

Programs

Opening Reception

Fri, Aug 14, 2015, 6–8 PM
Youth Arts Lounge & Upstairs Galleries
Free with gallery admission

Celebrate the opening of *Earth Machines* and *Won Ju Lim: Raycraft Is Dead*.

YBCA:You Exclusive and Young Artists at Work (YAAW) Field Trip to Recology

Tue, Sep 22, 2015, 5–7 PM
503 and 401 Tunnel Ave., San Francisco / YBCA:You free

YBCA:You and Young Artists at Work (YAAW) members visit San Francisco's recycling facility Recology to meet current artists in residence Jenny Odell, Chris Sollars, and Roger Ourthiague, and to see their exhibition. Through Recology's residency program, these artists have scavenged materials from the dump over a period of four months to make art while promoting recycling and reuse. The galleries will be open from 5–7 PM, and a gallery walkthrough with the artists will take place at 6 PM at 503 Tunnel Ave.

YBCA:You Exclusives are FREE for YBCA:You members. Not a member of YBCA:You? Call 415.978.2787 or visit ybca.org/you to sign up!

The YBCA Young Artists at Work (YAAW) program is a paid, year-long, multidisciplinary arts-as-activism residency for Bay Area high school aged youth at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. ybca.org/yaaw

YBCA Public Squares

Sat, Oct 10, 2015 & Sat, Nov 7, 2015
YBCA Campus / Free & Ticketed

YBCA's Public Squares are an institution-wide celebration of culture making. They invite the public to collide with artists, thinkers, and creative instigators. From panel discussions to performances, the Public Squares will spur conversation, encourage connectivity, and hopefully, inspire social change.

Troublemakers: The Story of Land Art

By James Crump
Thu, Oct 29, 7:30pm & Sun, Nov 1, 2pm
Screening Room / \$10

Architecture, landscape, sculpture, technology, archaeology and photography all converge in land art. *Troublemakers* unearths the history of land art, featuring a cadre of renegades who sought to transcend the limitations of painting and sculpture by producing earthworks on a monumental scale. Iconoclasts who changed the landscape of art forever, these revolutionary, antagonistic creatives risked their careers on radical artistic change and experimentation, and took on the establishment to produce art on their own terms. The film includes rare footage and interviews which unveil the enigmatic lives and careers of storied artists Robert Smithson (*Spiral Jetty*), Walter De Maria (*The Lightning Field*) and Michael Heizer (*Double Negative*). (2015, 72 min, digital)

ConVerge: Landscape in Flux

Thu, Nov 15, 2015, 5–8 PM
Grand Lobby, Screening Room, and Galleries / Free

In conjunction with *Earth Machines* and *Won Ju Lim: Raycraft Is Dead*, ConVerge: Landscape in Flux will feature an artist talk with Won Ju Lim, as well as performances by local artists. The YBCA:ConVerge series is a free monthly public gathering featuring creative and generative art practices. ConVerge is where community and innovative multi- and inter-disciplinary arts practices come together in our free and public spaces in a fluid, interactive, experimental format designed to engage audiences.



Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen, *From Below*, 2015.
Courtesy the artists and The White Building, London

About Yerba Buena Center For The Arts

Founded in 1993 out of an expressed need for an accessible, high profile arts center devoted to contemporary art of all genres, YBCA presents contemporary art from the Bay Area and around the world that reflects the profound issues and ideas of our time, expands the boundaries of artistic practice, and celebrates the diversity of human experience and expression. YBCA is an integrated site for creative endeavor: a unique fusion of art, innovation, and ideas in a social environment. It serves as a curated platform for the dynamic convergence of artists, inventors, thinkers, producers, and the community, working together to sustain multiple levels of participation, propel short- and long-term social change, and ensure contemporary arts and living artists are vital to our society. YBCA's artistic offerings include a year-round exhibition program, two annual performance series, a celebrated year-round art film program, a community rentals program making YBCA performance spaces available to Bay Area performing arts organizations at affordable rates, and award-winning community engagement programming. Distinguished by its widespread support of local, national, and international artists in the performing, visual, and media arts, YBCA is also recognized for its innovative approach to audience-centered programs and for its partnerships with other arts and community organizations. Through its programming, YBCA invites exploration and risk-taking, quiet reflection, and active engagement.

