

## A New Ecology and Art: on the *Clouds⇌Forests* exhibition

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“Every morning I walk towards the edge  
And throw little things off  
Like car parts, bottles and cutlery  
Or whatever I find lying around

I go through all this  
Before you wake up  
So I can feel happier  
To be safe up here with you”

—Björk, *Hyper-Ballad*

Information rains down from clouds, and forests aspirate it, filling bodies and spaces and everything.

### Introduction

Clouds⇌Forests employs a philosophy of ecology framework referencing circulation between sky and land. This essay is based on the art exhibition of the same title, Clouds⇌Forests, which was a proposition within a mood of crisis, to instigate the formation of new relationships to the environment: “The worlds we inhabit”; all that surrounds us. Ecologies:

cultural and political responses to crises inherent in our relationships with our environment. <sup>1)</sup>

The world “ecology,” intrinsically meaning ecological science, stands for wide-ranging and varied practices. As Timothy Morton says, “a set of *cultural and political responses* to a crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings” (Morton, 2007, 9). This concept, originally a term within the natural sciences, has evolved as a concept within the humanities which functions to clarify and connect dualities of subjective and sensory elements, interior and exterior.

Concepts of ecology, from Gregory Bateson to Félix Guattari, whether of nature, society, the mind, or information, urge us to reconsider relations to human creation. In Guattari's “production of subjectivity” our ecology of mind is itself an environment. Toshiya Ueno describes Guattari's subjectivity as “ambience”: “It has neither inside nor outside. Rather, it is a relational field that creates interiority and exteriority as an ecosophy (virtual ecology)” (Ueno, 2016, 87).

F spoke of the importance of aesthetic recognition in the production of subjectivity: “Acts of artistic perception—processing, analyzing, and responding to sensory information through the language and skills unique to visual arts -- serve to peel off and deterritorialize fragments of reality, and partially re-encode them. Art is a subset of the perceived world which reinvests it with meaning and heterogeneity. Art's almost animistic method of capturing language results in the creation of subjectivity in both the art producer and consumer” (Guattari, 2008, 128).

The incorporation of the act of recreating human subjectivity within ecology and the idea that subjectivity is a kind of environment suggests a position for art. To respond to this crisis, we must first rationally and viscerally grasp the extent of mismatch between our environment and

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<sup>1)</sup> This essay is based on the text written for the catalogue of the 7th Moscow Biennial titled *Clouds=Forests*. The catalogue has yet unpublished.

ourselves. Art makes signs of “environment” evident through visualization or other perceptions, and compels us to share these apparatus in order accurately calibrate our environment as sensorium. It furthermore provides avenues for co-existence with other non-human systems.

“Expanded awareness from recognition, perception to sensing/sensorium is accompanied by the transition from thinking environment as surroundings (object of perception) to (thinking environment as) concept of space to soak myself into, to possess — more ambient, encountering place” (Timothy Morton). For example, Morton puts ecological thinking based on the experience of introspection towards internal space as the first step to impinge on outside world. He describes it as becoming more sensitive towards not-me, tuning himself towards them (Morton, 2007, 147). We can say that there’s a certain sense of resignation or powerlessness in Morton’s descriptions hyper objects, that they are overwhelming changes and phenomena beyond our comprehension. Yet, we who exist together as other nodes, relationships within these ecologies, cannot help but perceive, feel, and continue to engage these phenomena.

“Animistic world views” which capture environment and ourselves as a whole, or a logos essentially distinct from the european model in that the work relies on intuitive ways that phenomena are handled, holistically integrating thought and action without ever needing to bifurcate into subject/object, could be reference points to verify “sensing” and “sensorium.” There, mediality is no longer based on the idea of “mediation,” as in exchange between two communicating agents, or “interaction,” where things act upon one another. Rather, mediality is discussed as a premise of media ecologies where everything is pre-connected, and that “intra-actions” occur from within subjects and objects comprising that ecology.

The purpose of this essay is to verify the characteristics of the aforementioned new ecologies and “environments” and the expressions of the art created within them.

The first chapter looks at the cloud and forest tribes, and examines the concept of the tribe itself as one that shares a certain creative subjectivity. The second chapter delineates the relationships between nature, society, history, and culture that intervene between these two tribes as an ecosystem. Diagrams that combine keywords expressing notions such as Micro/Macro Climate, Micro Sublime, Plants, Human/Animal, Deep Tribe, Dark Ecology, New Materialism (Material and Information), and Data Landscape were drawn up, and artists are discussed through some combination of these notions. The positions of these artists are discussed in terms of three broad categories: 1) land/forest, 2) the zone between land/forest and the clouds, where the two overlap, and 3) clouds.

## **Chapter 1: Ecology between clouds and forests tribes**

The theme of this essay came up from the ecology formed between the two cultural environmental spheres, Clouds  $\rightleftharpoons$  Forests. The circulatory respiration of forest and cloud infiltrates existing ecosystems, providing new air to fill lungs and refreshen minds. Maffesoli stated in his book *Le Temps des Tribus* (1988), in which he wrote the potentials of tribes today, that since ancient times groups (tribes) sharing common mediation functions (proxeme) were established on the basis of the shared environments: land, climate, and such corporeal conditions.

Forest takes root in the land, is deeply affected by the climate. Forests mean the tribes who share land, climate, natural features, proxemy, or personal space. They are people rooted in the lifestyles and cultural origins; the history, knowledge or aesthetics nurtured in their proxeme. 30 years since 1990, encounters via the Internet have enabled a vast new array of assembly points within cloud space. These tribes have left the

land (forests) and began nurturing new assemblies in the cloud space. In their new machinic animism, and the process of these forest tribes breathing life into the clouds of technology, new proxemes from people, things, information technologies, even bacteria (!), a new world is being birthed.

The generation born with Internet-predicated lives, are the *cloud tribes*, were essentially born and raised in informational cloud space. They have substantially different senses of reality, physicality, and “mediality.” We find them typically searching for alternative physical realities and cultural roots, new grounds (forests) to alight. Cloud tribe natives’ behavior is tentative, provisional. Instead of an active object-oriented search like radar, they sense their environments, as though dowsing, waiting for magnetisms to present themselves. Rather than using the Internet as a tool of vast reach, they use it as a means to seek shelter. Their expressions cross the spectrum from the magic of “regressive” technologies of pictographs like the earliest written languages, and pyrotechnics, to “innovations” such as the latest hardware and software technologies. The heuristics, knowledge, and data sources of each come from very intimate places, operated while sensing the tenuous present. This environmental sensitivity is the common thread which connects both types of tribes.

Art involves both the production of artists, and the production of appreciation and shared experience by those who encounter the artist’s practice. Both parties are involved in the work’s completion. Subjectivity is shared, including processes of mutual sensing and reaching understandings. Both resonate to create a common environment. A subjective, empathetic collective is formed of people who have shared an experiential, sensory environment. In this essay let’s call this group a *creative tribe*. Tribes and environments—share attractions, fascinations, and other interactions. Creative tribes are in a constant process of re-discovering environments, and in being re-discovered the environments too evolve.

Our current socio-political environment is one charged with reactionary populism, resurgent nationalism. The individual is superseded. What we find instead are contemporary creative tribes created of mutual attractions within ongoing rediscoveries of their environments, reflecting specific (including cultural) “environments” of collective subjectivities, agnostic to both globalist neoliberal humanitarianism and patriotic insularity, they function as buffers, acting to repair and reconnect. (I do not reference “collective” in the sense of an aggregate of several peoples’ subjectivities but rather, as Félix Guattari describes, in the sense of triads of territorialized power, deterritorialized knowledge, and processual self-reference, with no other aim than to clarify problems: “collective subjectivity” in this reading. (Guattari, 1996, 98).

Each tribe that shares a creative subjectivity, possess their own strongly idiosyncratic presence. We might describe it as “Tribe A is a collective of individuals who share environment A, in the sense of not only having the means to detect environment A physically, intuitively, and emotionally, but rather capable of being possessed by environment A.” Each such environment might be called a subjective sphere (field [of knowledge or interest], area, and sphere [affected by power or influence]). A creative tribe is therefore a group of people with the capacity to both rationally and viscerally profoundly grasp/be grasped by their “environment.” Rather than being a closed collective, their relationship is organic and open to the whole, and subject to forces both of centripetal bonding and centrifugal repulsion: Proxemy simultaneously organizes either in multi-centric and nebulous states. Now is not the time to refer to communities, rooted in time or place. Tribes’ unpredictable, fragile, emotional, and ambient subjective spheres interact with and interrupt the fragments of our collapsing “environment,” catalyzing new possibilities for modification. This is not a critique of modernization, but rather a pragmatic and critical commitment to how we might join forces as one worldview collapses. As each subjective-sphere-as-environment-zone, with corresponding tribe, coexists or clashes, the larger ecosphere

functions by mutual co-inhabitation and migration across the cusps bridging conventional structures.

