
no more potlucks

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Editorial

We are very pleased to present you with our guest editor, the amazing Heather Davis, for this Sept/Oct issue no.23 of NMP. Thank you, Heather!

Thank you also to everyone who helped copy edit and assemble this issue. Comme toujours, all this would be impossible without a collective effort.

Issue no.22 Record will be out soon in print-on-demand.

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a filthy and scandalous journal bimonthly.

Mél Hogan & M-C MacPhee

Dirt is deep and thick and moist. It is mineral and animal. It is where we will return to and it is the source of organic renewal. It is the most basic component of what we call 'earth.'

Dirt is what is dirty, perverted, sick, and twisted. It is filthy.

Dirt is rumour and gossip. It is the circulation of desire: a mechanism for fantasy, derision, aggrandizement, and social control.

Dirt is what is pushed out, elided, left to the side, and swept under the rug. It is used to describe those we deem unworthy, undesirable, and as literally below.

Dirt is political. It is the inescapable way in which we become entwined and composed of matter and all those around us. It is what reminds us of the thoroughly relational nature of being. It gets under our fingernails. It forces compromise; it asserts its own presence and bends us to its will.

This issue addresses the complicated and contaminating nature of dirt. We can assign it a proper place, value its capacity for production, or negate our dependence on it, but dirt has a way of getting into everything, whether we like it or not. Dirt can be moulded, moved, manipulated, but stubbornly remains, as in the leftovers of architectural projects captured by Lisa Hirmer. Micah Donovan shows that the mis-placement of dirt can reap interesting results. He explores the productive cross-fertilization that happens when dirt is found in office spaces, in order to re-imagine our relationship with food and the natural world more broadly. Similarly, Jean-Pierre Aubé, in conversation with Nathalie Casemajor, embraces the dirty noises of electromagnetic radiation to transform our understanding of sound. These various expressions of dirt reveal the impossibility of separating off human culture from that which surrounds us, composes us, and sustains us.

Dirt, as expressed through these contributions, is surprisingly animate. Geologist Louis Kamenka suggests that rock itself possesses a kind of mind, one that moves at a very slow pace in comparison to our own brief lives, but whose thoughts, if we could read them, would reveal the transformation of the earth itself. But, dirt remains stubbornly outside, composed of the real, as Elizabeth Grosz asserts. This inability to hear or assimilate matter offers a way to move past the solipsism of the human subject and toward new kinds of feminist philosophy. Dirt offers a way to animate thought. Etienne Turpin links dirt and thought through anal sex, or 'miraculous' sexual manipulations of the anus. Philosophy, through his reading of Georges Bataille, is not directed towards its reproduction, and the reproduction of history, knowledge, and power that this entails, but as an all-consuming excess, pleasurable in itself. Dirt is further accumulated and multiplied as a strategy for escape from the control of surveillance, as argued by Zach Blas in his writing on biometrics and a politics of imperceptibility.

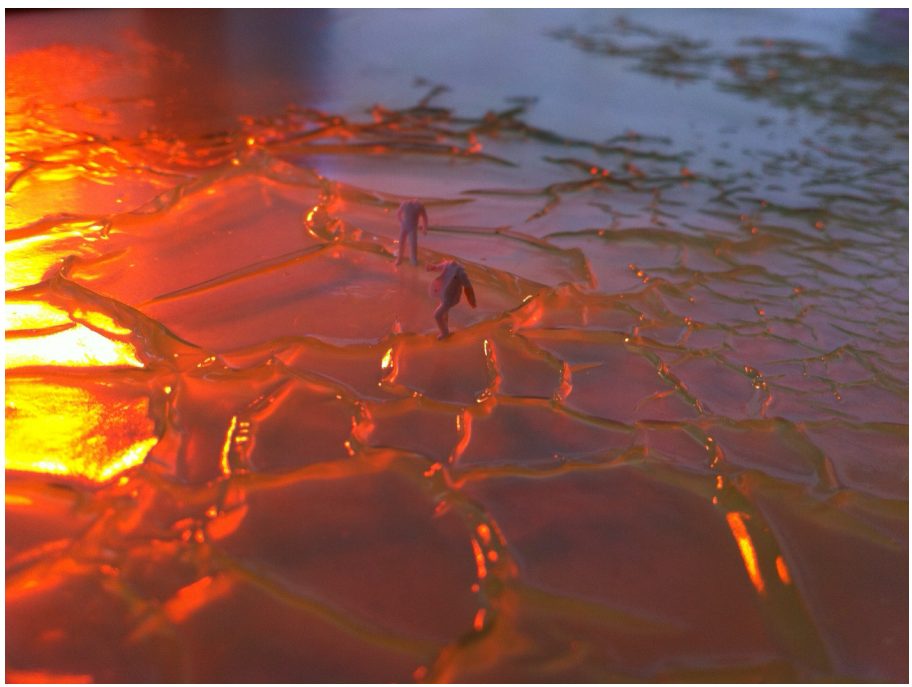
There were some surprising convergences of thought and subject in this issue. Kaolin clay, a kind of white dirt found in central Georgia, figures in two of the pieces here. This particular dirt is embedded in histories of the attempted eradication of indigenous peoples from America, discussed in the fictional ad copy by A. Laurie Palmer. Architect Neal Robinson also works with kaolin clay to create incredible structures that entwine colloquial earth, art, and craft to produce "homeopathic design."