Exhibition Credits

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Design by Nicole Ginelli

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
701 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-978-ARTS
ybca.org

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Alisa Baremboym
Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen
Spiros Hadjidjanos
Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe
Kevin McElvaney
Leslie Shows
Addie Wagenknecht

August 14–December 6, 2015

“ **Machines themselves contain a planet...[They are] like vectors across the geopolitics of labor, resources, planetary excavations, energy production, natural processes from photosynthesis to mineralization, chemicals, and the aftereffects of electronic waste.** ”

Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 139.

The interplay of cycles, both short- and long-term, is a dominant theme within this exhibition. From the vast e-waste site of Agbogbloshie documented in Kevin McElvaney’s photographs to the depiction of slow geological development in Leslie Shows’s paintings, *Earth Machines* questions how we visualize and manifest the cycles that power the chains of production essential for technological innovation. This movement from mine to factory to consumer to dump is obscured from the public, which usually only sees the finished commercial product.

The featured artists capture different moments in the succession of technological production, forefronting the intersecting forces of impermanence and risk. Addie Wagenknecht’s tangle of circuit boards and cables titled *Cloud Farming* (2014) hovers over the gallery, a creeping reminder of our pervasive technological infrastructure. The new commission *D/AlCuNdAu* (2015) by Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen reveals another side of that infrastructure. The work, consisting of an artificial ore made from metals found in decommissioned hard drives from the DataCell data center in Iceland combined with lava rock from the area, calls attention to data processing’s dependence upon natural resources. The accompanying video *From Below* (2015) captures the countryside surrounding DataCell, and the artists’ layering technique in certain segments conjures the syrupy flow of lava. In reference to *From Below*, the artists proclaim: “The cloud is floating under a volcano.” The delicate symbol of the cloud, representing that entity so essential to contemporary networked structures, is posed opposite the mammoth power of a volcano. In *From Below*, the blinking lights of the data center’s equipment fade in and out, overlaying scenes of Iceland’s stunning landscape.

Following Jussi Parikka’s statement, machines do contain the planet. This calls to mind the problem of conceptualizing the planet, and nature itself, which is the focus of Steven Shaviro’s text “Twenty-Two Theses on Nature” in this brochure. Faced with a “radically open” nature in movement, we must ask how we may move with it as embedded players within its evolution. The same question is true for our machines, but it is rarely posed. Rather, a larger economy driven by quarterly bottom lines and immediate returns on investment churns

the cycles of production that are indirectly or explicitly present within this exhibition, and short-term thinking prevails. The “innovation” and “disruption” of Silicon Valley is in step with this logic, and its most popular products are largely blind to long-term effects, ecological or otherwise. Like the haunting audio work by Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe that intermittently wafts through the gallery space, *Earth Machines* contemplatively expresses instances of a permanent transformation whose consequences are not yet fully understood.

Ceci Moss

Artist Bios

Alisa Baremboym

The New York–based artist Alisa Baremboym (b. 1982, Moscow, Russia) creates synthesized objects that investigate and extend critical aspects of materiality as they relate to the body. She explores the dissolving boundaries between machines of production and consumption and our finite biological nature. Baremboym’s work has been exhibited at Künstlerhaus KM–, Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz, Austria (2015), 47 Canal, New York (2015), the Taipei Biennial (2014), the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale–on–Hudson, New York (2014), Pilar Corrias, London (2014), Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2014), Luxembourg & Dayan, New York (2014), Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2013), MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2013), Beaux-arts de Paris (2013), Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2013), Robert Miller Gallery, New York (2013), Castillo/Corrales, Paris (2013), and SculptureCenter, New York (2012). She is represented by 47 Canal in New York.

Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen

The work of Revital Cohen (b. 1981, Jerusalem, Israel) and Tuur Van Balen (b. 1981, Leuven, Belgium) is occupied with broad meanings of material and production. The London–based duo works across objects, installation, video, and photography to explore processes of production as cultural, ethical, and political conventions. Their joint practice experiments with the use of design as a medium, and with reconfiguring systems and organisms in order to question the context in which these same systems and organisms operate. Recent exhibitions have taken place at FotoMuseum Winterthur, Zurich (2015), Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2015), FACT, Liverpool, England (2013), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2013), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012 and 2011), the National Museum of China, Beijing (2011), the Cooper–Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York (2010), Arts Catalyst, London (2010), the Natural History Museum of Vienna (2011), and Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, Belgium (2011), among others. The duo lectures frequently, recently giving talks at ICA London (2015), the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2013), Tsinghua University, Beijing

(2011), Tate Britain, London (2009), and FACT, Liverpool (2008). Cohen and Van Balen are the recipients of several awards and commissions, including the Wellcome Trust Arts Awards (2013, 2011, and 2009), the Science Museum’s Emerging Artist Commission (2012), First Prize at VIDA 14.0 Art & Artificial Life Competition (2012), and an award of distinction at Prix Ars Electronica (2011).

Spiros Hadjidjanos

The Berlin–based artist Spiros Hadjidjanos (b. 1978, Athens, Greece) pushes micro and macro levels of materiality to their limits by exploring data in its various physical manifestations. He has exhibited at Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam (2015), Kwadrat, Berlin (2012, 2011, 2010, and 2009), Future Gallery, Berlin (2014, 2013, 2012, and 2011), von cirne, Cologne (2012, 2011, 2010), Transmediale, Berlin (2012), Instituut voor Mediakunst, Amsterdam (2012), Import Projects, Berlin (2013), and Autocenter, Berlin (2013 and 2010). Hadjidjanos has received DAAD and Fulbright scholarships.

Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe

The Brooklyn–based artist Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe (b. 1975, Kansas City, Missouri) is an artist and multi-instrumentalist who works with voice in the realm of spontaneous music, often under the moniker Lichens. He combines modular synthesizer and his singular vocal style to create trancelike compositions for live performance and recordings. In addition to his solo projects, Lowe has collaborated with Ben Russell, Ben Rivers, Rose Lazar, Hisham Akira Bharoocha, Tarek Atoui, Ben Vida, Mark Borthwick, Lucky Dragons, Alan Licht, Michael Zerang, Doug Aitken, Patrick Smith, Monica Baptista, Lee Ranaldo, White/Light, Kevin Martin, Chris Johanson, Tyondai Braxton, David Scott Stone, Genesis P–Orridge, and Rose Kallal, among many others. He was previously a member of the progressive rock band 90 Day Men. Performances of note include his “Visiting Tarab” commission for Performa 11, New York (2011), the “Re-visiting Tarab” commission for Sharjah Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates (2011), Certain Distinctions (sound and dance), MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2010), Les Soirées Nomades: Fondation Cartier performance, Paris (2009), Doug Aitken’s *Frontier* happening, Rome (2009), Doug Aitken’s *Migration* happening, 303 Gallery, New York (2008), and Get Weird: New Museum performance, New York (2008), among others.

Kevin McElvaney

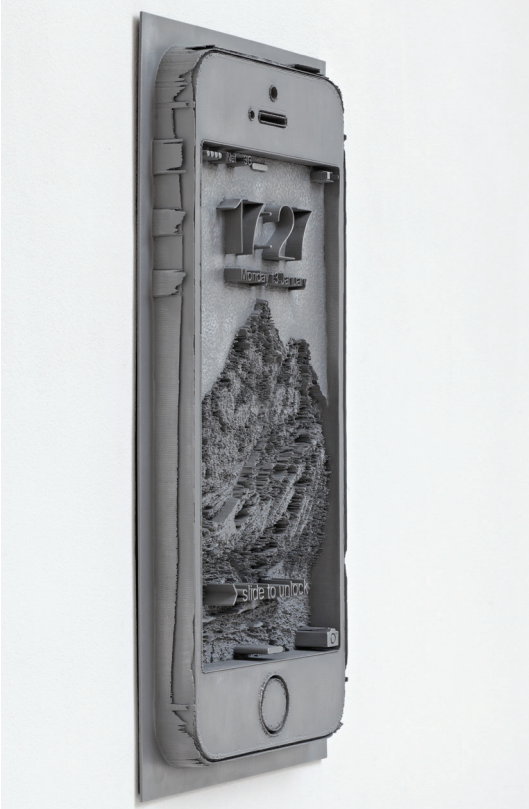
Kevin McElvaney (b. 1987, Soltau, Germany), based in Hamburg, is a self-taught freelance photographer, working since 2013. His photographs have appeared in the *Guardian*, Al Jazeera, Fox News, *Stern*, *Die Zeit*, *De Standaard*, *Daily Mail*, and *Dazed & Confused*.

