialist principle”, in this case through manipulation of found materials into repeating geometric forms).<sup>11 12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Detailed investigations can be found in: Rebecca Solnit, *Secret exhibition: six California artists of the Cold War era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Marks, “Force of Nature: Interview with Giuseppe Penone”, *Apollo*, September 15, 2015. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/force-of-nature-interview-with-giuseppe-penone/>

<sup>11</sup> This phrasing is borrowed from a description of similar tendencies in Dan Peterman’s work. Found in: Dan Peterman and Stephan Berg, *7 deadly sins and other stories*, (Hannover: Der Kunstverein, 2001): 16.

<sup>12</sup> See page 23 for a more complete description of *CQTP*

*CQTP* relies heavily on the legacy of Robert Smithson, a mid-century photographer and sculptor who worked at the intersections of minimalism, conceptual art, and land art whose work profoundly influenced the way artists have conceived of the landscape in the last 50 years. Furthermore, and of particular relevance to *CQTP*, Smithson's work deals with industrial and damaged sites, temporality and geologic time, and the fabrication of artificial geologies.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1967 essay titled *Provisional Theory of a Non-Site*, Smithson puts forward the nonsite as an abstract, three-dimensional representation of a site and its processes, a form of "Indoor land art".<sup>14</sup> In Smithson's nonsites, the artist removed materials from a specific outdoor space in the landscape and transported them "into the generalized spaces of a gallery or museum", often displayed accompanied with photographs, maps, or other evidence of the original site.<sup>15</sup> In these works, Smithson sought to compress the expansive experience of "the great, unfocused landscape" into the enclosed gallery space, while still maintaining a tangible connection to the site within the landscape.<sup>16</sup> I propose that *CQTP* functions as non-site for Dimeo Lane, taking specimens from the landscape at this site and recombining them in an abstracted model for the landfill's material processes of amassing, mixing, sorting, as well as entanglement, restratification and transformation.

Central to my research for this work was a three-month artist residency at the Dimeo Lane landfill. Although working in a very different vein, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and her groundbreaking career as an "embedded artist" with the New York

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<sup>13</sup> James Housefield, "Sites of Time: organic and geologic time in the art of Robert Smithson and Roxy Paine", *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 4 (2007): 538.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Smithson, "Provisional Theory of a Non-Site", *Robert Smithson*. Accessed 5/13/2018. <https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Housefield, "Sites of Time", 545-6.

<sup>16</sup> Housefield, "Sites of Time", 546.

City sanitation department and at the Fresh Kills Landfill since 1977 informs any contemporary landfill work. Beginning with her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969* Ukeles dedicated her arts practice to “maintenance”, making visible and connecting the ongoing work of both the gendered reproductive labor of the household with the institutionalized efforts of janitorial and garbage workers in the public sector.<sup>17</sup> Ukeles categorizes this drive as promoting collectivity and dissolving the boundaries between work and art.<sup>18</sup> In summarizing her work, authors Finkelppearl et al state that Ukeles’s focus on “process” signals a shift in the tactics being used by artists in the late 1960s “from *object-oriented* to *systems-oriented* culture.” The authors go on to suggest that Ukeles’s emphasis on such systems reflected her understanding of how socially relevant art work takes place, noting that “here change emanates not from *things*, but *the way things are done*.”<sup>19</sup> On a more personal level, Ukeles’s repeated focus on her dual role as mother and artist resonates with me as I have struggled to find a balance between my research and school work while parenting an energetic young child.

Although *CQTP* lacks the “qualities of environmental embeddedness and expansive scale” classically associated with Land Art, any discussion of a work engaging the landfill as a site of arts research needs to relate to this historical precedent.<sup>20</sup> Most of the history of artists working at dump sites can be viewed as an extension of the land art movement. In the 1970s there was a proliferation of actual

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<sup>17</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!”; reprinted in Finkelppearl, Tom Finkelppearl, ed, Larissa Harris, ed, Lucy R. Lippard, ed, Patricia C. Phillips, ed, Mierle Ukeles, ed, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles, maintenance art* (New York: Queens Museum ; DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2016): 210.

<sup>18</sup> Finkelppearl et al., *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 210.

<sup>19</sup> Finkelppearl et al., *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Suzaan Boettger, “Excavating Land Art by Women in the 1970’s: Discoveries and Oversights”, *Sculpture* 27, no. 9, (November 2008): 44

and proposed earthwork projects on the site of previous human environmental degradation as a form of esthetic remediation of dumps, mines and other anthropogenic scars on the landscape. As Barbara Noah described of proposed land-art remediation projects in King's County, WA, showcased in the Seattle Art Museum's group exhibition "Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture" in 1980, "the art here will be a vehicle for eradicating evidence of social guilt; hence it assumes a moral role."<sup>21</sup> My motivations are antithetical to this (perceived) function of landfill art; whereas Noah observes an urge to eradicate evidence of social guilt through aesthetic remediation of a damaged landscape, *CQTP* seeks to present to viewers evidence of our collective accountability.

Later engagements with the landfill as an art subject have taken different and evolving tactics. In "Fragile Ecologies", curated by Barbara Matilsky for New York's Queens Museum in 1992, artists showed actual and conceived landfill-based artworks, still largely focusing on remediation, but framed within the context of damaged ecosystems and the artist as healer.<sup>22</sup> In "Hyra in the Museum", a Tel Aviv Museum of Art exhibition in 1999/2000, international artists showcased diverse strategies for engaging with the notorious Hyra landfill site in Tel Aviv, Israel. Artists here presented work critical of the social systems which brought the Hyra site into being and used "the landscape as a mirror or a catalyst for social change" through exploring diverse facets of the practices and legacy of the landfill site; measuring, mocking, and revealing the dump's noxious character, not making it disappear.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Noah, "Cost-Effective Earth Art", *Art in America* 68, (1980): 12.

<sup>22</sup> Mira Engler, "Hyra in the Museum: Tel Aviv Museum of Art", *Public Art Review* 11, no 2 (Spring/Summer 2000), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Engler, "Hyra in the Museum", 1-2.

In a more recent group exhibition focusing on landfills, “DUMP! Multi Species Making and Unmaking” (2015), Elaine Gan (along with Steven Lam and Sarah Lookofsky) coordinated and curated an exhibition in Aarhus, Denmark. Through this context a diverse group of artists and interdisciplinary researchers interrogated issues of waste, specifically “garbage dumps and rubble of industrialization and colonialism” and multispecies entanglements in the Anthropocene.<sup>24</sup> Here Gan posits ‘unmaking’, through processes such as decomposition, obsolescence, and waste, as an appropriate counter balance to the damaging drive of runaway material production.<sup>25</sup>

Working separately from the physical context of the landfill site, many artists have engaged in meaningful ways with trash as an art subject and medium. Marc Dion, in addition to projects directly related to landfills, has worked with trash, waste and collections in a range of other contexts. In *Tate Thames Dig*, one of a series of similar undertakings in different locations, Dion engaged in an extended archaeologically-inspired project of collecting, cataloging, and displaying detritus rescued from the Thames River in London. The excavation was undertaken with a team of volunteers and collaborators, and the products of their inquiry were displayed through photographic documentation of the processes, tableaux of selected, arranged objects, and museum-like Wunderkammern displays of tools and artifacts. This work challenges boundaries between the arts and sciences, and also

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<sup>24</sup> Elaine Gan Steven Lam, Sarah Lookofsky, “DUMP! Multispecies Making and Unmaking, 2015”, Elaine Gan. Accessed 7/26/2018. <http://www.elainegan.com/dump.html>

<sup>25</sup> Elaine Gan. "DUMP! Multispecies Making and Unmaking at Kunsthal Aarhus." *Kunsthal Aarhus Vimeo Channel*. Video File. 8/24/2015. <https://vimeo.com/137148911>.

puts the viewer in the uncomfortable position of determining what kind of “truth” the artwork is presenting.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the persistent art/craft divide, there is extensive precedent for contemporary artists to use textiles in general, and quilt forms in particular. In Robert Rauschenberg’s *Bed*, from 1955, the artist presented a textile quilt fragment, along with pillow and other bed linens, composed like a recently slept in bed. This assemblage is mounted vertically, however, disrupting the comfortable tableaux; furthermore, Rauschenberg distressed the pillow and upper portions of the sheets with graphite and rough, thick applications of paint, suggesting movement, indexical bodily traces, or a general comfort/discomfort tension.<sup>27</sup>

There is considerable precedent for artists working with non-textile materials to create work in conversation with traditional textile forms. El Anatsui’s large scale bottle cap “tapestries” are undulating, aggregate surfaces formed from a multitude of small, manipulated pieces of colorful scrap metal. These works effectively bridge the trash/textile divide, although Anatsui resists their relationship to fabric.<sup>28</sup> Another example can be found in artist Anna Hepler’s 2011 piece “The Great Haul”, an illuminated, drooping net-like structure constructed from woven strips of translucent plastics salvaged from dumpsters and the landfill. The title of the work here is referencing both fishing nets and oceanic pollution, but also the act of salvage itself.

<sup>29</sup> Lastly, Phoebe Washburn’s expansive architectural installations composed of salvaged materials, described as “heaving tidal waves of refuse”, combine salvaged

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<sup>26</sup> Marc Dion, Alex Coles, et al., *Mark Dion: archaeology archeology* (London: Black Dog, 1999), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: art + textile politics* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 74.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Pollack “The New Razzle-Dazzle”, *ARTnews* 107, no. 6 (June 2008): 121.

<sup>29</sup> Patricia Malarcher, “Anna Hepler: Material Transformations”, *Surface Design Journal* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 48.



materials in structures that at once invoke textile quiltmaking traditions, as well as landscape aerial views and both layered and crystalline geologic imagery.<sup>30</sup>

Many historical and contemporary artists also use geologic metaphors and materials in their work. In addition to the geologically focused work of Smithson, many contemporary artists, such as Jimmy Durham and Maggie Groat, use images of rock and stone to invoke landscape based issues of extraction and deep time, as well as connection to non-human subjectivities.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the conception of stones as being worthless outside of their value as raw material, crystals have long been revered as magical and in defiance of clear classification. Canadian artist David Altmejd uses crystals, both actual and metaphorical, in his complex, allegorical sculptural installations. For Altmejd, the crystal symbolizes transformation, and an indistinct boundary between organic and inorganic, death and life.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey also work extensively with crystals -- metaphorically fusing the biological and the mineral through sculptural works formed by crystals grown inside skulls, figurative moulds, and other found and fabricated forms.<sup>33</sup>

To this point I have given an overview of artists and approaches I consider relevant in contextualizing *CQTP*. The following discussion will focus more in depth on several contemporary artworks which explore issues of temporality, material transformation, and geologic imagery. While diverse in appearance and approach, these works share conceptual threads critical to *CQTP*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Deidre Stein Greben, "Slikwicks, Pennyworts, and Sea Urchins", *ARTnews* 108, no. 10 (November 2009): 101.