Behind Maffesoli's focus on tribes is the current return to populism and domestic solidarity, as a response to neo-liberal globalization. With states and markets turning inwards, former third sector buffer zones like the UN, voluntary organizations, not-for-profits, charities, community groups, and foundations turn to re-establish their spheres of influence, and the buffer zones for repair and re-connection expand to include distributed tribes, new fourth collectives.

It's worth grasping the relationship of practice and society in the art of creative tribes and distributed networks, incorporating as multiple eco-systems into this ecology. The circulation seen in Clouds⇌Forests could be a wind that brings change to the concept of existing art, society or "environment." The metaphor of the eco-system between forest and cloud ebbs and flows, infiltrating existing system.

Now that the Anthropocene has become the default paradigm, the combined goal of these movements is to explore possibilities for survival through symbiotic coexistence. In order to reach an understanding of an increasingly complex world, we need both a micro perspective that consists of intra-actions (internal interactions) with familiar presences, and a macro perspective that can grasp invisible hyperobjects and events on the Internet.

The Forest/Ground Tribe adopts the former perspective, while the Cloud Tribe takes the latter perspective. The shared narratives and knowledge rooted in the traditions and collective memory of the former imbues the fragments of information instantaneously acquired on the internet with a certain syntax. Meanwhile, knowledge that was previously confined to the topos of the Forest rises like steam to form clouds, which are shared in an all-encompassing globality.

Artistic trends and movements from the 2010s among the tribes of Clouds⇌ Forests would be described as follows. One of these distinctive trends is a desire to translate and interpret the current state of the world through sensors that allow us to grasp a global situation that is growing more complex, and an analysis of these sensors. The second is a reexamination of our humanity, or rather, a shift away from anthropocentrism and towards a new humanity that also encompasses non-human existences such as animals, plants, and things. The third is a new materialist approach that gives a sense of materiality to introspective conceptions of art, and visualizes them as forms.

One of the exhibition's ambitions was to map the artists' creative tribes, in expansion and dispersion, in transition from forest to cloud, and therein show their practice as a resource for creating new environmental zones, and therein make evident this new world of subjective expressions for the viewer. Subjective spheres: Observant of this environmental zone birthing process, and their role in bringing new technologies to life; the means of acquiring new post-anthropocentric, and animistic forms of expression; the rhizomatic, organic crossing of history, genre, and medium; these are some of the criteria in the selection of worked for this exhibition.

In the following chapters I will discuss artists and artworks core to each subjective/micro environmental sphere together with several keywords and core concepts.

## **Chapter 2**

The Clouds⇌Forests Conceptual Map diagram represents the exhibition organization using ten keywords. The exhibition is considered as a holistic ecosystem. Each conceptual domain(space) is a network that gradually overlaps to form a subjective sphere, mutually affecting each other in a dynamic state of constant oscillation, in a manner similar to



Bruno Latour's actor network concept (ANT). In ANT, each actor has differing functions depending on available processes and contexts. Similarly, within the Clouds⇌Forests context, each art work can belong to multiple subjective spheres.

They axis follows from green (land) forest zone to white upper cloud zone, indicating a trajectory of forest materiality through virtual sky vapor. Political and social situations are captured from micro and macro perspectives between. The relationship between humans and plants, animals, etc., and a group of people who share a dense and core proxemie (including deep tribes: natives, nerds, etc.). Dark ecology refers to environmental pollution and destruction, conflict and poverty, abandoned territories and attendant burdens on living things.

The background of the land baseline is a community deeply connected to local cultures and climates, people who are rooted in the unique culture, the memory and history of the land, including traditional cultures, and embodied wisdom.

### **2.1.1 Micro/macro climate, natural/political climate**

As illustrated by object-oriented ontologist Timothy Morton's essentially unknowable hyperobjects (entities, such as global warming and styrofoam, which are of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place) and informational phenomenon such as "mega data," the enormity of change confronting us has left us bereft of conceptual moorings as fundamental as "objects" (Morton, 2013). As Bruno Latour says, "there is no place to be spectators," positions of observer and commentator are invalidated (Latour, 2016, 28). Thus disarmed, our remaining available strategy remains to simply live in the world committed to detecting what's going on. This is the expression of climate in the first section of Forest Tribes, which expresses the way to see, feel and care for the world better, on the ground.

The macro and micro climates (MMC) section includes artists who research on the awareness of the natural, political, and sociological weather, from the macro perspectives, such as cloud computing technology and interdisciplinary approaches, or from the microscopic view, analyzing and interpreting, or internalizing/embodying/realizing it visually or in “experiential” expressions. New readings of the world emerging from object oriented ontology (OOO) at the center of the study of existence in philosophy, and actor networks in sociology, serve to recalibrate our world views away from anthropocentrism, in favor of inter-relational dynamics. They are the tribes that belong to the forest, trying to rediscover the world, utilizing state-of-the-art technology developed in the cloud space.

Artist, researcher and writer Susan Schuppli, Director & Reader of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London, is a member of Forensic Architecture. Her work gives a new meaning to the legal term “material witness.” Her practice explores the ways in which toxic ecologies such as nuclear accidents are producing an “extreme image” archive of material wrongs, in order to open up new conceptual pathways into the material strata of our world. Her 2016 video trilogy *Trace Evidence* uses the unique signatures and behavior of radioactive isotopes to illustrate the trace of nuclear contamination (Fig.1). The trilogy focuses on three events: the 1972 discovery of 16 approximately 1.7 billion year-old natural nuclear fission reactions in uranium deposits in what is now Oklo, Gabon, the discovery of airborne contaminants from Chernobyl at the Forsmark power plant in Sweden in April 28, 1986, and the 7,600-kilometer, five-year journey of Caesium-137 across the Pacific Ocean, from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, to the west coast of Vancouver Island, in 2011. Presenting these three incidents in order, the ‘material witnesses’ presented here follow evidential paths, as both the evidence of event and the evidence of evidence. At Forsmark Power Plant, a detector sounded at the presence of a contaminated shoe, and then generating further evidence as more workers were found to be

contaminated. This leads through the deductive process arriving at the conclusion that the contamination had been carried from far-away Chernobyl via clouds and rain in the troposphere and lower stratosphere. The beautifully visualized evidence shows Schuppli's subject of inquiry in a non-narrative, non-linear structuralist manner. Her cross-reference of multiple evidence sources such as new media, remote sensing, material investigation, witness testimony, and cell microscopy, are brought together in a compellingly unambivalent vetting of the available data. Her research methods do not hearken to traditional documentary films, rather, they are product of an emerging investigative practice, which evidence being presented in a manner which might serve in a court of law like forensic evidence.

How else might the power of visualization function? For example, the sublime? Micheal Najjar fusing realistic elements with fictitious realities to make visible certain aspects of the modern world that are usually beyond the limits of human perception in “sublime” portraits of glaciers, the universe, and planet Earth in the situation of anthropocene (Fig.2). As Bruno Latour has pointed out, this is a crisis of the sense of sublime: “In the eighteenth century, the sentiment that forces of nature (volcanos, storms, floods, earthquakes) were much stronger than humans was contrasted with the certainty that the human mind was capable of transcending natural forces. The fact that humans could perceive the sublime was due to such a contrast. But you can feel the sublime only if you are safely protected from the spectacle of nature. In the twenty-first century, this kind of safe haven no longer exists. Our epoch is that of the ‘Anthropocene’ -humans have become a geological force in their own right. Within this new relationship between humans and nature, there is no place for being spectators.” In an era when scientists estimate that there will be an 8 to 88cm rise in sea levels by 2100 due to melting ice caps, the glaciers serve as a litmus for global warming, not in some indeterminate future, but a direct crisis here and now, underfoot (Latour, 2016). Najjar's *Liquid Time* captures the glacial present melt—the slowest response to climate change—in Iceland. Faint micro-vibrations stirring

inside of a massive chunk of ice beginning to melt, setting in motion the first water droplets from a vast and ancient water clock, many millennia-old accumulations of air, water and oxygen, set in motion, captured here by Najjar's montage.

Ali Kazma's *Safe* (Fig.3) presents a video consisting of a series of static images, almost like a slide-show, in a measured questioning of the meaning and significance of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault "secure" seed bank, created as an attempt to ensure against the loss of biodiversity in the event of global crises, and situated on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, about 1,300 kilometres from the North Pole. Kazma's absolute unrelenting stillness inherent in the image in his detailed presentation dwells on the 'object-ness' of the seeds, and the systems humanity has put in place to protect them. The work makes cognizant of the brevity of human history in the face of the anthropocene.