Leslie Shows

The Los Angeles–based artist Leslie Shows (b. 1977, Manteca, California) uses molds and unconventional materials such as laser-cut aluminum, resin, wood, Plexiglas, engraving on aluminum, and sulfur, in addition to paint and collage, to complete her monumental works. In her expansive and cryptic paintings she connects geologic timescales with urgent and intense imagery, while her sculptures of cast sulfur and visually rich, abstracted images of pyrite suggest ruptures of language, meaning, and substance. Shows aims to accurately depict an object’s source, while at the same time engaging the alchemical mythology of its materials. Her work has recently been exhibited at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Arizona (2014), the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2014), Haines Gallery, San Francisco (2014, 2013, and 2011), the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, Nebraska (2012), Richard L. Nelson Gallery, University of California, Davis (2012), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2011, 2010, and 2007), Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (2011), the Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2011), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2009 and 2008), the Oakland Museum of California (2007), and the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California (2006). Shows is the recipient of an Artadia Award (2009), the Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellowship (2008), the SECA Art Award from SFMOMA (2006), and the Tournesol Award from Headlands Center for the Arts (2006).

Addie Wagenknecht

Addie Wagenknecht (b. 1981, Portland, Oregon) is an American artist based in Austria whose work explores the cultural connections between technology and social interaction. Constructing installations, interventions, paintings, and sculptures, she reverse-engineers reality into condensed bits, building a space in between sculpture and lived experience. Playing with the contemporary anxieties of post-Snowden information culture, she builds objects that contemplate power, beauty, and networked consciousness. Wagenknecht has exhibited her work internationally, including at the Museum für angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt (2015), Art Cologne, Germany (2015), MuseumsQuartier Wien, Vienna (2013), La Gaîté lyrique, Paris (2013), the Istanbul Biennial (2013), MU, Eindhoven, the Netherlands (2013), and Phillips Auction House, New York (2013), among other venues. Wagenknecht is a member of Free Art & Technology (F.A.T.) Lab and the Taco Bell Drawing Club, and chair of the Open Hardware Summit at MIT. She coproduced the open-source laser cutter Lasersaur, and recently she founded Deep Lab under a Warhol Foundation grant (2014). Wagenknecht serves on the board for the Open Source Hardware Association. She has held fellowships at Eyebeam Art + Technology Center, New York (2013 and 2008), Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University (2013), Culture Lab, Newcastle University (2011), and HyperWerk Institute for Postindustrial Design, Basel, Switzerland (2011).