<sup>31</sup> Carlesimo et al., "Becoming Geologic", 47.

<sup>32</sup> Cheetham, "The Crystal Interface", 253.

<sup>33</sup> Gill Perry and Brian Dillon, *Crystal World*. (London: The Royal Society, 2011), 6-11.

<sup>34</sup> I am consciously leaving out many noteworthy works with relevant formal and material attributes by Dan Peterman, Peter Buggenhout, and others. Although they offer important

Adrián Villar Rojas is an Argentinian “post-human” sculptor and installation artist, whose work deals with time, waste, mortality, and the nature of art and knowledge. His sculptural installations evoke a sense of temporal uncertainty, presenting “fragments that exist in a slippery space between the future, the past, and an alternate reality in the present.”<sup>35</sup> In *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, Rojas transformed The Geffen contemporary in Los Angeles, a large warehouse building, into a science fiction museum/reliquary space, contrasting bright blue constructed interior partial walls with large stone boulders, pillars of human-generated strata, and

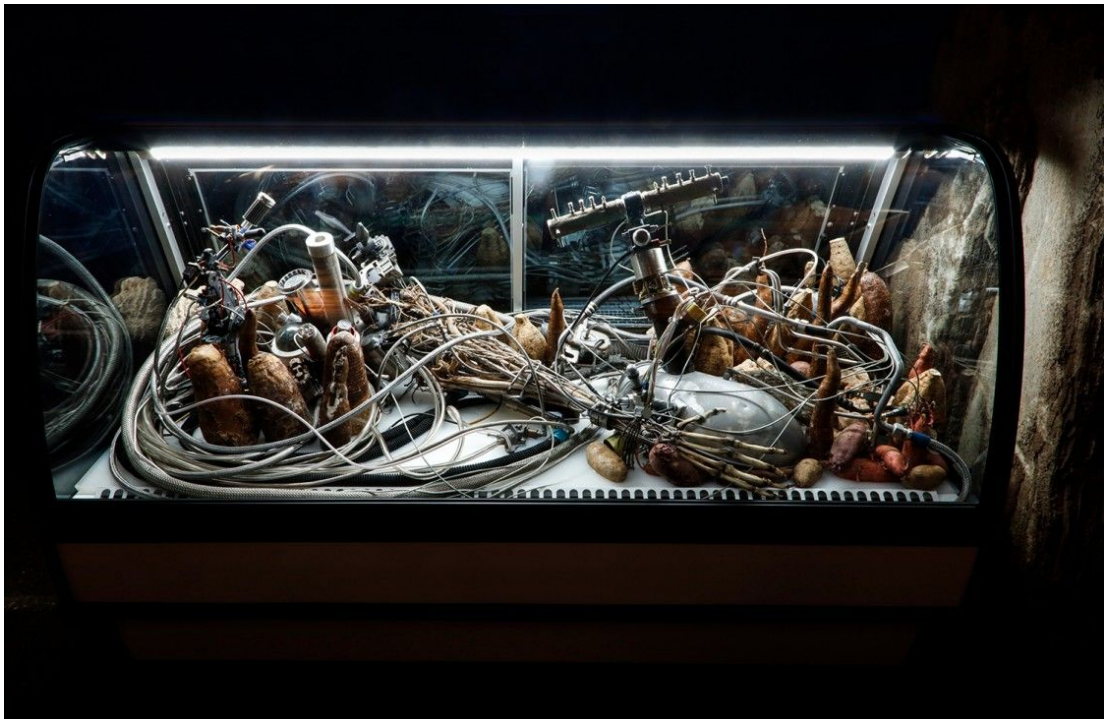


Figure 1. Vitrine detail from *The Theater of Disappearance*, Adrian Rojas<sup>36</sup>

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connections to exploring materiality, working with trash/refuse, etc. I have instead decide to focus on artists and works with relevance to the central issue of temporality and transformation in *CQTP*.

<sup>35</sup> Bryan Barcena and Helen Molesworth, “Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance”, The Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed 7/26/2018. <https://www.moca.org/exhibition/adrian-villar-rojas-the-theater-of-disappearance>

<sup>36</sup> “Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance”

assemblages in vitrines.<sup>37</sup>

These vitrines contain a mixture of disparate natural and manufactured material, rotting food, shoes, etc., as well as fragments of previous sculptures by the artist. Rojas describes the rapid transitions that create meaning in the work: “...elements will journey from ‘art’ to ‘non-art’ and back again to ‘art,’ reinforcing their impermanence and our own in relation to our attempts to ascribe imperishable meanings and values to the world around us.”<sup>38</sup> Rojas’s sentiments on transformation and transgression of categorization echo themes in the work of Joe Scanlan, and aid in the ongoing project of dismantling such categories, or at least wallowing in their contradictions.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 2. Installation view of *The Theater of Disappearance*, Adrian Rojas<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> “Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance”

<sup>38</sup> “Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance”

<sup>39</sup> See further discussion on page 30

<sup>40</sup> “Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance”

The artificial strata in Rojas's pillars reflect both the artificial strata in former workers such as Smithson, but also reference geological core samples and layered tableaux familiar from a natural history museum. The space as a whole plays with the idea of the historical job of museums as a site of preservation, of halting time, in tension with the impossibly volatile, anti-archival tableaux of excess and decay. These concepts are in parody with the central ideas of the encoding of time into matter and the presence of multiple incongruent temporalities in *CQTP*.

Another contemporary artist whose work in sculpture and installation feels both conceptually and formally relevant is Andrew Yang. Yang explores art practice through the lens of science by focusing on experimentation, influenced by his previous training as a biologist. Among his interests are the relationships between human body and the composition of the universe, elemental equivalence, and material transformation.<sup>41</sup> Speaking of *Makeshift Geologies*, 2013, Yang writes:

With the Anthropocene, any asserted fundamental division between the human and the natural shows itself to be untenable. As such, this collection of makeshift geology is an anthropo-scene, and by necessity a combination natural and artful, rock and non-rock, a constellation of parts merging in continuity as a whole.<sup>42</sup>

*Makeshift Geologies* is comprised of found mineral specimens, both real and imagined. Rocks are paired with trash and other materials that are manipulated to look like rocks. The lines between natural and unnatural are blurred, with trash becoming geology and vice versa. These approaches are further explored in *The Way Within*, 2016— again a table full of specimen objects, which upon first glance appear to be

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Yang, "Makeshift Geology (an Anthropocene), (sight unscene)", Andrew S. Yang, accessed 7/26/2018. <https://www.andrewyang.net/knowledge-and-nature>

<sup>42</sup> "Makeshift Geology"



rocks and minerals— but further examination yields that they are composed of other disparate materials of human and non-human construction.<sup>43</sup>

In this work Yang calls into question concepts of naturalness and authenticity, while arguing that all the specimens he presents are equally “real”.<sup>44</sup> What is the relationship between formal and material equivalence? I think that Yang’s point here is at least two-fold: not only do humans look for patterns in the world around us and find the incongruence between substance and appearance unsettling, but we and the rest of the universe really are all made out of the same stuff, just in different



Figure 3. Detail from *Makeshift Geology*, Andrew Yang<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Andrew Yang, “the Way within”, Andrew S. Yang. Accessed 7/27/2018.

<https://www.andrewyang.net/copy-of-a-beach-for-carl-sagan>

<sup>44</sup> “the Way within”

<sup>45</sup> “Makeshift Geology”

arrangements.

In another work which deals with material transformation, in this case growth and temporality, new media artist David Bowen, explores the daily growth of an onion. In *Growth Modeling Device*, 2009, the form of an onion sprouting from its bulb is digitally scanned in one of three planes once every 24 hours.<sup>46</sup> A 3D printer then translates the scan into a printed planar model of that time period's growth. Each scan progresses along a conveyor belt away from the onion after it is formed, leaving the viewer with an array of sequential onion models, and makes visible a simultaneous progression of cumulative past moments.

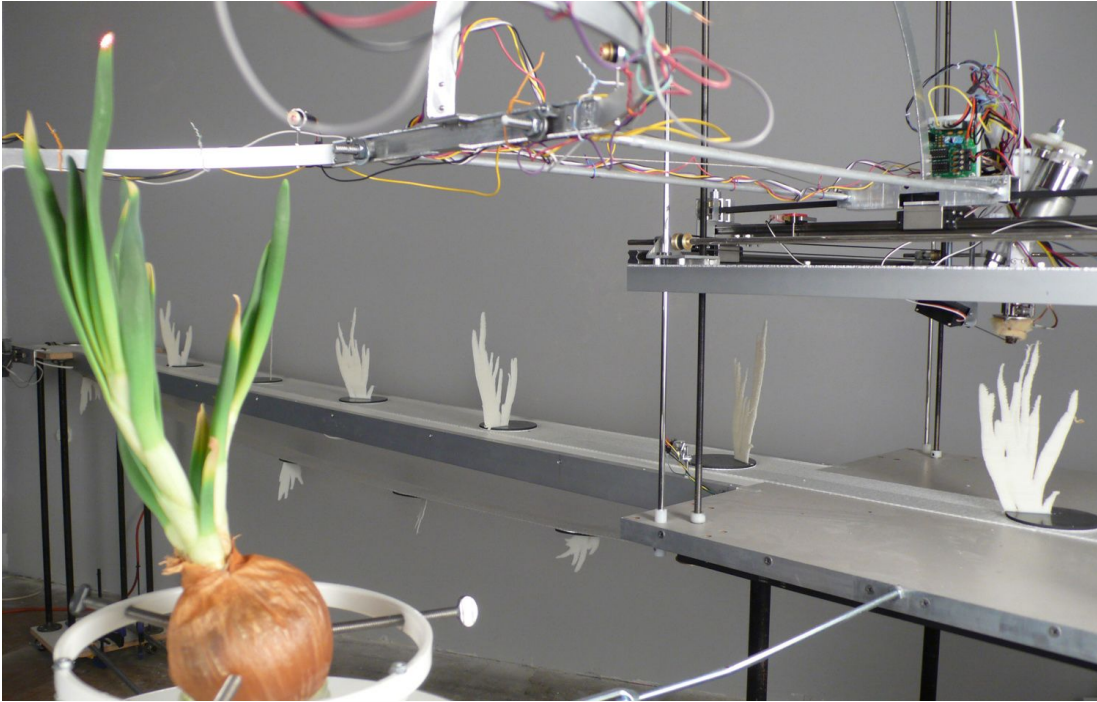


Figure 4. Detail from *Growth Modeling Device*, David Bowen.<sup>47</sup>

The Bowen tracks one time-based process with a model generated through a different time-based process, while simultaneously showing the same system viewed

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<sup>46</sup> David Bowen, "Growth Modeling Device", David Bowen. Accessed 7/27/2018  
<http://www.dwbowen.com/growth-modeling-device/>

<sup>47</sup> "Growth Modeling Device"

from different angles. The resulting prints are both cross sections of the same form from multiple vantages, and also progressions of the form at different moments in time, with the length of the conveyor belt spacilizing temporality. The scans and associated printed models act as an incremental unit of time measurement, where each 3D print represents a frozen moment, thus providing a compelling visualization of matter as time-fossil. Just as the 3D scans of the onion in a single moment exist during the lifetime of the onion in *Growth Modeling Device*, in *CQTP* the sculpture can be seen as a frozen moment that captures multiple time realities that exist simultaneously.