### **2.1.2 Human/animal/plant**

When we redefine our position in the universe according to object-oriented ontology and see ourselves surrounded by hyperobjects, a class of entities of greater temporal or spatial dimensions than we can imagine discreet entities as being, we notice a sense of tranquility. Cohen and Van Balen's *The Quiet* tries to reproduce the elusive feeling of the "quietude before the storm—a cold daylight, low temperature, high humidity levels, electromagnetic waves at a specific frequency, high levels of VOC (volatile organic compounds)" within a room isolated from outside, by installing tropical plants, LED lights, and climate science instrumentation, with the consultation of meteorologists as well as pain neuroscientists (Fig4). Before the storm we feel unease and pain more vividly. Old wounds hurt anew. Our body responds to the storm through malaise. Exactly what is it about our animal selves which can sense a storm's approach? As the artist states, through working on the potential experience of becoming animal, *The Quiet* proposes a set of conditions based on scientific inquiry which nevertheless evokes "mysterious" irrational senses of belief. It is an

experience on the act of increasing one's sensitivity towards one's environment through surpassing boundaries of subject and object.

Another meteorological experience is Marie-Luce Nadal's *The Factory of the Vaporous* (Fig.5). Her father, a viticulturist, was perplexed by the enormous damage to his vineyards caused by a storm, and started studying how atmospheric events function to prevent similar damage from happening again. Inspired by this, Nadal began producing clouds. *The Eolorium*, for example, is a cloud aquarium, an atmospheric phenomenon in a contained territory (Fig6). Earth, air, and water become localized chemical and inorganic extracts, a system of extracting and circulating air and water in a seemingly infinitely reproduceable mechanism of vaporous clouds. In *Extracts of clouds* three glass cases continually generate different cloud conditions. Cloud extraction have been made into objects. She has grasped, and reconstructed climate. A father's fight for climate knowledge has inspired an interior, emotional cloud practice in the daughter.

### 2.1.3 Deep tribes

Forests tribes constantly update their wholistic knowledge from the forest/ground through regional cross-disciplinary knowledge production methods and technologies in their current "environment." Their neo-animistic and non-western-centralized world-views are updated through contemporary artistic thought and practice, in the formation of post-anthropocentric "environments." The sciences, the psychologies of the flora and fauna resident there are derived from a breadth of research is filtered through their sensitivities to creating meaningful "sites." Exploring relationships with non-human phyla, in these newly formed places, in these "contact zones," is another site for mutual transformation. From the video document and hybrid sculpture combining the concepts of animal and plant by psychoanalyst Natalia Bazowska (Fig.7), who makes inter-species communication with a wolf (named Luna) in a forest, to the plant/animal hybrid synthetic organisms

and virtual ecosystems by synthetic biologist Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg (Fig.8); from the chart of metaphorical phylogenetic fauna by Ilya Fedotov-Fedorov to Mirai Moriyama and Justine Eward's collaboration with roboticists exploring the formation of new communication languages through android/human interaction, each use “cloud” technologies to present animism as therapy towards conscious “transformation” (Fig.9).

Deep Tribes explores the world views and shared aesthetics from profound engagements from certain periods or sites/spaces, and highly corporeal forms of cultural engagement. Emerging “viral” internet artists like Ryan Trecartin, who has been called the Matthew Barney of the YouTube generation, re-contextualize YouTube content, multiplexed in search of unique aesthetic qualities (Fig.10). The chaotic contents, starring himself and the people around him in real life, are ripped from traditional temporal-spatial narratives by liberal applications of bad-taste, and the vulgar stylings of bad mass media culture, challenge the very question of whether or not digital life can grasp human subjectivity. One of the recurring characters in his work is *Mark Trade* (played by amateur actor Murphy Maxwell) who is a cult leader in camouflage from the Californian desert who speaks in tongues, or channel surfing, a shamanistic portrayal of a contemporary deep tribe. Koji Nakazono paints primitive images of deep forest tribes as mixed human figures of ancient and contemporary (Fig.11). The mysterious and primitive religious unions of plants, seas, and humanity, under a layer of people's faces, like ghosts coming from cloud space. There's contemporary primitivism where the forest perception rises in high-def image aesthesia revolt, in rapid gestures like scratching and blurring the surfaces, and in layer of many images surrounded with lines. The artist Björk is one of the greatest pioneers and muses of the Deep Tribes: deeply rooted in the unique vivid, dense, and fragrant ecosphere and culture of Iceland, she uses the very latest technologies to crystalize music, audio-visual and performative expressions and sends them to refract and reflect in the clouds.

## 2.2 Zone in between: Chaotic fusion of overlapping of two zones

### 2.2.1 Dark ecology

Dark ecology (DE) embraces the entirety of our environment, rather than selectively denying, downplaying, or attempting to prettify issues like environmental pollution, urban waste, and abandoned dogs and cats. It's an attitude and perspective of recognizing our actual place together with them, and at the same time a call for transformation. DE is deeply connected to macro/micro climate (MMC). DE is a zone of failed modernism which stands between forests and clouds as the offspring of their unavoidable collisions: The un-biodegradable products of scientific knowledge, the toxic waste of computer technology and energy, including radioactive contamination, the nerves frayed from information overload and overwhelming change, the excesses of food production “rationalization.” The population of animals brought to the city to create a sense of balance with nature in urban life, only to be abandoned. Their existence is just so much junk, excreted from the body of cultural and knowledge “information.” Some of the expressions of this zone, along with scientific perspectives and observations, coming from “terminal” mode, utilize allegory and Sci-Fi narratives, and poetic effects. Especially hybrids and chimera, collage, new algorithmic formations, mirroring effects... all are practiced at different depths (levels of expression) than before.

*Roadside Picnic* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky is a story about “stalkers” who enter “visitation zones” in search of strange objects and supernatural phenomena left by aliens. The stalkers' attempts to retain their humanity under these extraordinary circumstances is depicted with a vivid sense of actuality. The title asks the question “what meaning did the garbage left by those aliens, who happened to select that roadside spot to have a picnic, mean to the roadside insect humans?” The Zone, through contact with the other transforms, sites to an allegorical field for the existence and relevance of dark ecology. Laura Provoust's exhibition fig (Fig.12), in

which she spread lots of rubbish on the floor covered with resin in a space monotonized by yellow light and erected the video screens accelerating the degree of escape and desire, represents the aesthetics that transcends the binary between good/evil and beauty/ugliness, involving everything surrounding it. This is an homage to zone, as well as a statement for entering into the realm of Dark Ecology.

Marina Zurkow's *Mesocosms* is an animation based on a software generated ecosystem which changes over a period of 140 hours (Fig.13). "Mesocosm" is a term from Environmental Science, meaning a slice of an ecosystem that one has isolated in order to study. A growing sinkhole on oil company property near the small town of Wink, Texas, and the landscape surrounding this expanding cesspool disaster, are lovingly depicted like "familiar pictures in a Nature coloring book" (Morton, 2013, 192) with a void around the frame. A rest stop bench, butterflies dancing, and birds in flight. Coyotes crying in the distance. A flare stack burning atop an oil refinery tower. Trains occasionally crossing the horizon. The sinkhole adds an uncanny weirdness. Little people in hazmat suits wander around it. The oil slick on its surface ripples, it bubbles and burps, little plastic bags float in it. It lays a dark cloud over the landscape. Each mesocosm is unique. There are no such things as stereotypical landscapes. There is only the living Earth. And when we've poisoned nature the dark side becomes just another part of that ecology.

Aside the question of whatever dark ecology is to human being, what about how it impacts non-humans? Pierre Huyghe's *Untitled (Human Mask)*, portrays a monkey living in an unmanned pub in a town evidently destroyed in the great 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami (Fig.14). (Although in fact the town was not destroyed by the tsunami, such implication appears in the first scene). The monkey wears a white Noh-theater-like mask and a wig, and a black uniform, it can seem to be a woman depending on the angle. The monkey occasionally remembers and removes a hand towel from the refrigerator to present to the unmanned counter. Here at the border of survival, in an area restricted due to



radioactive contamination, the point of identifying a boundary between humans and animals was lost, and the monkey continues his ape-ing behavior, an inter-species communication which resonates with the viewer. The actor playing in wig and mask and uniform, is a monkey named Fuku-chan who is actually a novelty server in a provincial pub. In the melancholic, emotionally-charged final close-up the vividness of Fuku-chan's eyes peering out from behind the mask calls out to the viewer to question our creations of dark ecology. Huyghe's work photographing areas outside the limits of human habitation in the Polar Antarctic Circle, and in creating Sculpture Garden at DOCUMENTA (13) including living honeycombs and dogs, are all part of his keen critique of anthropogenic ecology. New territories keep opening anthropocene clarion calls through contamination.