Twenty-Two Theses on Nature

Steven Shaviro

- 1 We can no longer think of Nature as one side of a binary opposition. In an age of anthropogenic global warming and genetically modified organisms, not to mention Big Data and world-encompassing computing and communications networks, it makes no sense to oppose nature to culture, or a "state of nature" to human society, or the natural to the artificial. Human beings and their productions are not separate from Nature: they are just as "natural" as everything else.
- 2 We must think Nature without any residual anthropocentrism: that is to say, without exempting ourselves from it, and also without remaking it in our own image. Human beings are part of Nature, but Nature is not human, and is not centered upon human beings or upon anything human.
- 3 Above all, we must avoid thinking that Nature is simply "given," and therefore always the same—as opposed to a social realm that would be historical and constructed. Rather, we must recognize that Nature itself is always in movement, in process, and under construction. We need to revive the great 19th century discipline of "natural history," practiced by Darwin, Wallace, and many others. Evolution (phylogeny) and development (ontogeny) are both historical processes; they cannot be reduced to the study of genomes as synchronic structures.
- 4 Nature is all-encompassing, but it is not a Whole. It is radically open. However far we go in space, we will never find an edge or a boundary. There is no way of adding everything up, and coming up with Nature as a fixed sum. There is also no way of subordinating Nature to some Theory of Everything.
- 5 Nature is radically open in terms of time, as well as space. The future is always contingent and unpredictable. It cannot be reduced to any calculus of probabilities. As Keynes and Meillassoux have both shown us, the future is intrinsically unknowable. It exceeds any closed list of possibilities. The radical unknowability of Nature is not an epistemological constraint: it is a basic, and positive, ontological feature of Nature itself.
- 6 In the 19th century, thinkers as different as Schelling (with his *Naturphilosophie*) and Engels (with his *Dialectics of Nature*) tried to define an overall "logic" of Nature that included—but that was not reducible to—human developments and concerns. In the 20th century, such projects were abandoned. Instead, humanity was either given a special, transcendental status (phenomenology), or else reduced to its non-organic presuppositions (scientism). Today, in the 21st century, both of these alternatives are bankrupt. We need to return to a project of thinking Nature directly—even if we reject the particular antiquated terms that thinkers like Schelling and Engels used for their own attempts.
- 7 Schelling and Engels both tried to conceive Nature in ways that were grounded in, but not reducible to, the best natural science of their own times. Our task today is, similarly, to conceive Nature in ways that are grounded in, but not reducible to, the best contemporary science.
- 8 Nature is neither a plenum nor a void; rather, conditions or states of affairs *within Nature* may tend either towards plenitude or towards vacancy. Usually, however, neither of these tendential extremes is reached. Things generally fluctuate in an intermediate range, between fullness and emptiness.
- 9 However, we are still on safer ground if we consider that Nature comprises something rather than nothing. We know from modern physics that quantum fluctuations happen even in a vacuum. In this sense, Nature is better understood in terms of more rather than less, or surplus rather than deficiency. Nature will never be finished, never be shaped and structured once and for all; but it has also never been "without form and void."
- 10 Nature is not formless, and not simply homogeneous: it is rather "metastable," in the sense defined by Gilbert Simondon. All-encompassing Nature is traversed by potentials and powers, or by energy gradients and inherent tendencies. At any moment, these may be activated and actualized. The most minute imbalance or the most fleeting encounter can be enough to set things into motion, and there is generally more to the effect than there is to the cause. The consequences of these imbalances and encounters tend to be orders of magnitude larger than the incidents that set them into motion.
- 11 The result of any disruption of Nature's metastability is what Simondon calls "individuation": the emergence and structuration of an individual, together with those of its associated milieu. Examples of this process include the precipitation of a crystal out of a solution, and the emergence and growth of distinct tissues, organs, and parts from an initially undifferentiated embryo.
- 12 Nature thus comprises multiple processes of individuation. These must all be understood in two distinct ways: in terms of energetics, and in terms of informatics.