Figure 5. Installation view of *Chronometers for Time Travelers*, Elaine Gan.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Elaine Gan and Nik Hanselman, "Chronometers for Time Travelers, 2011", Elaine Gan. Accessed 7/27/2018. <http://www.elainegan.com/riceChrono.html>

Elaine Gan's work *Chronometers for Time Travelers* (2011)<sup>49</sup> explores the idea that temporality is bound to materiality.<sup>50</sup> In this piece, Gan shows four cube-like plexiglass containers are partially filled with different materials. These boxes are mounted on a wall in a row, from left to right containing water, soil, grain and air. Each of the clear containers is framed top and bottom in black plastic, with two lines of digital clock display located on the upper portion of the front of the container. The LCD digital readouts each have a line for shared "clock" time, which remains the same for all containers, and a second time specific to that container which references the temporality, or timeframe of change, of the material within.

In this work Gan engages with the project of troubling the common narrative of simple linear time, and visualizes multiple, simultaneous and divergent timeframes embedded in the matter that surrounds us. *Chronometers for Time Travelers* evokes the science fiction trope of decoupling from one's own native timeline, while the work also asserts the inherent temporalities bound up in matter. This insistence on the material presence of divergent temporalities is a shared goal between this piece and my work in *CQTP*.

The collaborative sound walks of Canadian artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller also play with our perception of time. Participants simultaneously experience pre recorded audio or video, often combining evidence of occurrences from multiple different moments, in the same space they are moving through in real-time during the walk. Among these works is *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (2012), created as part of dOCUMENTA (13), which I argue bears relevance to *CQTP*

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<sup>49</sup> "Chronometers for Time Travelers, 2011"

<sup>50</sup> "Chronometers for Time Travelers, 2011"



through Cardiff/Miller's exploration of multiple complex temporalities in the piece.<sup>51</sup> This work is a site specific, hand-held video walk in which the viewer-participant is guided using an iPod and headphones. The viewer travels through the space of the old train station in Kassel, Germany, aligning their own view with that of the recorded video image of the same space. Different characters and tableaux play out, both in real time and in video time, while Cardiff's voice provides instructions and commentary.



Figure 6. Video documentation still of *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller<sup>52</sup>

In the opening moments of the piece, the narrator's voice states: "This video will be an experiment. We're like those prisoners stuck in Plato's cave. We watch the flickering shadow on the screen... try to align your movements with mine."<sup>53</sup> Here, Janet Cardiff is alluding to the limits of our perception and through this work is

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<sup>51</sup> Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, "Alter Bahnhof Video Walk", Janet Cardiff George Bures Miller. Accessed 7/26/2018.

[http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/alterbahnhof\\_video.html](http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/alterbahnhof_video.html)

<sup>52</sup> "Alter Bahnhof Video Walk"

<sup>53</sup> "Alter Bahnhof Video Walk"

making visible the layers of simultaneous time which otherwise might remain invisible, exposing something more ‘real,’ to follow the logic of the Plato analogy. In this work, the ghosts of the past are shown to be present in this moment, and made visible as superposition of time. Although through very different means, this work succeeds in manifesting an experience of the thick present which provides the conceptual framework for *CQTP*.

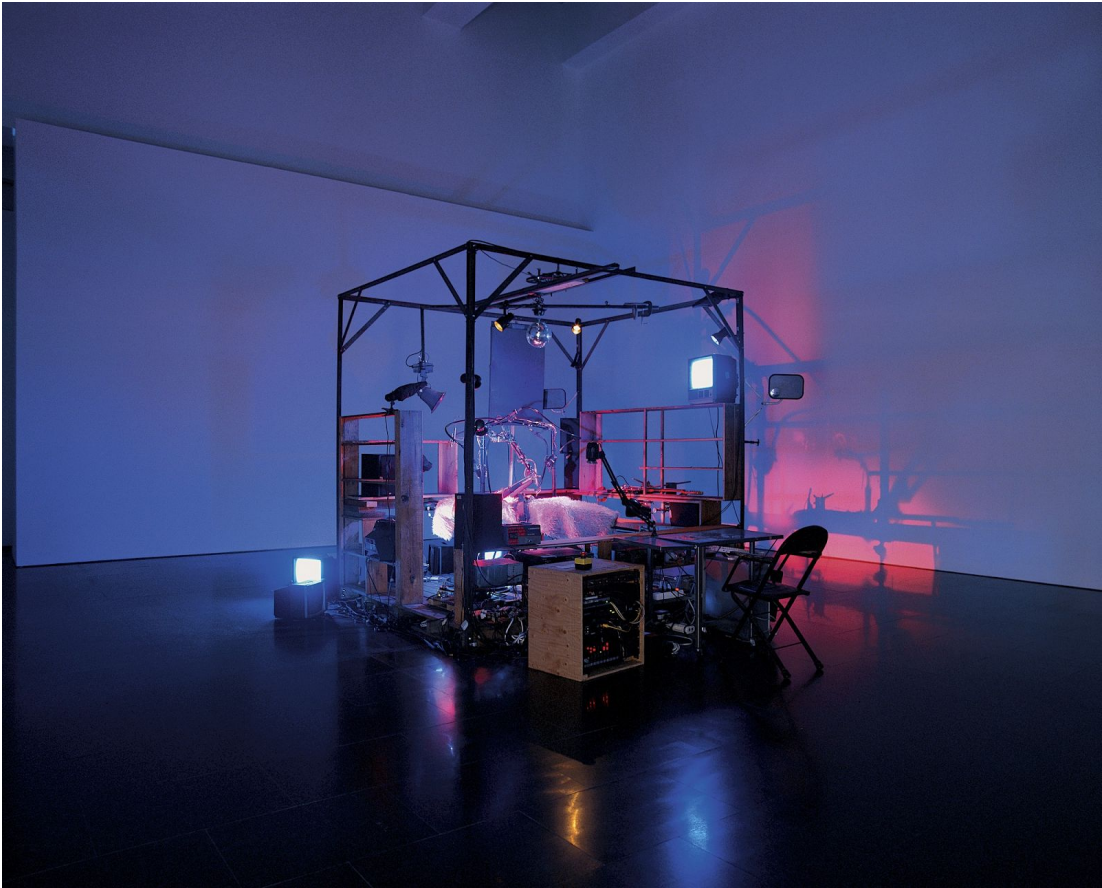


Figure 7. Installation view of *The Killing Machine*, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller <sup>54</sup>

Considering a different work from Cardiff and Miller, *CQTP* also draws inspiration from *The Killing Machine* (2007), a multi-media installation inspired by the

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<sup>54</sup> “The Killing Machine”

Franz Kafka story *The Penal Colony*.<sup>55</sup> The work is centered around a medical examination chair in which an invisible patient is attended to by invasive, probing robotic arms while lights move and flash and electronic music shrieks. The chair is situated in a cube-shaped room implied by a metal scaffolding and an array of lighting, monitors and other industrial equipment. There is dizzying constant motion: moving sound, moving lights, moving mechanical arms, moving cast shadows, the dancing reflections of a disco ball. Through this the viewer is transported by the emotional intensity of the work, which produced an effect I found both mesmerizing and terrifying. In the installation, recognizable found objects take on new meaning—everything is visible, nothing is hidden. The mass of materials that comprise the sculpture take on anthropomorphic characteristics in the absence of an identifiable protagonist.



Figure 8. Video still from *The Killing Machine* documentation, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, "The Killing Machine", Janet Cardiff George Bures Miller. Accessed 7/26/2018. [http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/inst/killing\\_machine.html](http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/inst/killing_machine.html)

<sup>56</sup> "The Killing Machine"

Each piece is carefully curated, creating disparate moods between the playfulness of certain objects and the more insidious and unpredictable behaviors of others. Similarly within the mass of *CQTP*, objects are artificially woven together, deeply embodying the qualities of their material components but also taking on new characters and actions. Additionally, *The Killing Machine* is intensely theatrical, and is exemplary of what Cardiff and Miller self-describe as a tendency toward “baroque” maximalism in their work.<sup>57</sup> I was inspired by the complexity of their pieces and took their approach as permission to not feel the need to be minimalist in my installation.

### **Project Description**

In the previous section I have discussed a selection of historical and contemporary artists whose work I see *CQTP* to be in conversation with. While this work shares many aspects with previous precedents, it recombines these ideas and approaches in nuanced ways.

A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present is a sculptural installation made up of materials sourced from the Dimeo Lane landfill in Santa Cruz, California. The work is composed of a suspended mass of tangled, intertwined matter, a geometric three-dimensional arrangement protruding from the floor directly below the mass, and a suspended planar arrangement of multiple curving linear forms directly above the tangled mass.

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<sup>57</sup> Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, “*TRACTION: Art Talk* with Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller” (lecture, UCSC, Santa Cruz, CA, 4/6/2018).





Figure 9. Installation view of *A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present*. Photo credit: David Pace

*CQTP* is a non-site for processes of ordering and chaos at the landfill and the “all-at-onceness” of time. The work explores the balance and interplay between order and chaos, and the transformation of matter through different forms in both anthropogenic contexts and otherwise. Through these processes, traces of temporality are locked into the orderings. Through formal and material metaphorical representations of different time-based ordering processes, this work explores the interconnectedness of time and matter. Furthermore, *CQTP* posits that flattening the hierarchy of material importance in light of a thick and vast imagining of time is a useful tool for right-action in the Anthropocene.