Dirt inevitably gets under the skin, swallowed, excreted, forcing us to delve into the intimacies of our personal lives, as micha cárdenas expresses in her piece on art, feminism, and gardening in Los Angeles. C. Smith uses dirt as a metaphor to explore the intricacies and entanglements of auto-ethnographic writing on drug consumption and addiction research. Dirt is not so easy to brush aside.

There is no way to summarize, contain, or determine what dirt is, but it is remarkably fertile: spawning these interventions of thought, image, and sound.

I am excited and grateful to be able to collect and share the talents of these remarkable contributors – thank you all. I also wish to extend many thanks to M-C, Mél, and the rest of the No More Potlucks team for all their hard work in producing this amazing journal, and for taking care of all the technical details, allowing me to simply play in the dirt. Thank you!

Heather Davis



The Anus is the Night

Etienne Turpin

My buttocks are bare and my stomach is bloody.
Very blinding memory like the sun seen through the lids of closed eyes, in red.
– G. Bataille

Among twentieth-century French philosophy's physical or bodily analogies to thought, one of the most provocative analogies appears in the writings of Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze: for both of these thinkers, anal sex – or, perhaps more correctly, 'miraculous' sexual manipulations of the anus – provides an analogy for philosophical thinking. It is the work of this brief essay to consider the role of the anus, its capacity for miracles, and its qualities of production within the philosophical imaginary and its attendant social milieu. As the area of the body most readily associated with impurity, filth, and disgust, by way of its associative relation to and instrumental delivery of excrement, it is surprising to find the image of the anus as the site of both philosophical production and cosmological reverie.

Deleuze makes the case for an anal image of philosophy in his the letter to the gay activist Michel Cressole, with whom he had contributed a text to the 1973 special issue of the journal *Recherches*, entitled: "Three Billion Perverts:

“

The anal image of thought is here reconnected to an opening up, a distention, a dilation that can only occur among relations of forces.

Grand Encyclopedia of Homosexualities." In a rather cutting defense of his apprenticeship within the history of philosophy, Deleuze scolds Cressole as follows:

> The history of philosophy plays a patently repressive role in philosophy, it's philosophy's own version of the Oedipus complex: 'You can't seriously consider saying what you yourself think until you've read this and that, and that on this, and this on that.' Many members of my generation never broke free of this; others did, by inventing their own particular methods and new rules, a new approach. I myself "did" history of philosophy for a long time, read books on this or that author. But I compensated in various ways [...] I suppose the main way I coped with it at the time was to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed. (*Negotiations*, 6)

Following this statement regarding the productive and compensatory role of his anal image of thought, Deleuze goes on to add a decidedly more Spinozist corrective: "Individuals find a name for themselves, rather, only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities running everywhere within them, to intensities running through them [...] it's depersonalization through love rather than subjection" (*Negotiations*, 7). The anal image of thought is here reconnected to an opening up, a distention, a dilation that can only occur among relations of forces. As Deleuze makes clear, it is the shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that make the act of philosophy, like the act of anal sex, enjoyable. Given the impossibility of reproductive results (to extend and maintain the biological analogy), the productive joy of the anus, like the productive joy of philosophical engagement, does not have as a goal "re-" production, but instead a mutual contamination and depersonalization of forces and bodies in a frenzied entanglement. To conclude this analogy, we might suggest that the philosophical text is thus more akin to that hot, frothy mixture of cum, lubricant,

and fecal matter that leaks from the anus following anal sex, which Dan Savage has defined, in a sentimental homage to the former Republican presidential candidate, as *santorum*.