- 13 Nature involves continual flows of energy. Energy (or, more precisely mass-energy) can never be created or destroyed, but only transformed from one state to another (the First Law of Thermodynamics). And yet this also means that energy is continually being expended or dissipated, as gradients are reduced, and entropy is maximized (the Second Law of Thermodynamics). As Eric Schneider argues, complex organized systems (from hurricanes to organisms) tend to form because they can dissipate energy more efficiently and on a vaster scale than would otherwise be possible. Such “dissipative systems” are internally negentropic; but this is precisely what allows them to discharge so much energy into their environments, thus increasing entropy and reducing energy gradients overall.
- 14 Today, thanks to our computing technologies, we tend to think more commonly in informational terms than in energetic ones. Physicists propose that the universe is ultimately composed of information; cognitive scientists tend to see biological organisms as information-processing systems. I fear that our excessive concern with informatics has gotten in the way of a proper understanding of the importance of energetics.
- 15 Information, unlike energy, has no “in itself,” for information only exists insofar as it is for some entity (someone or something) that parses it in some way. This might make it seem as if information were inessential. But nothing is altogether devoid of information; nothing exists altogether on its own, outside of all-encompassing Nature, entirely self-subsistent and without ever being affected by anything else. The transmission and parsing of information, no less than the transfer and dissipation of energy, is an essential process of Nature.
- 16 We might link information to perception, on the one hand, and to action on the other. Perception is how we obtain bits of information; and the parsing or processing of information issues forth in the possibility of action. A living organism gathers information by perceiving its environment, and it uses this information in order to respond flexibly and appropriately to whatever conditions it encounters. This is not just the case for animals, or entities with brains. A tree discerns water in the soil, which it draws in with its roots; it discovers insects feeding on its leaves, and releases a noxious chemical to repel them. Information processing thus mediates between perception and action.
- 17 Information processing involves—and indeed requires—at least a minimal degree of sentience. But we should not confuse *sentience* with consciousness; for the former is a far broader category than the latter. Organisms like trees, bacteria, and slime molds are probably not conscious; but they are demonstrably sentient, as they process information and respond to it in ways that are not stereotypically determined in advance. Even when it comes to ourselves, most of the information processing in our brains goes on unconsciously, and without any possibility of ever becoming conscious. Consciousness is most likely only sparsely present in Nature. But sentience is far more widely distributed.
- 18 Perception is only a particular sort of causality. When I perceive something, this means that the thing in question has *affected* me in some way, whether through light, sound, touch, or some other medium. But if I am affected by something, then that something has had an *effect* upon me. It has altered me (however minimally) in some manner or other, and this process cannot be confined to perception only: I am often affected by things without overtly perceiving them. I feel the symptoms of a cold, but I do not sense the virus that actually causes me to fall ill. I feel an impulse to buy something, because my mind has been subliminally primed in some way. I lose my balance and fall from a height, pulled by the Earth’s gravitational field even before becoming aware of it. I turn over in my sleep, responding to some change in the ambient temperature. In all these cases, something has caused a change in me; it has given rise to an effect. Information has been processed in some manner, by my body if not my mind.
- 19 Nature involves a continual web of causes producing effects which in turn become the causes of further effects, *ad infinitum*. This need not imply linearity or monocausality: there are many causes for every effect, many effects arising from every cause, and potential causes may interfere with and block one another. But just as energy is continually being transformed, so information is continually being processed, even on what we might consider a purely physical level. This is why information, no less than energy, is a basic category of Nature.
- 20 Within all-encompassing Nature, the difference between the “physical” and the “mental” is only a matter of degree, and not of kind. To a modest extent a thermostat is an information processor, and therefore we should agree that it is at least minimally sentient—if not, as David Chalmers suggests, actually conscious. That is to say, the thermostat *feels*, although it does not know anything, and it is not capable of self-reflection. We can make a similar claim for a stone which falls off a cliff, or even for one which lies motionless on the ground. Gravity pulls the stone to the Earth, and the information associated with this process is what the stone feels.
- 21 Nature is not itself a particular thing or a particular process, although it is the never-completed sum, as well as the framework, of all the multitudinous things and processes—transformations of energy and accumulations of information—that take place within it. How, finally, can we characterize it? All-encompassing Nature stands apart from every particular instance. And yet it is not anything like a Kantian transcendental condition of possibility for all these instances, since it stands on the same level, within the same immanent plane, as they. Nature is neither outside history, nor the totality of history, nor a particular datum of natural or social history. It is rather what all these particular instances, all these transformations and accumulations, have in common: it is what places them all in a common world.
- 22 I will conclude by taking a hint from Alfred North Whitehead, who articulates this commonness more rigorously than I can. Whitehead translates the ancient Greek *physis* not just as ‘Nature’ (as is customary), but also as ‘Process.’ And he equates this *physis* with the narrower technical term (from Plato’s *Timaeus*) *hypodochē*, the ‘receptacle.’ Nature, or the Receptacle, Whitehead says, “imposes a common relationship on all that happens, but does not impose what that relationship shall be.... [It] may be conceived as the necessary community within which the course of history is set, in abstraction from all the particular historical facts.”

“Twenty-Two Theses on Nature” originally appeared in the *Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, volume 58 (2012), pp 205–210.

Steven Shaviro is DeRoy Professor of English at Wayne State University, Detroit. He is the author of several books, including *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* and *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society* (Minnesota, 2003).

Front Image:

Leslie Shows, *Face K (detail)*, 2011, Courtesy the artist and Haines Gallery

Inside Images:

1. Addie Wagenknecht, *Cloud Farming*, 2014, Courtesy the artist and bitforms gallery
2. Spiros Hadjidjanos, *Displaced (Smartphone)*, 2014, Courtesy the artist and Dr. Mathias Boehringer
3. Kevin McElvane, *Agbogboshie: John Mahama*, 2013, Courtesy the artist
4. Alisa Baremboym, *Parasorbal Systems*, 2014. Installation view, *The Great Acceleration*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei. Image courtesy 47 Canal, New York