Taken as a whole, the main figures at play in this work are those of the tangle, above, and the crystal-quilt, below. Seen in relation to one another, the tangle and crystal-quilt could each be thought of as reflections of the other, or as each

other's shadow or projection. In conceiving this work I was considering the mathematical concept of projection in multivariable calculus, the translating of the curvature of a three dimensional surface into a patterned field of lines on a 2D plane, as an applicable metaphor for poly-ontology, or different simultaneous ways of knowing time and space in a place. The same information is present in both, but in different forms. Borrowing from Haraway's visual metaphor for cultural history, the past can be viewable as both a tangled mess of yarn to tease out a thread at a time, or a decadent layer cake interleaving pleasure and contradiction in each bite; here I offer the tangle and the geologic orderings of the crystal/quilt as different views of the same reality.<sup>58</sup>

Past this initial tangle/quilt mirroring or duality, there appears the overall stratified structure of *CQTP*. The vertical layering in the installation between the quilt, the tangle, and the upper saw blades sets up the metaphor of geological layering, implying matter which amassed through processes over time. This layering could also be applied to more global scale vertical layering: the stratified vertical structures of the landscape itself, with the earth's surface overridden by atmospheric and stratospheric layers. This implies a landscape, where the crystal quilt takes on the form of a city, and the tangle becomes a threatening cloud.<sup>59</sup> In this view, the trash geodes and the triangular columns on which they are balanced take on the presence of an urban skyline with concrete skyscrapers and a variety of shiny and reflective surfaces referencing glass windowed high rise buildings.<sup>60</sup> Following the logic of

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<sup>58</sup> Donna Haraway, "Donna Haraway Reads "The National Geographic" on Primates" . *Paper Tiger TV Vimeo Channel*. Video file 4/1/2015. Accessed 5/18/2018.

<https://vimeo.com/123872208> (originally aired as Episode 126 in 1987)

<sup>59</sup> For further discussion, see the section *Learning From the Work* on page 45.

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion of the term "trash geode" see page 34.

sculpture-as-landscape, the suspended trash tangle cloud above the city symbolizes pollution, overconsumption, and unpredictable, dangerous weather patterns we are coming to expect under global climate change. The interplay between this vertical stacking and horizontal expansiveness, albeit limited to a particular region, also brings up the discussion of the critical zone, a three dimensional visualization of the portion of the biosphere which effects a particular locality.<sup>61</sup> Just as the model of the critical zone helps us visualize “multiple traces of heterogeneous agencies mixed together in wildly different combinations”, *CQTP* describes just such a system in the Dimeo Lane landfill site.<sup>62</sup>

Virtually all of the materials which compose *CQTP* are sourced from the Dimeo Lane landfill. Dumps (along with quilts and the geologic record) are sites of both memory and forgetting, associated with collecting, disbursing, and reordering matter. Specifically, the landfill is a place where material goes once we abandon it, release it from our categories of importance, and instead hope for it to become invisible. Things cast off are layered but mixed; their origin, stories, and intended uses evaporate. It’s the place where all categories of order fall apart, and a repository for what we must “permanently thrust aside in order to live”, to borrow the metaphor of bodily abjection.<sup>63</sup> We relate to matter by categorizing it, as we relate to time by creating linear narratives. Close examination of the matter we are all made

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<sup>61</sup> “I take “critical zone” to mean a spot on the envelope of the biosphere (Gaia's skin in Lovelock's parlance) which extends vertically from the top of the lower atmosphere down to the so-called sterile rocks and horizontally wherever it is possible to obtain reliable data on the various fluxes of ingredients flowing through the chosen site (which in practice generally means water catchments)”. Bruno Latour, “Some Advantages of the Notion of “Critical Zone” for Geopolitics”, *Procedia Earth and Planetary Science*, *Procedia Earth and Planetary Science* 10 (January 1, 2014): 2.

<sup>62</sup> Latour, “Critical Zone”, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

of, however, reveals a more complex and challenging view of reality. Superposition of time, as made visible by the measurable evidence of multiple different experimental outcomes occurring during the same interval, is not only an ongoing reality on the smallest of material scales in the quantum realm.<sup>64</sup> The proliferation of simultaneous temporalities this suggests also offers a useful conceptual framework with which to explore entangled histories, despite linear narrative or arrow-time being what we are accustomed to perceiving.<sup>65</sup> In *CQTP*, I seek to revel in the confusion and dislocation of these categories of time, matter, and meaning, as they strain to the point of rupture in the landscape of the Anthropocene.

The landfill is a taboo landscape, to follow the logic of Mary Douglas -- one of the necessary wastelands sacrificed and rendered invisible to maintain the order of consumer capitalism. Material, once it becomes garbage, loses its comforting categories—uneasy mixing occurs and the once safe becomes waste, or “matter out of place”.<sup>66</sup> Objects once precious are now broken and forgotten. In this undoing of structure and meanings openings are created. As objects hover near the apex of the chiasmus created by their movement from precious to trash and vice versa, this point of categorical breakdown now opens space for new possibilities and changing narratives. Objects not intended for consideration may become imbued with unexpected beauty and import. New meanings and new cosmologies may be formed, while material traces of past stories still remain, making things muddy. In the

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<sup>64</sup> Barad, “Troubling Time/s, Undoing the Future”.

<sup>65</sup> “...while the past is never finished and the future is not what will unfold, the world holds the memories of its iterative reconfigurings. All reconfigurings... are sedimented into the world in its iterative becoming...” Karen Michelle Barad, “Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness: re-turning, re-membling, and facing the incalculable”, *Lawrence & Wishart* (2018): 73. Accessed 5/9/2018.

<https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/new-formations/92/troubling-times-and-ecologies-of-nothingness>

<sup>66</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, 41.



logic of the landfill, things are broken, mixed and left to find new, unexpected recombinations. While the bulk of landfill matter is combined into a “...vast heterogeneous mix of known, unknown, and unknowable phenomena”, other areas are dedicated to recycling: materials are re-sorted— not by use or sentimental value, but by material constituents.<sup>67</sup> Despite these efforts, only a small fraction of things at the landfill are slated for intentional human reuse and the majority of this material, once extracted for its value from the earth elsewhere, is now deemed useless and is re-interred. The stories of the landscape are erased; the hollows of the landscape are now filled with the story of the Anthropocene.

Conceptually, the relationship between waste and the landscape is complex. In the logic of capitalism, unimproved land is “wasted” until human action “improves” it.<sup>68</sup> From a different, non-human perspective, the entire Earth can be thought of as a “waste-world”— one systems waste product is another’s fuel and vice versa (animal and plant respiration is a familiar example of this).<sup>69</sup> In our present moment, anthropogenic waste is not confined to landfills and containment facilities—human pollution of one form or another is so prevalent that it can be thought of as what connects biosphere, geosphere, atmosphere and stratosphere—from groundwater contamination to space junk.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to Douglas’s waste-as-dirt framework, some workers -- in seeking a less anthropocentric model -- offer an alternative waste-as-scat model. Excrement is integrated into multi-species interaction, and can be thought of as a sign of the former actions of the creature which produced it, as

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<sup>67</sup> Myra J. Hird, “Phenomenon of Waste-World Making”, *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 30 (July 2016): 4.

<sup>68</sup> Carlesimo and DiRisio, “Becoming Geologic”, 48.

<sup>69</sup> Hird, “Waste-World-Making”, 1

<sup>70</sup> Hird, “Waste-World-Making”, 2

well as a source of food and nutrients for the surrounding bio-networks.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, our trash does not cease to exist once it defies comfortable categories and we dispose of it. Waste and landfills leave an indexical record of the societies which produce them, and are not inert after the abandonment of human actors, as epitomized by the liveliness of our waste in the form of bacterial communities and radioactive decay.<sup>72</sup>

This re-stratification of once extracted geologic materials, now transformed into an amalgamation of cast-off consumer goods and other bi-products of capitalism, is mirrored in the mixture of materials which compose the suspended tangle of *CQTP*. The tangle is roughly lozenge-shaped, measuring approximately 5' by 12' by 3'. The core of the mass is the weathered metal interior of a twin mattress, with other objects embedded in, wrapping around, and weaving through it. These include a bent tomato cage, piano strings, an electrical utility box, automotive jumper cables, lichen-covered severed tree branches, dead grass, medical oxygen tubing, and automotive snow chains. The mass hangs at about 5 feet from the floor and has multiple twisting, looping protrusions that extend off of the denser, central structure. The tangle has a lively, twisting, undulating quality to its form, suggesting a sense of movement or biological quality. The overall appearance of this structure is chaotic: reminiscent of both an animal's nest and a microorganism, while still clearly being composed of recognizable debris.

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<sup>71</sup> "Seeing waste... as a temporary set of things in between forms of life, rather than between disorder and order, would arguably serve to foster a better environmental politics, not only conceptual clarity." Joshua Ozias Reno, "Toward a New Theory of Waste: From 'Matter out of Place' to Signs of Life", *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, 6 (2014): 20.

<sup>72</sup> Hird, "Waste-World-Making", 2

Although still readable as familiar, these objects have been rendered foreign, embodying evidence of transformations they have already undergone. The mattress central to the tangle exemplifies this tendency. Abandoned from its familiar use as a place of rest and comfort, the mattress has gone through an unexpected and grueling process at the landfill site, being used as a tool to use other garbage by the landfill workers.<sup>73</sup> Through this process, the mattress becomes quite unmattress-like: filthy, wet, abraded, and embedded with other detritus. Comfort is transformed into discomfort and repulsion, yet the resulting post-mattress object is lively and engaged with the world, albeit in a new, category-disrupting way. Brought into the installation space, this tortured mattress carcass becomes part of an inverted, exploded bed with the mattress in the air and the quilt on the floor. In this world turned upside down, things take turns being each other.

“If every bit of matter in the universe could have a turn at being art, then the conflict between permanence and destruction would become irrelevant, since all matter at all times would be on its way to becoming an artwork and all artworks would be on their way to becoming something else.”<sup>74</sup>

Although Scanlan here is specifically describing a dissolution of categories with regards to an art/non-art dichotomy, I would expand this image of fluidity to include all matter, all things.

To further explore this fluidity, I call upon the ‘thing-power’ of Jane Bennett. In this animist leaning thought experiment into object oriented ontology, Bennett works to erase the distinction between biological and inanimate systems, reimagining things having ‘aliveness’ on a continuum rather than a dichotomy, and thereby flattening the hierarchy of being. Rather than accepting our familiar subject-object

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<sup>73</sup> For a more in depth discussion of this process see page 48.