*The urban fauna laboratory* (Alexey Buldakov and Anastasia Potemkina) researches symbiotic relationships of urban flora and fauna such as rats, stray dogs and cats. Their workshops involve walking cities in groups people and observing from multiple viewpoints. Their laboratory's methods extend to sensing experiences, and seeking to understand new relationships and possibility of coexistence through untraditional notions of ecology and urbanization. Anastasia Potemkina's project of bouldering existing concrete walls with colorful resin and air plants created new relationships between human inhabitants and previously ignored plant life.

And now from animals to bacteria, a micro perspective on our environment is indicated by Nadim Abbas' Chimera. Chimeras were monstrous fire-breathing hybrid creatures of Greek mythology, a single organism composed of cells with distinct genotypes, and also the name of a molecular 3D visualization project at the University of California (Fig.15). In *Human Rhinovirus 14*, video projectors, each in tandem with a high-powered air-blower, cast static images of a visual mockup of the common cold virus onto blank white beach balls as they float like planetary orbs. In *Chamber 667* is closed like an abandoned

clean room with glass barriers (Fig.16), from with portals for examination gloves. In Abbas' SF inflected installations, the virus is the overwhelming presence, and rationality, the power of modernism, is represented by our vulnerable existence in the form of toilet paper rolls in a clean room.

### **2.3 Cloud Zone: Space of accumulation and condensation**

Cloud tribes (CT) try to maintain incessant interest and involvement in the land-forest, within environments (data landscapes) where big data rains, forming new relationship between materiality and informationality (new materialism). They accumulate information throughout the network, filter and organize it according to their algorithm. The process has contact with other unavailable persons, and waits for connections from outside, so it is subject to a lot of noise, attack and transformation crisis. The algorithm itself also has been changing self-critically and self-generatively. Information is transformed by interpretation and taste, and it is put in the process of making programs and forms.

We do not know whether censored and undisclosed information is dirty or dangerous, but we feel curious texture (materiality) there, and such feeling becomes art. Bahar Behbahani's work could work as an example towards new relationship between material and information.

Behbahani's *Garden Coup* series suggests a relationship between materiality and information (Fig.17). The work consists of paintings, and texts placed on top of a table in front of the paintings. Their theme, the Persian Garden, is presented as a place where traditional culture and the politics of information war overlay. The painted space is an ephemeral air layer rich with vibrant colors, and in the architectural site plans are precise drawings of decoration and plant life from the gardens. The black strips dotting the metaphorical garden landscape are a metaphor of censorship. They reference Donald Wilber, a well-respected Middle Eastern architectural scholar, who wrote on Persian gardens who was also a secret CIA agent, responsible for orchestrating the 1953 military

coup in Iran. In the texts, parts which could reveal his identity have been redacted. These black strips are therefore information, materiality, and representation. Bahar uses the metaphorical material weight of this information to indicate the latent politics of the enormous mega data in the background.

The cloud tribes are connected through the architecture of language, sound, and image (the tentatively dominant factor being the image) of the Internet. Thus, a tribe, or a collective, tends to be formed based on the sharing of an aesthetic principle: a particular aesthetics rather than a shared ideological or intellectual principle. Unlike deep tribes, who share specific sites and material properties, cloud tribes value the power of image as representation, its method of presentation and proliferation, its mediate-ability, transmissibility, its mediality. With the strength of the image and mediality combined, image objects are created. Cloud tribes present practices in which digitality and physicality/emotionality are not dichotomous concepts, but merge, overlap and intra-act. They explore materiality on the idea of effective mediality. In doing so, their work ceases to be a “representation” of ideas or information, but functions as presentations of Image objects open to interpretation. The artists from the cloud space discover, select and invent potential media (intermediary tools of communication), or mediality, in a much larger, comprehensive context that includes physicality, emotions, and relationships with the surrounding environment. Here, the term mediality is not based on the idea of “mediation,” where exchange happens between two communicating agents, or “interaction,” where things act upon one another. Rather, mediality is discussed on the premise of media ecologies where everything is pre-connected, and that “intra-actions” (Barad, 2012) occur from within subjects and objects comprising that ecology. Take the example of the fetishism of new commodities like iPhone, which can be discussed as a kind of contemporary manifestation of animism, or neo-animism if you will. Alexander Zahlten points out that animistic thinking

surfaces when the relationship between people and objects face a turning point. Now is perhaps one such time.<sup>2)</sup>

### 2.3.1 Material/information – Image object

Nile Koetting sensitively expresses the actor-network ecology within cloud spaces (Fig.18). Referring to the thought of Mario Perniola: things are humans who don't feel, Nile Koetting made an installation of "invisible body," made of "things that feel." He creates one environmental-sphere using products he purchased from online retailer Amazon. *Sustainable Hours* is composed of non-materialistic elements, such as an aroma diffuser, solar foils, line array speakers, a Wi-Fi router, light, etc. as principles. It's full of paradox: sustainability of no-man's site/place. In the space filled with ambient music, intervenes mechanical voice which reads the text of punk—lyrics of Sex Pistols' No Feeling, or The Clash's Remote Control—whose essence is no future no feeling. Koetting creates a space filled with "zero degrees" negative ion, directed towards no future and no feeling—in other words, bleaching or deleting—and suggests a subjective sphere of the tribes who soak themselves in it to distill their sensitivities. Amazon will give next suggestions based on Koetting's order record, matching it with the taste of the others who have similar sensibilities. And that will automatically become Koetting's "own" algorithm. He remains at one site, catching the information from the network, and connects—a primitive encounter, in a sense. An invisible eco-system generated within the network, but it's formed centrally around Koetting's "sensibilities." His "body" includes the whole "space" including this network. Furthermore, the importance of this work is that it aspires to produce the elements essential for survival. It's furthest and most delicate sensing, of the cloud trying to touch the land.

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<sup>2)</sup> Keisuke Kitano, "Chōkō To Shite no Mono: Neanimizumu, Media, Shihon no Jigan [Things as Symptom: neo-animism, media, and the time of capital]," in *Gendai Shiso 6* (2015, vol. 43-10), 148.

### 2.3.2 Data Landscapes

Data landscapes are indicated in digital demographics. Louise Drulhe makes topological maps with cloud space as her geopolitical subject (Fig.19). The multi-layered three-dimensional map interwoven by networks such as Google, Yahoo and others is in continuous transformation. It's also a challenge to create alternative lands. Mikhail Tolmachev's imagery from drone surveillance target areas, are buffer spaces filled with political tensions. The ratio of data to-be-inputted about intruders, vs. the total absence of drones, fills this landscape with metaphors about contemporary society. Valia Fesisov's *Be My Friend* (Fig.20) —an application which lets you record your friends' activities on Facebook and Facebook Messenger—presents relationships with others, or “emotions” regarding contacts, as a colorful and abstract statistical portrait. Social networks can limit, insulate, exaggerate, and destroy relationships. The leveling of networks, information, and things, doesn't equal a leveling of values, or flatness, numbness, but rather new relationships which open the tribes previously unknown physical sensations, materiality, and consciousness. With the cloud tribes' new sensibilities, new eyes, they see the land, smell the earth, feel the humidity, sense light reflecting on the water, note the houses destroyed, become rubble, see how the trees are cut down to become paper. In terms of the context, the same is true for the origin of cultural products, such as art. The cloud tribes understand the world at a molecular level, an elementary particle level, the level of mass in energy through data. They sense how a change happening in one place will influence others by watching the fluid dynamics data from tsunamis after earthquakes. Knowing all of this, they head out to confirm and regenerate the texture of the world, as a thing completely different from data and original products.

## Epilogue

Clouds⇌Forests combines the horizontal scope of creative tribes who live in the grand forests of laurel trees in the Eurasian continent, and Asia, in the rainforests and conifer forests of Russia, extruding out to Europe, and up into the vertical rising vapors of the forests breathing information networks like cloud banks. Within the environmental spheres of each forest or each cloud, or within the environmental spheres where forest and cloud overlap, these tribes sense the surrounding world and express signs, indications for our path forward. Cloud tribes are not proactive. Rather than actively searching for their subjects like radar, they sense and dowse their surroundings and wait for someone to reacts as though drawn by magnetic force. Like the calming ozone emanating in the forest, like the rain in the cloud formations, the cloud tribes ambiently penetrate and transform into us around our bodies inside of us.