<sup>74</sup> Joe Scanlan, “23 Thoughts about Dirt”, *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, State of the Art: Contemporary Sculpture (2009): 108.

relationship to the non-human world, Bennett asks us to consider all things as having energy and agency, existing as ecologies of interaction in which we are included, but not the only actors. These discussions bear relevance to the work of *CQTP*, begging the questions of: What is the distinction between natural and anthropogenic? What is our responsibility to the materials we use/consume? In discussing the liveliness of trash and landfills, Bennett asserts "...vital materiality can never be thrown "away", for it continues in its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity".<sup>75</sup> Exemplary of this ongoing activity is the phenomenon of leachate, a toxic sludge produced deep within landfills which defies precedent and categorization, being composed of different innumerable combinations of industrial, medical and biological components, activated by rapidly evolving and unnamed microbial communities.<sup>76</sup> The energy and liveliness of the material histories of things do not disappear with their designation as trash—there is only transformation, there is no 'away.'

The tangled mass' reaching, undulating linear movement embodies the tentacularity of Haraway's Chthonic ones, "the tentacular ones whose faces are tentacles not eyes, whose faces are feelers," and whose symbiotic lives capture the complexities of this entangled present moment.<sup>77</sup> Reconfiguring fragments of ancient mythologies to aid in re-thinking of "lowly" creatures of the Earth as intelligent, powerful metaphorical role-models for toppling anthropocentrism and being-with other creatures and systems of planet Earth. It is both floating, yet

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<sup>75</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 6.

<sup>76</sup> Hird, "Waste-World Making", 4.

<sup>77</sup> Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble" as part of "Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet", *Open Transcripts*. 5/9/2014. Accessed 5/18/2018.

<http://opentranscripts.org/transcript/anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>

subterranean;static, yet writhing; inert, yet lively. The interwoven materialities which compose it symbolize chaos, but also entanglement and interconnectedness.

Above the suspended tangled mass is a hanging planar aggregate of numerous rusty bandsaw blades that is looped together in a repeating, organic lobe-like structure. The saw blades are arranged in two stacked layers, bound together at many points with wire, and arranged with the teeth pointing down toward the rest of the installation. These blades may be thought of as the uppermost strata of the installation, the upper bounds of the critical zone, that swath of the Earth's atmosphere, surface and subsurface inhabited by biological systems.<sup>78</sup> Hovering above the mass and quilt they also summon up both the time-stopping photographic imagery of atomic mushroom clouds, and the medieval firmament, iconically dividing earthly realms from the heavens in Medieval European visual traditions.

Stepping back again, the overall layered structure of the installation continues this reference to the ubiquitous geologic motif of strata. From the perspective of a geologist, time is both stacked and cyclical, deep, and all-at-once present. Layered strata provide a record of the same slow processes, and occasional disasters, we see playing out day by day around us; however, much of what this linear stacking records is the cyclical patterns of environments changing through time. Seas open and close and open again. Mountains rise and are ground down, only to form the spine of the next mountain range pushed up in that place. Any point in space on the surface of planet Earth has been many different places, as the landscape and ecosystems wash back and forth across it through deep time, leaving their traces in

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<sup>78</sup> Bruno Latour, "Some Advantages of the Notion of 'Critical Zone' for Geopolitics", *Procedia Earth and Planetary Science*, GES-10 Paris France (August 18-23, 2014): 2.

the landforms and materials of the geologic record.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, this linear/cyclical narrative is far from complete—there are events and creatures which were never preserved and for whom memory is forever lost, or places of unconformity where information has been eroded away, bringing events from radically different times and their places to touch in the same place, in the same time.<sup>80</sup> At the landfill things arrive from different eras, with different histories, just to be crushed, mixed, ground up and spread over the landfill at night like a blanket.<sup>81</sup>

My discussion so far has largely framed the landfill as a site of mixing, as personified in the suspended, tangled mass. Here I will argue that the site, along with this work, can be thought of as a system of sorting and reordering. Just as in the landfill, material sorted, broken down, processed, and reformed. These processes favor sorting for material properties, not previous history or use value.<sup>82</sup> The stories it holds are those of this material transformation, and so the crystal-quilt begins to take shape.

Below the tangled mass lies the crystal-quilt: a repeating geometric arrangement of small triangular pyramid forms, 4” on each side of their base and ~1” high. These pyramids are composed of a range of wood, plastic, layered composites of wood and plastic, and metal. They vary from dull to shiny, predominantly in shades of beige and brown, but with repeated striated patterns on their faces, and transparent/translucent and red accents.

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen Jay Gould offers an elegant rephrasing of Charles Lyell’s foundational theory of uniformitarianism: “Past processes are, in principle, unobservable; only their frozen results remain as evidence for ancient history— fossils, mountains, lavas, ripple marks... In this sense, the present must be our key to the past.” Gould, *Time’s Arrow*, 105.

<sup>80</sup> Gould, *Time’s Arrow*, 62.

<sup>81</sup> This actually happens daily! The “dirty wood” pile, wood and wood products containing paint, glue, formaldehyde, tar paper, metal fasteners, plastic laminate, etc., is chipped and layered over the day’s accumulation of rubbish.

<sup>82</sup> I am speaking of the material sorting that happens at the recycling facilities.

These pyramids can be thought of as 'trash geodes', interleaving the geode's unassuming stone exterior with its 'crystalline' inside through the range of their material combinations. These crystals defy the standard definition of their form, for although they display a regular repeating faceted geometry, they are heterogeneous in composition.<sup>83</sup> In this way, I propose that my artificial geology fuses two oppositional cultural views of mineral formations, on the one hand the removed transparent, timeless perfection of the crystal and on the other the lowly, commonplace, raw, and extractable potential of the stone.<sup>84 85</sup> Also, as the geode denotes something hidden since the interior clarity and complexity cannot be guessed at from the drab exterior, they can be thought of as a metaphor for time encoded in matter: a secret hiding in plain sight. In laminating plexiglass and wood layers for the stratified geodes of the work's crystal matrix, I realized I was creating my own plastiglomerate: a novel geologic formation of the Anthropocene composed of natural debris fused together by melted plastic.<sup>86</sup>

Although all the materials encountered at the landfill site are encoded with stories of material transformation, I share Roland Barthes's mythology of plastic as pinnacle of transformation.<sup>87</sup> Although Barthes describes plastic as artificial, here I am interested in troubling this base assumption: plastics are made from hydrocarbons, fossil plants and, although processed in industrial contexts, the C-H bonds in petroleum and its derivatives are still holding the energy harvested through

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<sup>83</sup> Mark A. Cheetham, "The Crystal Interface in Contemporary Art: Metaphors of the Organic and Inorganic", *Leonardo* 43, no. 3 (2010): 252.

<sup>84</sup> Cheetham, "The Crystal Interface", 251.

<sup>85</sup> Teresa Carlesimo and Michael DiRisio, "Becoming Geologic: Representations of Stones in Contemporary Art", *BlackFlash Magazine*, no.4 (2007): 47.

<sup>86</sup> Carlesimo and DiRisio, "Becoming Geologic", 50.

<sup>87</sup> Roland Barthes and Annette Lavers, *Mythologies*, Plastic (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006) 97.

photosynthesis long ago. Describing the unique temporalities folded into

plastiglomerate, Teresa Carlesimo and Michael DiRisio write:

“Plastics are made up of millions of years of life and energy that has been brought forward to the present, often for only a few minutes of use as a straw or plastic bag, before being discarded, requiring hundreds or thousands of years to biodegrade. Offering a glimpse far into our geologic past and future, plastiglomerate seems to defy time itself”.<sup>88</sup>

In this way, I have come to think of plastic as a pharmakon, that double edged sword of both poison (the pollution and toxicity of plastics are undisputable), and medicine (a time capsule allowing us to surround ourselves with fossil sunlight, a tangible link to deep time and ancient days).<sup>89</sup>

A different approach to exploring these time/matter connections is through the example of John Conway’s *Game of Life*: a simple computational system of cellular automata which, through limited set of instructions can create complex, emergent visual patterns of black and white pixels.<sup>90</sup> Simplified to the most basic level, one-dimensional cellular automata and the patterns they “print” with each consecutive run through the program, can be thought of as stand-ins for any worldly patterns of organization created through iterative, time-based processes<sup>91</sup>—the patterns the code leaves behind are evidence of past actions, one step at a time. Time-based geologic and metabolic processes such as trees turning sunlight into the wood of their bodies, animals laying down calcium to form shell or bone, slow accumulation of particles forming the layering of sedimentary rock, or minerals crystallizing slowly deep underground all leave a readable trace that can be

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<sup>88</sup> Carlesimo and DiRisio, “Becoming Geologic”, 50

<sup>89</sup> Adopted from Derrida via Bernard Stiegler, “Technics and Time” (Lecture, UCSC, Santa Cruz, CA, 10/12/2016).

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Champaign, IL: Wolfram Media, 2002), 877.

<sup>91</sup> This train of thought is influenced by, yet somewhat tangential to, the work of Wolfram.



unpacked or expanded—using examination of physical structures, categorization of chemical constituents and geometries present, stable isotope analysis, and others—to understand details of that past time. Moments, days, seasons, and eons are all present and readable in these records. In a literal sense, traces of past times are coded into the organization of matter. In this way, all of matter can be thought of as a time capsule or fossilized time, time made motionless for us to touch, peer into. Or, borrowing imagery from rapid prototyping, time can be thought of as a matter printer.<sup>92</sup>

How do these multiple pasts, bound together in the present, help us conceive of different futures?

Allowing the thick present to trouble a familiar linear view of history and our perceived isolation of the past, present and future, time becomes thick and dense, layered, transparent, mixed and all-at-once. This formation references Walter Benjamin, who asserts that time isn't flat and empty, a linear chain of causality, but is shot through with events that rupture teleology and bring past and present together in an expanded, messianic time.<sup>93</sup> While Benjamin was referring to moments of historical crisis, Barad extends this idea more broadly— the world around us is full of ongoing moments of rupture, the crisis is ongoing, and this is upheld by quantum temporal indeterminacy and entanglements on the most foundational scales of matter.<sup>94</sup> In this work, I am adding the preceding discussion of the temporal ordering of matter to this conversation.

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<sup>92</sup> For discussion of an artwork which physically explores this theme, see David Bowen's *Growth Modeling Device* on page 17.

<sup>93</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986): 261-3.

<sup>94</sup> Barad, "Troubling time/s", 60-61.

Another formation of a similar impulse is ‘The Long Now’, a phrase initially used by Brian Eno and posed as antidote to destructive, short-term thinking, ‘The Long Now’ acknowledges that ‘now’ is never just as simple as a single instant, involving the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future. The longer your sense of ‘now’, the more past and future it includes, and the greater your sense of response and responsibility to those pasts and futures may become.<sup>95</sup>

Continuing in my material explorations of temporality, I again return to the metaphor of textiles as a site of all-at-onceness. Textiles exist in a state between making and undoing, and can be seen as a microcosm for the large-scale universal tension between the disordering tendencies of entropy and ordering force of gravity.<sup>96</sup> <sup>97</sup> The creation of textiles is the ordering of linear filaments which, left to their own, will devolve into an unstable tangled mess. Formed into a surface through regular, repeating geometry, however, they are flexible, durable. Traditional textiles are made and remade, patched and darned to repair the wear of usage. They fray at the edges from friction, are reconfigured to meet new uses as the most overworked portions must be abandoned, and at some point sustain cumulative damage from which they can no longer be repaired. I found this tension in my own research process through time spent at the landfill—the staggering weight of things there which need care I cannot give them or are past care I can offer, the category of “the things I cannot mend”. I have come to think of recognizing this point at which maintenance breaks

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<sup>95</sup> Brian Eno, “The Big Here and Long Now”, *The Long Now Foundation* (2000). Accessed 5/16/2018. <http://longnow.org/essays/big-here-long-now/>

<sup>96</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> David Christian, *Maps of time: an introduction to big history* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011), 41.

down and mourning may be the most productive action, a point which is constantly moving and open to revision, is an ongoing labor in itself.<sup>98</sup> This moment recognizes the entropic nature of the process around us, and the sisyphian nature of maintenance, domestic labour, care, social reproduction, all of which reflect back to themes from the maintenance work of Ukeles. These interleaving acts of care and mourning relate to my previous discussion of “the arts of living and dying on a damaged planet” of Tsing, Haraway, and others, and the ongoing conversation of how to navigate the abyss we are on the edge of with compassion and grace, finding beauty and possibility in more-than-human entanglements in terrible times.<sup>99</sup>

Crystal geometry is determined by small scale material properties of the elements involved and the time of crystallization encoded into the structure. Crystals can also be seen as a structure of transferable information, and perhaps the origin of self-replicating forms.<sup>100</sup> Just as a crystal lattice not only manifests the bonding order of the molecules which comprise it but also can communicate that order to compounds which may rub up to its surface, we need to consider the metaphors and thought structures we use to view the world as they indeed shape what we see and bring into being.<sup>101</sup> The way we study crystals and other structures in microscopic realms is by measuring the way light is changed by bouncing off and passing through them: reflection, refraction, diffraction, and interference patterns formed where they overlap. Taking the position that reality is responsive to how you probe it, these

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<sup>98</sup> Or perhaps mourning can be thought of as a form of mending. I think of Karen Barad noting “Crucial to this ongoing labor of mourning is the work of re-turning – turning it over and over again – decomposition, composting, turning over the humus, undoing the notion of the human founded on the poisoned soil of human exceptionalism.” Barad, “Troubling time/s”, 86.

<sup>99</sup> Anna Tsing, as discussed by Donna Haraway, in Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, 37-8.

<sup>100</sup> For further discussion see: Cairns-Smith, *Clay Minerals and the Origin of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

<sup>101</sup> Cheetham, “The Crystal Interface”, 251.

microscopic inquiries have implications in thought and our understanding on macro scales, reminding us “it’s important which stories tell stories.”<sup>102103</sup>

Crystals have been described as existing in a “liminal position on the border between the inanimate and animate, the inorganic and the organic”.<sup>104</sup> Crystals grow and self-organize as a challenge to conventional thinking of the non-animate world as inherently static. Rather than summoning crystals as images of ideal geometry existing outside the corporeal plane, I am hoping to use their metaphorical position at confused boundaries, relating back to the indeterminacy of categorization matter and theories of new materiality.<sup>105</sup> To further trouble these matters, this crystal-quilt is also the site of decay, unraveling, and other entropic forces, both “coming into being and falling into ruin at the same time”, as made visible by the organic material reworking of non-human collaborators at the edges in the form of termite-chewed wood.<sup>106</sup>

Textiles are an ancient form of material culture and quilts themselves a site of material transformation, equal parts taking care and making do, and in constant flux between making and mending.<sup>107</sup> Quilts are made of fragments: materials are taken from different sources, with their own histories and previous uses, and are recombined to form a new aggregate whole which still holds trace memories of the past, like geology and the landscape itself. The stitching on a quilt is an indexical

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<sup>102</sup> For further discussion, see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Chapter 7: *Quantum Entanglements: Experimental Metaphysics and the Nature of Nature*.

<sup>103</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, 118.

<sup>104</sup> Cheetham, “The Crystal Interface”, 251-252.

<sup>105</sup> “I claim that part of the fascination and recourse to the crystal as form and metaphor lies in its liminal position on the border between the inanimate and animate, the inorganic and the organic.” Cheetham, “Crystal interface”, 252.

<sup>106</sup> Perry and Dillon, “Crystal World”, 5.

<sup>107</sup> Bryan-Wilson, *Fray*, 178.

record of the hands which worked on it and there for a record of the social relationships in which it was made. Quilts are passed between generations as a manifestation of intergenerational memory long after the network of hands which made them have been forgotten.

Quilts combine textile fragments from different sources into a repeating geometric matrix, known as piecing, and the layers of material are joined by patterned stitching or quilting. In the case of traditional textile quilts, both the piecing and quilting patterns are of significance, and have their own histories and ritual meanings. For this quilt, I chose a repeating pattern of triangular pyramids based on the three-dimensional crystal structure of sheet silicate minerals as the inspiration for the piecing matrix pattern. In this piecing pattern, the pyramidal quilt blocks are arranged in a tessellating matrix of six touching corners, simultaneously implying a six-sided star and forming a hexagon in their negative space.

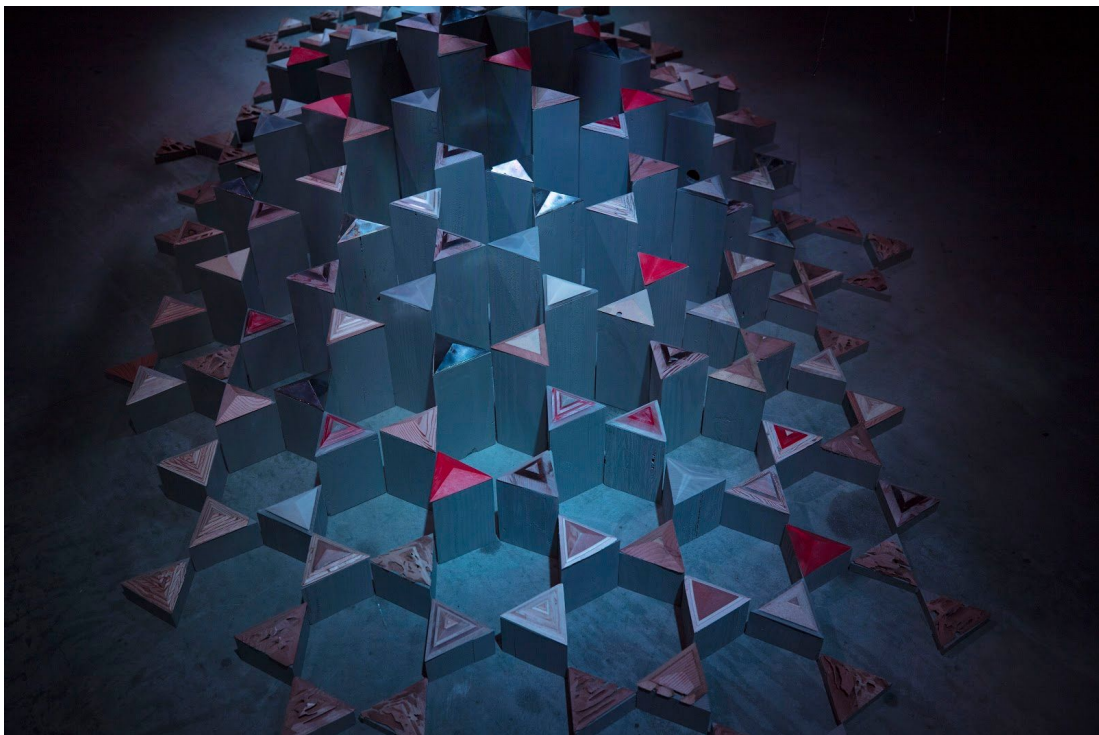


Figure 10. Crystal-quilt detail. Photo credit: David Pace

Sheet silicate minerals, or phyllosilicates, a family of crystal forms which includes micas and clays, have been proposed by some researchers to have been the geometric matrix which catalyzed the repeating chemical structures of the earliest life on earth.<sup>108</sup> Phyllosilicates are also among the predominate inorganic components of soil, or irreverently, dirt. These crystal structures are organized in tessellated layers of alternating geometric patterns, which create both the flaky texture of micas, the slippery nature of clays and the two-dimensional voids which may have supported the generation of early life. It is this deep Earthiness I hope to invoke through my use of this particular crystal form. Additionally, the translucent, layered appearance of some sheet silicates and the clear plastic layers used here, metaphorically embody the layered, transparent nature I propose for visualizing geologic time.

The quilt block pyramids are elevated off the gallery floor on triangular columns of wood, also 4" on an edge, and varying in height from ½" to 16". These columns are reminiscent of the transformative illusional power of periaktos, triangular columns first used in Greek theater for rapid set changes. These supports also superimpose onto the expansive geometric array of the crystalline quilt another layer of the more dimensional, time-based geologic metaphors: frost heaving, stalactite/stalagmite formation, and columnar jointing. This imagery plays with transposing different scales of space and time, summoning the presence of processes large and small, fast and slow.

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<sup>108</sup> Cairns-Smith, *Clay Minerals*, 11.