We should not forget, that the rain is not just something beneficial to moisten the earth, but could also be acid with fake news, deleterious information, radioactivity and/or pollutants, let alone tempests of viruses hacking people's daily life. Our transformation is never in the direction of "good" "improved future" by conventional human-centered values. The steam and ozone generated from the forest (earth) also diverge the rubble dust of the town where it collapses, the CO<sub>2</sub> to be washed off, and the smell of traditional knowledge and tradition spells. We will read, translate, recombine, exchange, accumulate, condensate, reconnect, etc. by sensing and describing it carefully, and making ourselves deeply present in the place between cloud and forests. The creative tribe's proxemy should be shared and utilized as a tool, as well a kind of wisdom. That being achieved, we will gradually enter the new zone together.

The concept of tribe, which was discussed in this article, postulates that one person belongs to multiple subjective spheres. This article aimed to situate the art that connects individuals in the social context of the formation of creative tribes at the time when the idiosyncratic singularity

of each person becomes more and more conspicuous due to the shift in the environment regarding migration and information. What kind of impact might be generated in each conceptual sphere if we integrate them into the new ecology? One of the remarkable features of the new ecosystem is the dual structure composed of cloud tribe and forest tribe, and the reflux and circulation produced between the two. This is based on the urgency, that is, the sense of crisis in existence. We need to inspect what is happening in the land now from the perspective of the cloud and to re-capture things and phenomena speculatively. From the viewpoint of the cloud, we can re-discover the memories of body and community, and revitalize them with the aid of the perspective of the cloud. This article provides the diagram that allows us to start observing how the map of the ecosystem will change in the future. Thus, I hope that the readers would examine the argument of this article in its dynamics and contingency.

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**7th Moscow International Biennale of Contemporary**

Art: *Clouds⇄Forests*

Dates: September 19, 2017–January 18, 2018

Venue: New Tretyakov Gallery (The State Tretyakov Gallery) 10,  
Krymsky Val, Moscow, Russia

Organizer: 7th Moscow International Biennale of Contemporary Art

Supported by: The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, The  
Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan

Artist list (52 artists)

Nadim Abbas, Adel Abidin, Nindityo Adipurnomo, Farah Atassi, Kanako  
Azuma, Matthew Barney, Natalia Bazowska, Bahar Behbahani, Björk,  
Hussein Chalayan, Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen, Alexandra Daisy  
Ginsberg, Rohini Devasher, Louise Drulhe, Olafur Eliasson, Justine  
Emard & Mirai Moriyama, Cécile B. Evans, Ilya Fedotov-Fedorov, Valia  
Fetisov, “Forensic Architecture,” Theaster Gates, Gauri Gill, Marta  
Gornicka, Alina Gutkina, Joey Holder, Elliott Hundley, Pierre Huyghe,  
Ali Kazma, Nile Koetting, Siji Krishnan, Alexey Martins, Mathieu Merlet-  
Briand, Marie-Luce Nadal, Michael Najjar, Koji Nakazono, Dashi  
Namdakov, Uriel Orlow, Anastasia Potemkina, Laure Prouvost, Aurora  
Sander, Susan Schuppli, Sayaka Shimada, Wieki Somers, Yuken Teruya,  
Sissel Tolaas, Michael Tolmachev, Ryan Trecartin, Hanna Tuulikki,  
Alexander Vinogradov and, Vladimir Dubossarsky, “Where Dogs Run,”  
Robert Zhao Renhui, Marina Zurkow

Curator: Yuko Hasegawa, Assistant curator: Seiha Kurosawa

## Paper abstract

### “A New Ecology and Art: on the *Clouds⇌Forests* exhibition”

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Graduate School of Global Arts,

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Professor

This paper is a revision of the text I wrote for the exhibition catalogue of the 7th Moscow Biennial, which I curated in 2017. The objective of the exhibition was to analyze and explore the phenomenon of the “cloud generation” and the “forest”— the break with a generation that shares a sense of historical and cultural memory and the new circulatory and cultural ecosystem that is emerging from this.

This ecosystem is made up of complex and diverse forms of expression. By extracting several keywords from the elements that make up each of these forms, it also becomes a constellation of artistic trends and movements from the 2010s. One of these distinctive trends is a desire to translate and interpret the current state of the world through sensors that allow us to grasp a global situation that is growing more complex, and an analysis of these sensors. The second is a reexamination of our humanity, or rather, a shift away from anthropocentrism and towards a new humanity that also encompasses non-human existences such as animals, plants, and things. The third is a new materialist approach that gives a sense of materiality to introspective conceptions of art, and visualizes them as forms.

Now that the Anthropocene has become the default paradigm, the combined goal of these movements is to explore possibilities for survival through symbiotic coexistence. In order to reach an understanding of an increasingly complex world, we need both a micro perspective that consists of intra-actions (internal interactions) with familiar presences, and a macro perspective that can grasp invisible hyperobjects and events on the Internet.

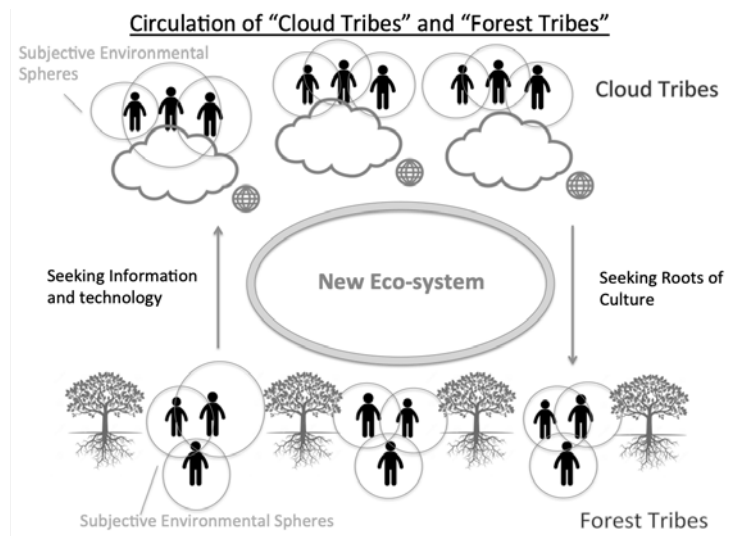
The Forest/Ground Tribe adopts the former perspective, while the Cloud Tribe takes the latter perspective. The shared narratives and knowledge rooted in the traditions and collective memory of the former imbues the fragments of information instantaneously acquired on the internet with a certain syntax. Meanwhile, knowledge that was previously confined to the topos of the Forest rises like steam to form clouds, which are shared in an all-encompassing globality.

The first chapter looks at the cloud and forest tribes, and examines the concept of the tribe itself as one that shares a certain creative subjectivity. The second chapter delineates the relationships between nature, society, history, and culture that intervene between these two tribes as an ecosystem. Diagrams that combine keywords expressing notions such as Micro/Macro Climate, Micro Sublime, Plants, Human/Animal, Deep Tribe, Dark Ecology, New Materialism (Material and Information), and Data Landscape were drawn up, and artists are discussed through some combination of these notions. The positions of these artists are discussed in terms of three broad categories: 1) land/forest, 2) the zone between land/forest and the clouds, where the two overlap, and 3) clouds. In this fast-changing, uncertain, ambiguous, and complex world, artistic expression is implicated in reality through a similarly intricate network of positions. This state of exploration or “The Dithering” (Donna Haraway)<sup>1)</sup> is what might be said to distinguish the art within this new ecology. Research, analysis, as well as composite approaches that are all-encompassing and intuitive, will be necessary. Curatorial practice is itself a composite methodology, and the format of this paper, which seeks to analyze the diagrams and descriptions of the artworks in a logical manner, also takes a cue from this observation.