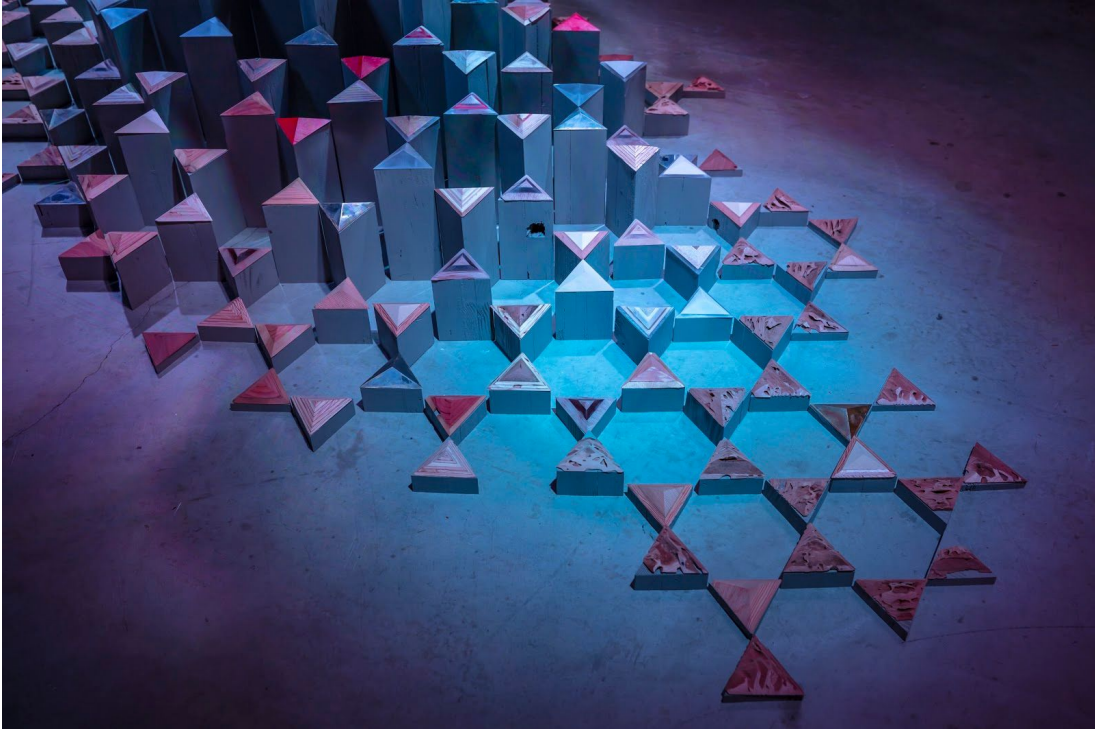


Figure 11. Crystal-quilt detail. Photo credit: David Pace

The columns are painted a warm grey which simulates the color of the cement gallery floor, as if they have grown from it like a mineral cave formation, but maintain a semi-organic quality to them through visible wood grain, cracks and occasional holes and other imperfections. Through retaining this evidence of previous material stories, as well as the organic disruption around the edges of the crystal-quilt trash geodes themselves, I seek to trouble the prevalent understanding of the crystal as pure mathematical perfection. Naturally occurring mineral crystals are often contaminated and complex, embedded in a dull matrix and or imperfect in their form. These trash geodes are caught in a state of flux, precipitating and coming undone, on the cusp between organic, mineral, and fabrication.

The pyramid-topped columns are arranged with their heights increasing towards the center of the area they occupy, which corresponds roughly with the

footprint of the suspended tangle directly above them. This arrangement suggests a sense of motion or connection between the two forms, as if the lower geometric arrangement were swelling towards or accumulating from the suspended tangle. Connection between the levels of the installation is reinforced by the repeating red colored elements in both assemblages.

The work is placed in the room to invite the viewer to circumambulate the installation, thereby experiencing the work from all sides and relating its physical presence to the scale of the human body. The work can be contemplated initially on its gross formal composition, but also holds enough details to allow continued engagement on a variety of scales of viewing.

*CQTP* is intended to feel mysterious, magical, ominous and fascinating through the interplay of the materials, physical forms and lighting. The work hopes to form a tension between the orderly geometric forms below and the tangled chaotic forms suspended from above. This dichotomy is intentionally troubled; these elements which may initially appear disparate, are inseparably linked through color, shared material composition, and implied motion.

The work is lit from above with multiple LED light sources within a darkened space, casting a theatrical, bluish light bath, invoking an imagined subterranean space. The lower geometric structure sits in a pool of light, which fades into darkness through dappled shadows at the periphery.



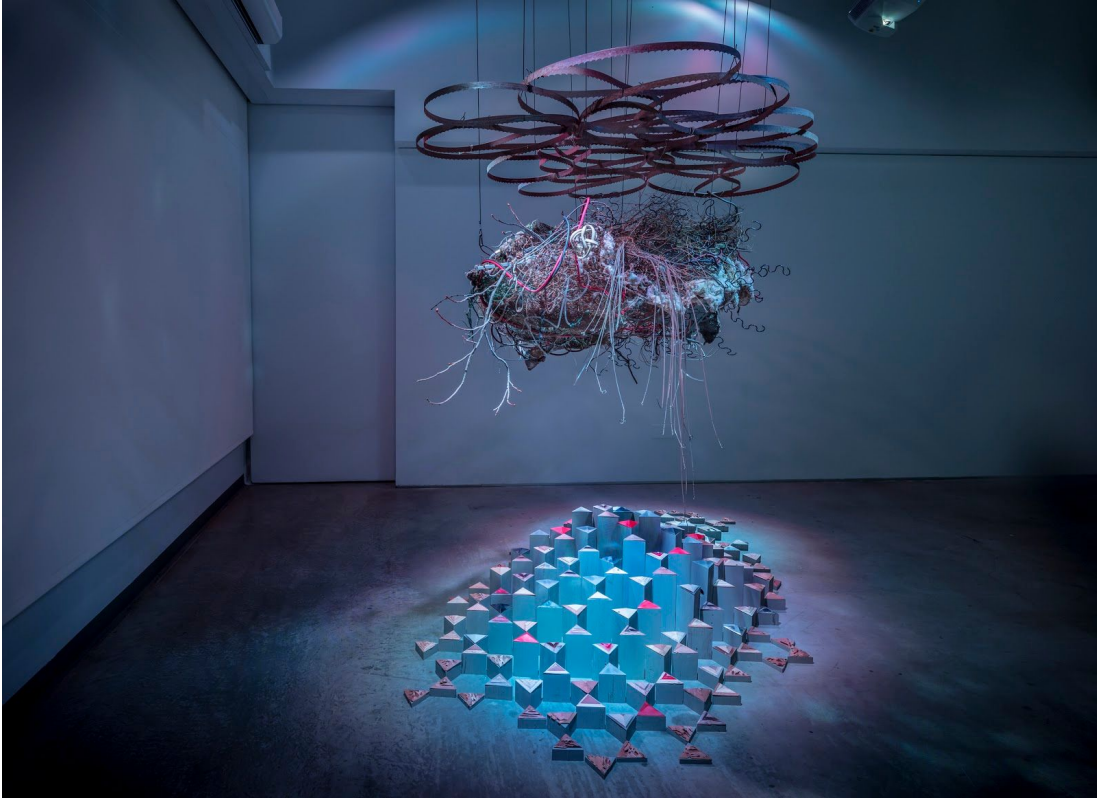


Figure 12. *CQTP* installation view. Photo credit: David Pace

The mood created through this lighting is dim, subterranean, and secretive. This atmosphere ties back to the earlier discussion of the Chthonic ones, primordial yet futuristic. The cast shadows are also reminiscent of forest edges in the moonlight, though this forest is mined, manufactured and discarded. The LED lights cast a characteristic pixelated shadow in contrast with this organic connotation, reminiscent of my earlier discussions of both cellular automata and crystal lattices.

In this work I grapple with the dizzying vastness of time but also the fear and fascination I feel in the enormity of the landfill site itself. To this end, I seek to employ the figure of the sublime in my discussion of this work. In the Romantic aesthetic tradition of Europe in the 17th-19th centuries, the sublime was more than just grand and beautiful. The sublime in this context refers to “a greatness beyond all possibility

of calculation, measurement, or imitation”, borrowing from and expanding on Roman-era Greek philosophy.<sup>109</sup> This sublime is the experience of the spectator experiencing beauty and pleasure in response to powerful larger-than-human, natural or “inanimate” forces— mixed equal parts with fear and despair. Describing the emotional shock of the first scientists to grapple with the enormity of Earth’s history, Gould quotes Playfair, on viewing Hutton’s Great Unconformity: “the mind seemed to grow giddy by looking so far into the abyss of time.”<sup>110</sup> This fear/fascination plays out in the towering pile of scrap metal, the layer upon layer of consumer cast offs three stories tall, twisted and tangled forms calling my attention yet also threatening to crush me at any moment. The history of the earth (and universe) is similarly larger than safely human. This history is vast and complex — we are part of that complexity, but not separate or above — a small, dependent, interconnected, vulnerable part, as geologists remind us again and again.<sup>111</sup>

### **Research Process and Learning from the Work**

The research process I engaged in the development of this work, although largely separate from the physical manifestation of the installation, was a crucial aspect of my process. From November 2017 through January 2018, I was one of the artists selected to participate in the Santa Cruz City Arts residency at the Dimeo Lane Resource Recovery Facility—time spend at the site, observations of processes visible there, and materials collected became the basis for my material and

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<sup>109</sup> Edmund Burke, “A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful” (1757), via “Sublime— Art Term: ”, *Tate*. Accessed 5/18/2018.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/sublime>

<sup>110</sup> Stephen J. Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: myth and metaphor in the discovery of geological time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 62.

<sup>111</sup> John McPhee, *Basin and Range*, (1981) as excerpted in: Peter Eleey, *The quick and the dead* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2009): 169-170.

conceptual thesis research. Additionally, working at the landfill site provided its own set of complications to contend with. I was struck by the frenetic energy, the physical repulsion of noise and dust, and the scale of our community's consumption and waste. The psychological toll of the harshness and magnitude of the space was at times paralyzing: pressure to find a needle in a haystack, pressure to save everything, the pressure of my own desire to run away.

I found myself helping out, participating in the "maintenance" of the site, continuing in the precedent of Mierle Laderman Ukeles without the awareness in that moment that I was doing so. It felt satisfying to act as a collaborator in this big group effort of the landfill. While looking for materials for my own research, I was also conversing with dump workers about their jobs, their lives, and the landfill itself. Wearing a reflective safety vest and gloves, it quickly became clear that visitors to the landfill assumed that I was a city employee. They would approach to ask me questions and, as other real dump employees were often occupied, I took to responding by helping them deal with their waste, showing them what material goes where. It is hard to resist the urge to sort other people's garbage they have dumped indiscriminately, to pick up after where previous landfill users left off, to invest in the on-going care of the system and the site. While combing the trash and scrap metal for items that "called" to me through the chaotic din of forms, conscious of Jane Bennett's work on new materiality, I was also unconsciously trying to re-order: taking plastic out of the wood pile, removing the brass and copper from the general scrap

pile as they can be sold for higher value, separating out electronics designated for e-waste recycling, and so forth.<sup>112</sup>

Throughout my time working at the landfill, this urge for sorting also including trying to shepherd useful things away from the site and back into the use-stream, hoping to give materials and manufactured goods another chance in their current configuration. As an activist who has spent years involved in grassroots organizations promoting repair and reuse, I faced a considerable emotional challenge in the sheer scale of the landfill reality, the number of things I would deem worth saving discarded daily in our relatively small community. This urge to save was something I sometimes acted on, yet often practiced ignoring, thinking of my time at the landfill as “exposure therapy” for someone with a tendency toward collecting. This internal dialogue was especially painful with the potted plants which I encountered at the landfill — facing the prospect of a living being designated as waste was particularly sad.<sup>113</sup> As mentioned in my earlier conceptual framework discussion, the emotional strain of recognizing the category of “the things I cannot mend” was not only key to this work, but also feels useful when considering how to approach how we proceed in the Anthropocene. Mourning is not giving up—mourning is another tool in mending.