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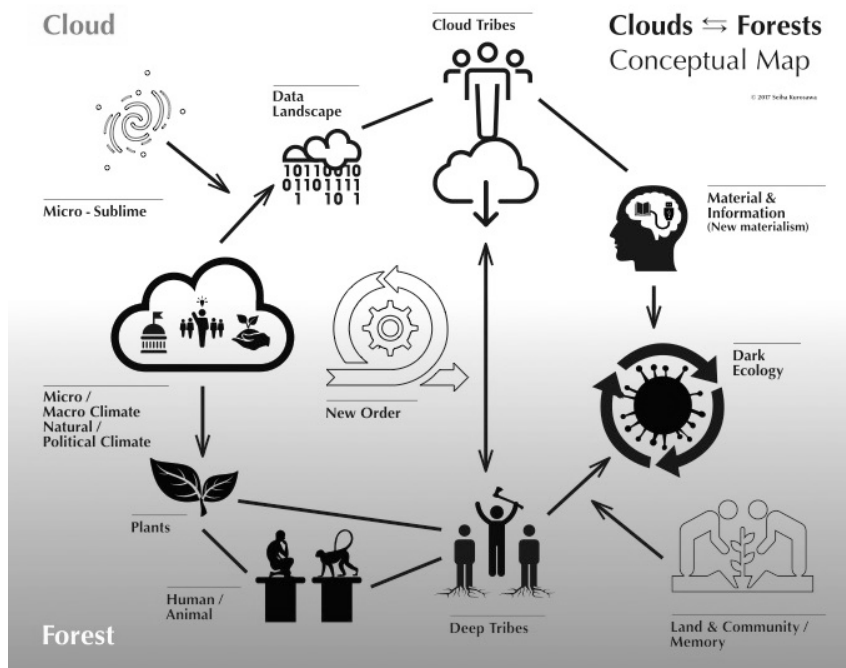
<sup>1)</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p.102





**Diagram.1**

clouds⇌forests (コンセプト：長谷川祐子、作図：黒沢聖覇)  
 clouds⇌forests (Concept by Yuko Hasegawa, Designed by Seiha Kurosawa)



**Diagram.2**

コンセプトマップ (コンセプト：長谷川祐子、作図：黒沢聖覇)  
 clouds⇌forests Conceptual Map  
 (Concept by Yuko Hasegawa, Designed by Seiha Kurosawa)



**Fig.1**  
Susan Schuppli/Trace Evidence/2016



**Fig. 2**  
Michael Najjar/liquid time (triptych)/2017/182 x 560 cm



**Fig. 3**  
Ali Kazma/SAFE/2015

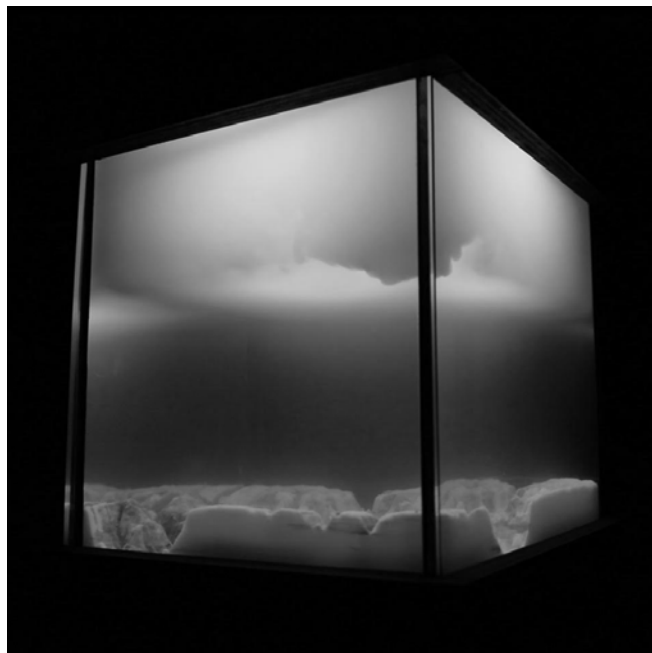


**Fig. 4**  
Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen/The Quiet/2015



**Fig. 5**

Marie Luce Nadal/The Factory of the Vaporous #2/2017/photo: Natasha Polskaya



**Fig. 6**

Marie Luce Nadal/Eolorium/2013





**Fig. 7**

(above) Natalia Bazowska/LUNA/2014/Videoperformance/Film, color, sound, loop  
(below) Natalia Bazowska/Runic sculptures/2011-2015/  
Parts of plant, animal, adhesive, polyurethane foam



**Fig. 8**

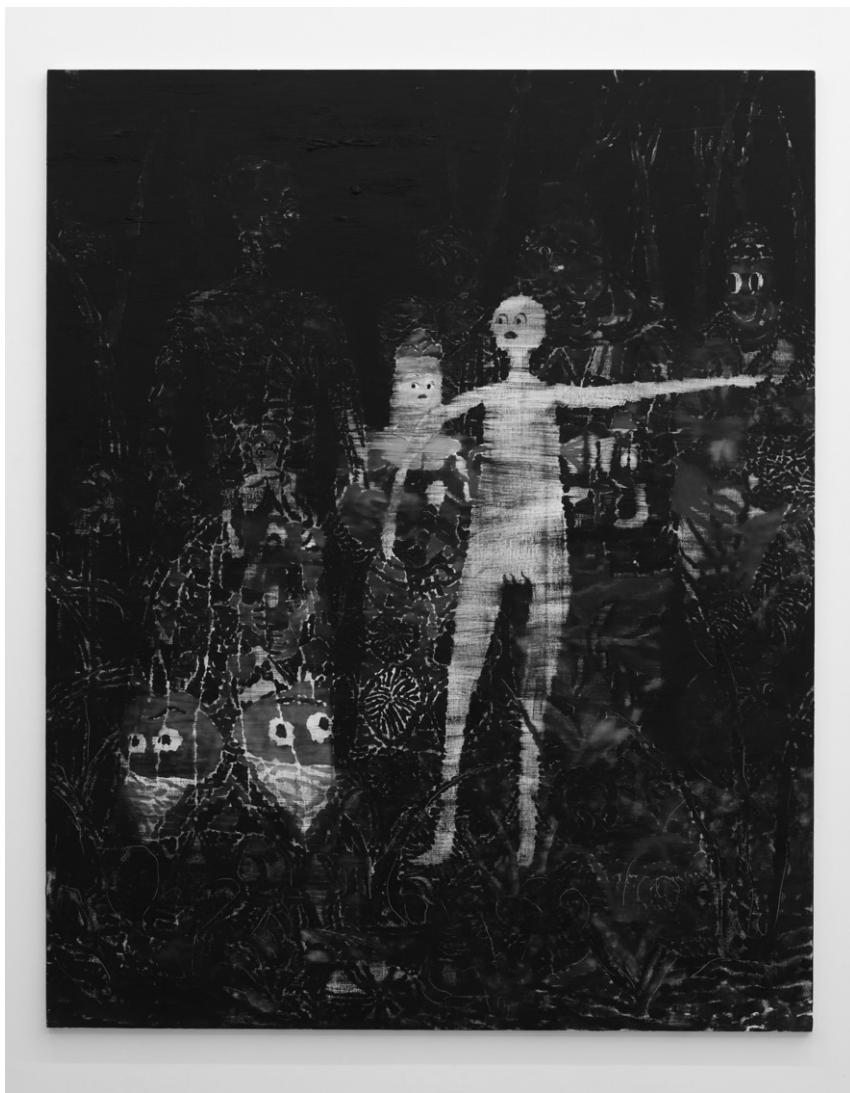
Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg/  
“Rewilding with Synthetic Biology” from *Designing for the Sixth Extinction*/2013-15



**Fig. 9**  
Justine Emard /Co(AI)xistence/2017

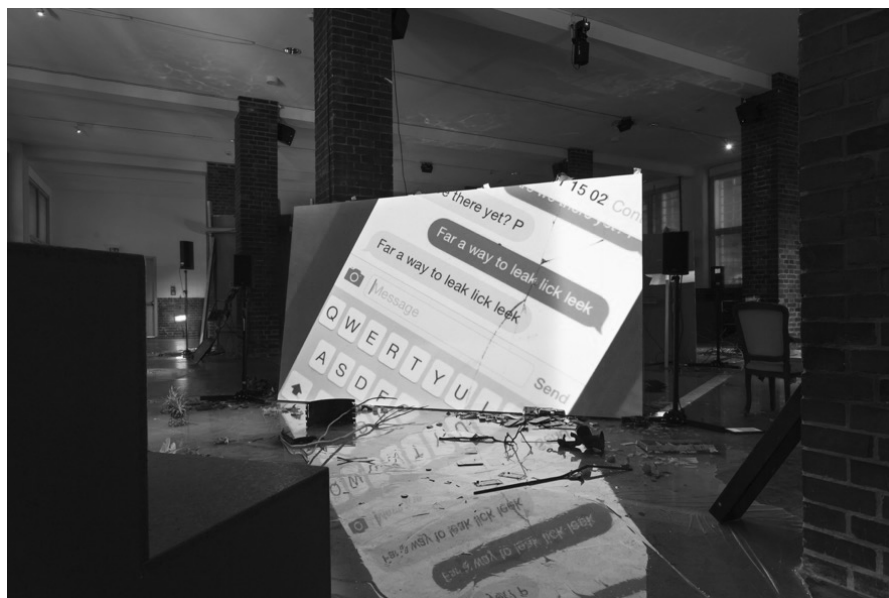


**Fig. 10**  
Lizzie Fitch, Ryan Trecartin/Wouldy's Grill/2016/Unique sculptural theater  
exhibiting Ryan Trecartin, Mark Trade/single-channel HD Video, runtime 1:13:30



**Fig. 11**

中國孔二/無題/2012/228 x 182 cm/oil on canvas/©Koji Nakazono/東京都現代美術館藏  
Koji Nakazono/Untitled/2012/228 x 182 cm/oil on canvas/©Koji Nakazono/  
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo



**Fig. 12**

Laure Prouvost/all behind, we'll go deeper, deep down and she will say:/2016/Installation view MMK/© Laure Prouvost/Courtesy of the Artist/  
photo: Axel Schneider



**Fig. 13**

Marina Zurkow/Mesocosm (Wink, Texas)/2012/  
Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery



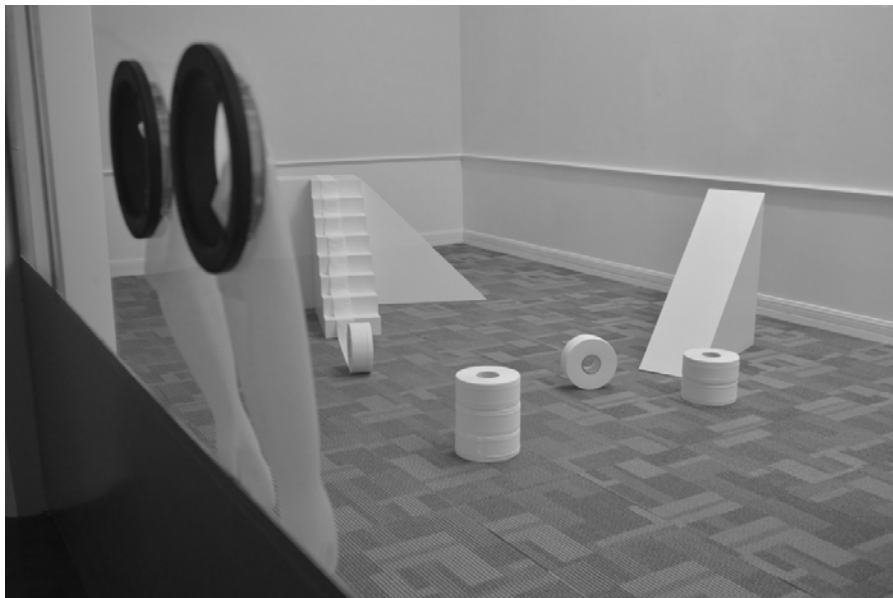
**Fig. 14**

Pierre Huyghe/Untitled (Human Mask), 2014/Film, color, sound,  
19 minutes/Courtesy of the artist, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York;  
Hauser & Wirth, London; Esther Schipper, Berlin; and Anna Lena Films, Paris



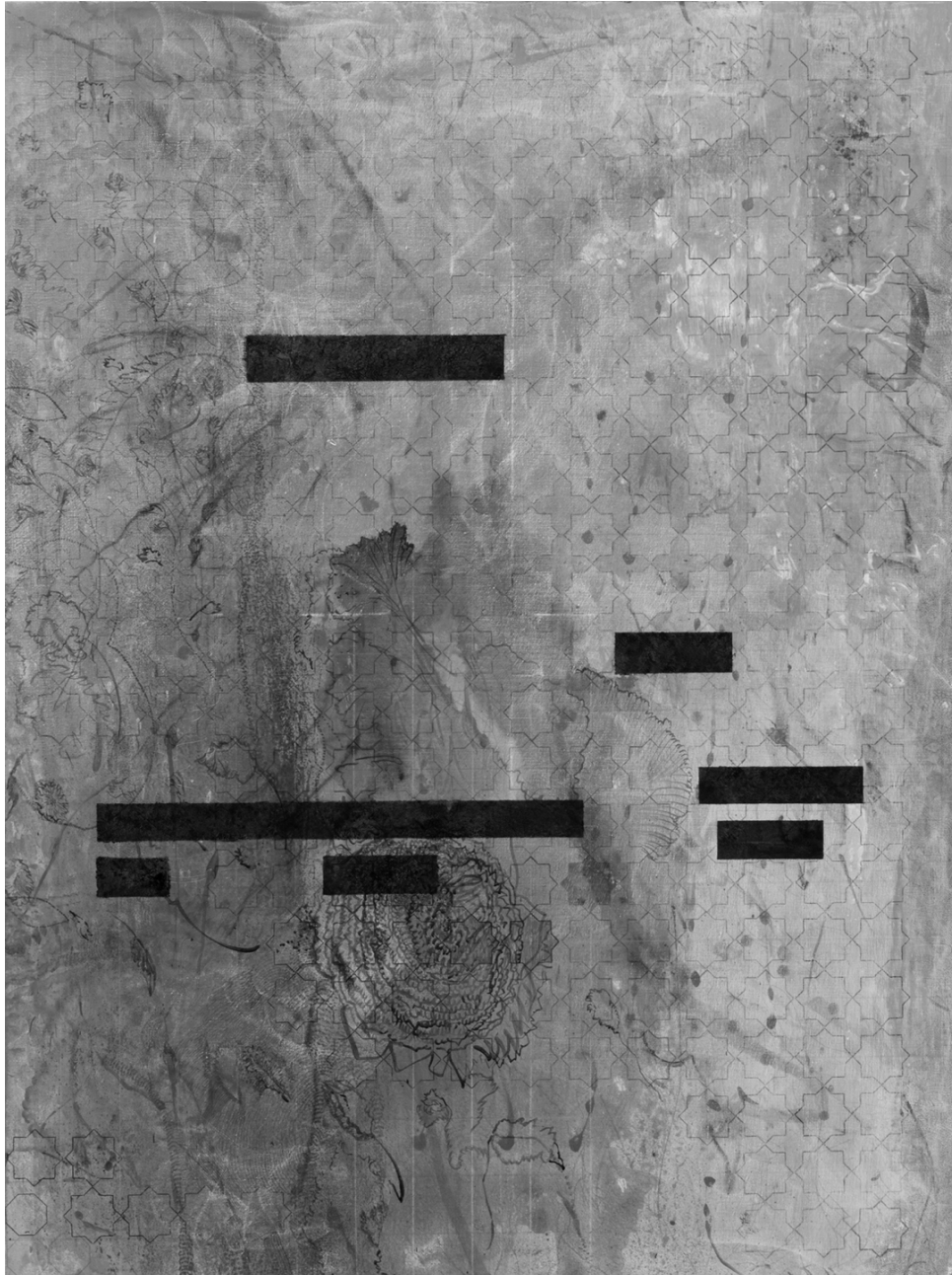
**Fig. 15**

Nadim Abbas/Human Rhinovirus 14/2016/Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



**Fig. 16**

Nadim Abbas/Chamber 668 /2016/Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space

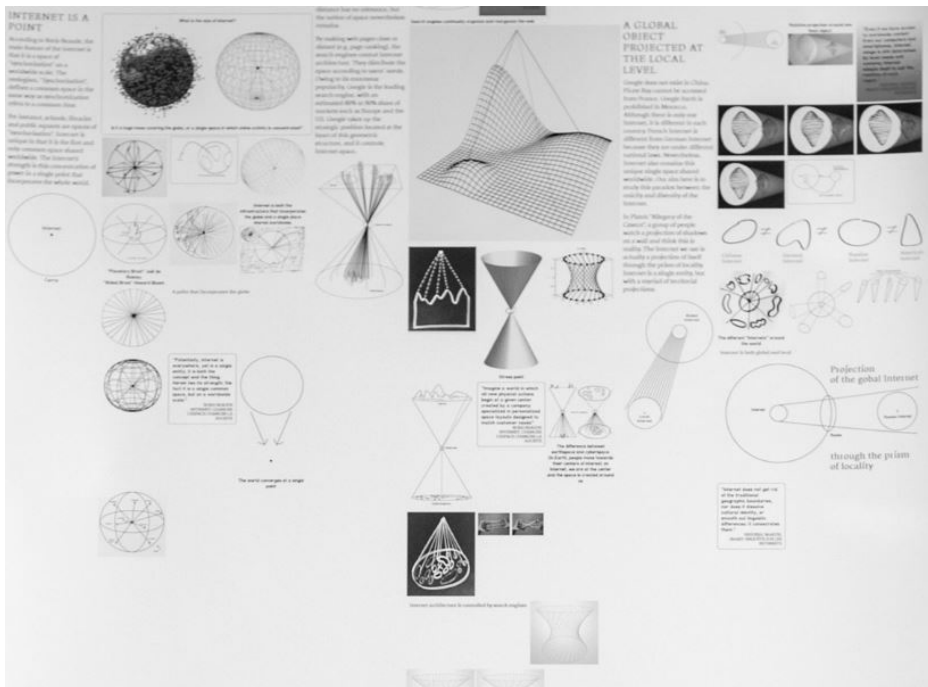


**Fig. 17**

Bahar Behbahani/Consolidating the Plan, from the Garden Coup series/2015-2016/Oil, acrylic, Indian ink, pencil, pen on canvas/72 x 54 inches