Although I initiated this research process with the explicit goal of forming a quilt which was also a geologic/climatic record, what I learned from my time at the landfill pushed the project’s evolution. The chaos and the tangles of mixing materials

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<sup>112</sup> Referencing Bennett’s discussion of the “call of things”: Jane Bennett “Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter”, *Vera List Center Vimeo Channel*. Video file. 9/24/2011. Accessed 7/18/2018. <https://vimeo.com/29535247>

<sup>113</sup> This research process generated ideas for multiple different project and exhibition strategies. Collecting and nurturing these abandoned house and garden plants was one I entertained and would enjoy pursuing.

that characterize the tipping area and scrap metal pile at Dimeo complicated my initial goals of creating an orderly textile quilt. This was epitomized by my observations of the process that some mattresses undergo, and the dissociation of objects from familiar and comforting stories which it suggests.



Figure 13. The mattress as “sponge”. Photo courtesy of the author

Most mattresses taken to the landfill are packed into a semi-truck and are shipped elsewhere for processing. The lucky few, however, undergo a process in direct opposition to their familiar role. These mattresses are used, one at a time, as sponges to wipe down the cement surface where the public is to dump their garbage. A mattress is grasped by a front-loader, dipped into a dumpster of murky water, and used to push trash and dust to the far end of the tipping area. Through this process they quickly become the mattress of nightmares: wet, filthy, abraded, and punctured through with all manner of debris. The mattress is used in this way until the fabric and padding is disintegrating, then it is discarded in a heap, eventually finding its way to the scrap metal pile. I found the twisted remains of such a mattress carcass, run through and encrusted with disparate trash, and this formed the basis of the tangled mass, central to the formation this installation. Finding this object completely



reorganized how I was thinking of my goals, and I now imagined the quilt as the counterpart to this tangle, and the entire installation as the exploded diagram of a bed turned inside out or upside down.



Figure 14. Tangled and interwoven materials in the scrap metal area of the landfill. The mattress carcass is pictured on the right. Photo courtesy of the author.

Rather than transforming dump materials to represent the complex temporalities held within objects, as I had initially proposed, through this time at the landfill I realized that the objects and materials had already undergone transformational processes. In fact, this was how they were encoded with layered pasts. In experimenting with making a model tetrahedral silicate crystal out of plywood, I was drawn to the satisfaction of exposing the laminated layers of the wood through a miter saw cut, enjoying the reference to geological strata. This led me to creating laminated stacks of different wood and plastic materials I then cut the tetrahedra from. In this process I needed to troubleshoot which adhesives would stick to various plastic, or combinations of wood and plastic surfaces. When attempting to visualize how the tetrahedral would be elevated off of the gallery floor, I used a 3D model of their layout and relative heights to get an estimate of how many and what height distribution I would need. Since I wasn't able to source the adequate

amount of wood from the landfill of the appropriate thickness in the time frame I had, I made thicker blocks by laminating together thinner stock with was readily available. A several step milling process was required in order to form the triangular prism stock, then they had to be to various lengths and painted with a color matching the cement floor of the install site. The installation of this work required that I learn how to safely suspend heavy things from the ceiling as well as how to install and program the DMX LED lighting.

Throughout the process of this project, I encountered the challenges of working with bulky, heavy, and at times dirty or potentially dangerous materials. I faced the challenges of moving and storing large physical materials without a dedicated studio space; in several cases things were moved repeatedly, from space to space, as I worked within the limitations of what was physically available at any given time.

I entered into this project with specific goals and aims, namely to make a quilt from landfill detritus which was also a metaphorical geologic record. Although these plans became altered and influenced by the course of my research, I was nonetheless surprised by some of the unexpected outcomes of this work which only became apparent to me during the final installation and didn't conform to my previous plans for the piece. In my previous arts practice, I have long been accustomed to having some plan heading into a work, but also trusting impulses I could not yet categorize, with the understanding that through the process of making the rest of the story would become clear. In this way, I think of art making as a process of knowledge generation, not only a medium of expression—as an artist,

you may choose the ideas you put into the art, but you can only learn from, and respond to, the ideas you get back from the process.

My process of generating this work was more formalized than in previous projects, given the academic context in which I was working. I found myself hesitant to trust the same intuitive processes. Moreover, this work represents my first real experiments with working sculpturally, and I learned that the dimensionality of the work required a whole new set of considerations I needed to recognize and respond to.

As the work was nearing completion, however, I was surprised to see the visual presence of a landscape/city appearing in the midst of my carefully conceptualized crystal quilt/tangle arrangement. I took measures to downplay this metaphor through modulating the height and arrangement of the triangular pillars which support the crystal/quilt, but the landscape/city image remained insistently present. Rather than continuing to fight it, I realized that this was a legitimate component of the work speaking back to me, and I had no choice but accept this interpretation and fold it into my thoughts and discussion of the work.

Similarly, imagery evoking Catholic religious art history started to appear out of *CQTP*. Although this is the part of the visual culture in which I was raised, I was not consciously choosing to summon this imagery in this work. However, the stratified landscape separating heavens from earth, the dramatic lighting, and the inclusion of the thorn-like saw blades, all spoke to unintended, yet hard to ignore, religious visual themes.



## **Project goals and outcomes**

It is my hope that this work will create an aesthetic and contemplative experience in the viewer. For this to manifest, it would be helpful, although I argue not imperative, for the potential audience to be somewhat attuned to viewing art, generally, and found object sculpture more specifically.<sup>114</sup>

If the work is seen by people interested in science, mathematics, waste, time, geology, etc., they may be able to engage with the piece at different conceptual levels. Beyond that, by showing this work in an academic gallery context I accept the baseline assumption that my prospective audience for this work is going to be limited to people who are willing or able to chose to be on the university campus and enter a gallery, museum or other “art viewing” environment.

Visitors will interact with the work through observation, contemplation, conversation. I hope that the viewer experiences a mixture of pleasure, discomfort, and disorientation. Ideally, the work manifests both the desire and the impossibility of easily reconciling this all-at-once view of time, of multiple concurrent poly-ontologies and encourage in the viewer a different conception of their own material presence in the world.

The formal qualities of the work offered a mixture of pleasure and discomfort which I found satisfying, while the piece contained enough material complexity and links to recognizable worldly things, literally present in the work and evoked through representation, that most viewers found rich conceptual content available. I watched

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<sup>114</sup> One of my most enthusiastic audience members at the MFA show was a 5 year-old kid (not my own), who certainly did not have any specialized knowledge of art, let alone the history of sculpture. However, I have certainly experienced people for whom art is confusing or makes them uncomfortable because they feel that they don't understand it; this can be especially problematic for art made out of trash, which can be viewed as... looking like trash.

visitors experience a range of emotions including apprehension, fascination, and curiosity. Many people I spoke with read into the work themes of trash and pollution, the relationship between the human and non-human, geologic processes, the passage of time, confusion of physical scales, and a tension between creation/destruction or order/disorder.

While much of the impressions expressed about the work aligned with the range of my own thoughts and intentions, there was a repeated observation of the piece that it resembled a landscape, and specifically a cloud above a city. This drew out ideas of landscape, Anthropocene, and a tension between human and non-human processes, but the interpretation as a whole felt unfortunate to me. Although I was aware I was setting up a landscape relationship once I started the planar vertical stacking of elements, this visual metaphor as it was described to me by others felt trite, heavy-handed and was far from my intentions.

Although many visitors were brought to think about time and time-based processes, complex temporalities and the coding of time in matter were not expressly communicated to most viewers. Concepts of superposition, or all-at-onceness, of time were central to my conception of this work, while these were not dominant interpretations shared with my audience. Perhaps I could explore different approaches to embodying these concepts in future iterations of this project through supporting documentation/ media, wall text, or pairing *CQTP* with separate but related works.

Another crucial part of this work which viewers could only learn about through reading the curatorial text, speaking with me or attending the artist's talk, was the on site research component of the work. The addition of photo documentation of the

landfill site, video of material processing and transformation, interviews with dump workers about their relationships to the objects and materials they process, and maps exploring the way the landfill has altered the physical environment of the watershed in which it is situated were all parts of this work which I had considered but did not act on. Any of these modalities mentioned here could have helped formed a contextual link for the viewer between the sculptural assemblage and the landfill.

## **Conclusion**

As I have elaborated here, *A Crystalline Quilt for the Thick Present* may be understood as a sculptural assemblage of materials salvaged from the Dimeo Lane landfill in Santa Cruz. The installation is composed of a multi-level tessellated geometric array of repeating triangular forms arranged on the gallery floor, mirrored by large, chaotic assemblage of tangled linear elements suspended overhead. Combining found object sculpture with a geometric array of manipulated found materials, *CQTP* can be theorized as a non-site for landfill itself: an abstract representation of the processes of the site, constructed from materials found at that particular place and transported and recombined in a different spatial setting. Through the formal metaphors of the tangle, the crystal lattice and a textile quilt, this work uses the landfill site as a case-study in the layered, entangled, superimposed nature of time, and proposes the ordering and reordering of matter as a record of these complex temporalities. *CQTP* challenges the viewer to join and be implicated in this investigation of the material histories of trash, and more broadly to consider the implications of waste and consumption, humans in relationship to the

more-than-human world, and creative re-thinkings of our changing futures in the Anthropocene.

This work as a continuation of themes I have been exploring in previous works -- geology, time, trash, found objects and collections. However, this work was a foray into new territory for me both with the extended on site research process I went through at the Dimeo Lane landfill site, as well as working sculpturally and at a large scale. I am excited to continue working with this content through different approaches, especially the themes of temporality and material transformation as embodied in plastics.

For a further iteration of this project, I am considering reworking the bottom geometric component of this installation independent of the larger layered structure. I have an interest in potentially exploring the approaches described above of introducing multimedia “viewing” interface employing sensors, sound, stop-motion animated video, etc., to allow the viewer to “see” material temporalities embedded in the sculptural objects. Additionally, I am curious about continuing to experiment with different iterations of these ideas by installing the crystal/quilt structure to activate a more dimensional space: on a vertical surface, over a larger area, or creating an enclosed interior where the geometric elements are protruding from multiple surfaces, or from above and below as in a cave or geode.

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