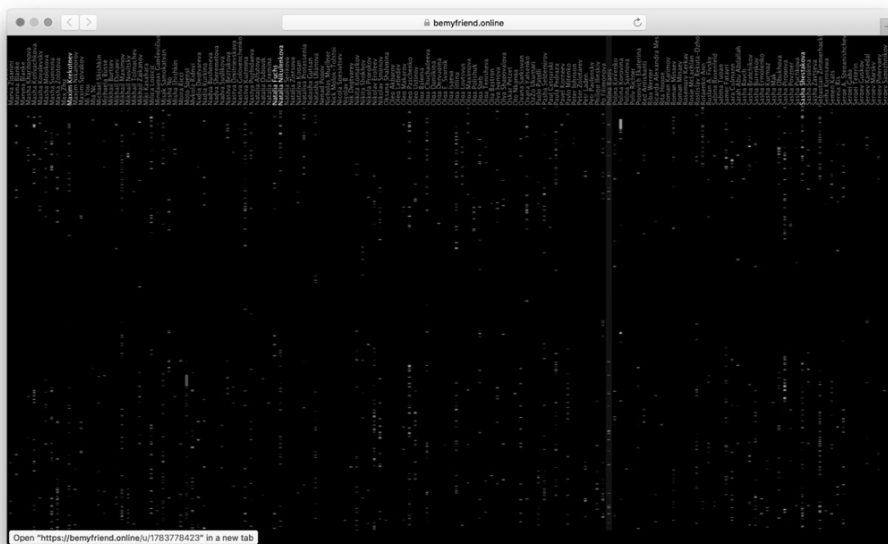


**Fig. 18**  
Nile Koetting/ Sustainable Hours/2016/photo: Yoshihiro Inada



**Fig. 19**  
Louise Drulhe/Critical Atlas of Internet/2015





**Fig. 20**  
Valia Fetisov/Be my Friend/2017 option2/  
<https://bemyfriend.valiafetisov.com>

長谷川祐子「新しいエコロジーとアート —Clouds⇄Forests 展にそって—」より



**Fig.1** (p.9)

Susan Schuppli/Trace Evidence/2016



**Fig. 2** (p.10)

Michael Najjar/liquid time (triptych)/2017/182 x 560 cm



**Fig. 4** (p.11)  
Revital Cohen &  
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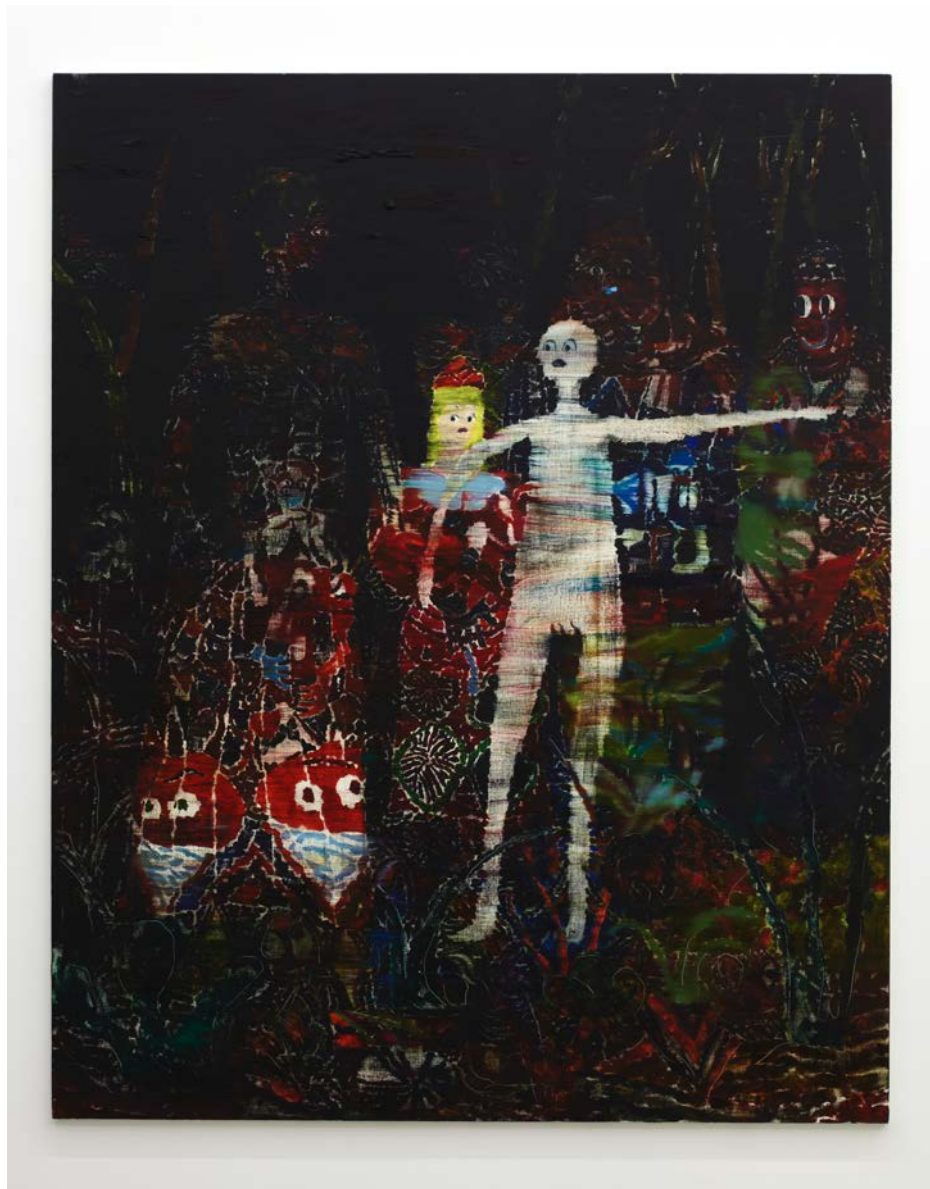


**Fig. 7** (p.13)  
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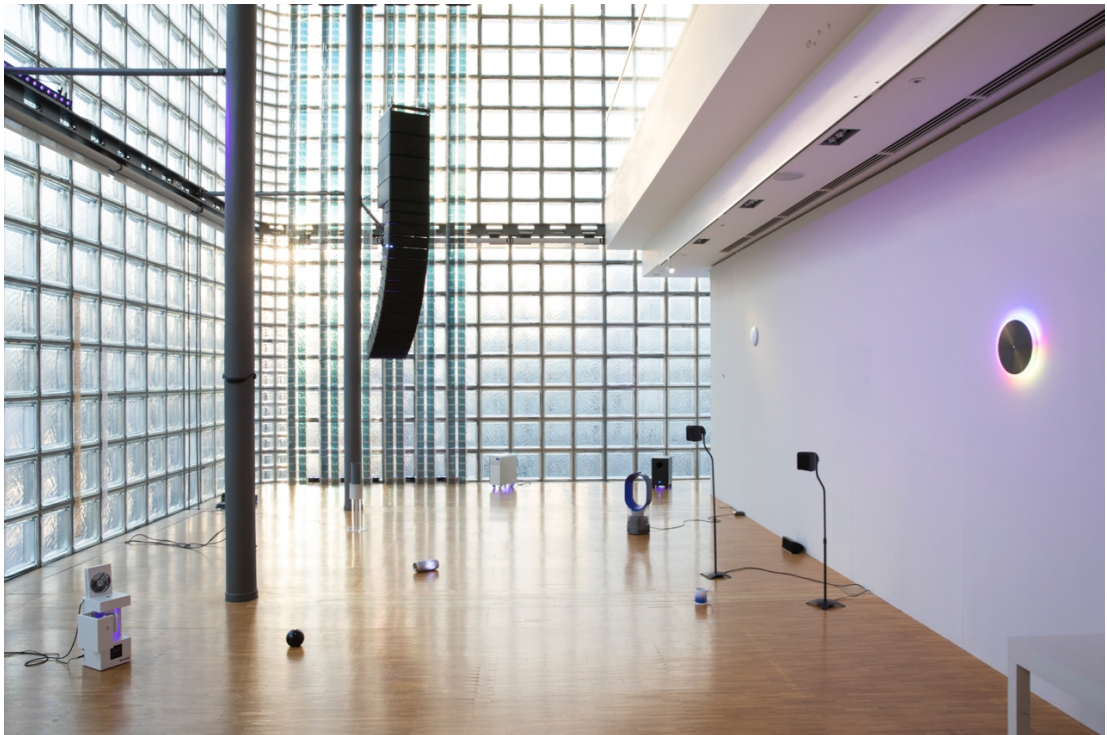


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