While Deleuze's philosophy can be understood as a productive, affirmative project in the tradition of Spinoza and Nietzsche, and while his *oeuvre* of santorum teems with affirmation, there is, surprisingly, one thinker too reviled for even Deleuze to thoroughly penetrate: Georges Bataille. While somewhat sparse, his remarks on Bataille betray the image of Deleuze as a perpetual anal affirmation machine. Before we consider Deleuze's critical remarks on Bataille, however, we should first recall his own anal image of thought. In "The Solar Anus," written in 1927 and published in 1931 by Editions de la Galerie Simon, in Paris, with illustrations by Andre Masson, Bataille provides a premonitory text relating the energy of the sun, the sexual movements and excitements of the cosmos and of terrestrial life, and the anus of an eighteen-year-old girl. Operating at the intersection between his sexually explicit literary works – think here especially of *Madame Edwarda*, whose eponymous hero demonstrates that her labia are the *copula* of God: "Madame Edwarda's old rag and ruin leered at me, hairy and pink, just as full of life as some loathsome squid. [...] "You can see for yourself," she said, "I am GOD." – and his later development of a theory of a general economy of expenditure in *La part maudite*, "The Solar Anus" provides a rich but conceptually underdeveloped reading of the cosmic and terrestrial with regard to their potency, fertility, and fundamental antagonism. Bataille writes,

> Disasters, revolutions, and volcanoes do not make love with the stars. The erotic revolutionary and volcanic deflagrations antagonize the heavens. As in the case of violent love, they take place beyond fecundity. In opposition to celestial fertility there are terrestrial disasters, the image of terrestrial love without condition, erection without escape and without rule, scandal, and terror. [...] The Sun exclusively loves the Night and directs its luminous violence, its ignoble shaft, toward the earth, but it finds itself incapable of reaching the gaze or the night, even though the nocturnal terrestrial expanses head continuously toward the indecency of the solar ray. (*Visions of Excess*, 8)

Then, just as the text reaches its most speculative cosmic crescendo, Bataille reintroduces the object (of desire) of his philosophical reflection: "The *solar annulus* is the intact anus of her body at eighteen years old to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun, even though the *anus* is the *night*" (*Visions of Excess*, 9). What to make of this anal *copula* of blinding nocturnal potential? If, for Deleuze, the anus is the non-"re"-productive site of philosophical apprenticeship, how can we characterize Bataille's expressly "intact" anus as an image of thought?

In *La part maudite*, Bataille goes on to develop his argument against scarcity, which contends that, from the point of view of a general economy, the key problem on the tellurian surface is not the conservation of energy, but its expenditure [*depenser*]. Bataille offers the following reversal of the political economy of scarcity:

> I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically. (*The Accursed Share*, 15)

The "curse" of the accursed share is disturbingly simple: the earth is bombarded with so much energy from the sun that it simply cannot spend it all without disaster. Over the course of millions of years of solar bombardment, the creatures enslaved to this "celestial fertility" by way of photosynthetic-reliant metabolic systems are forced to become increasingly burdensome forms of life. By the end of the Ediacaran period, we find the emergence of animals with bones, teeth, and claws, and eventually even more flamboyant expenditures like tigers and peacocks, and later still, tall buildings. Or, as Bataille suggests in his short text "Architecture," for the surrealist *Critical Dictionary*: "Man would seem to represent merely an intermediate stage within the morphological development between monkey and building." With this morphology of expenditure in mind, let us now return to the anal image of thought.

What the theory of expenditure calls into question in its most precise philosophical reading is the division between useful and wasteful (flamboyant) practices; this is because in order for any theory of use value to be coherent, it must first restrict the economy, or field of operations, within which it is operating. The restriction of this field of energy exchange is a moral action inasmuch as it sets up the conditions for any action in the field to be read as either productive or wasteful. For Bataille, the general economy permits us to evaluate the terms of restriction as a means to call into question the cultural values and forms of social organization they engender. Because of this, the "anus of her body at eighteen years old" *must be intact:* as a potential for pure loss, pure expenditure of energy without reserve and without reproduction, Bataille is transfixed by the analogy of glorious or catastrophic expenditure in relation to the energy of the sun and the potential for escaping this curse as much as the curse of the intact anus.

Even from a quick fuck, one can get a sense of potential relations: however cursory our reading of the anal image of thought, we might now speculate, recklessly, fantastically, or otherwise, about Deleuze's own hatred of Bataille who, despite their shared image of the anus as a site of analogical philosophical production, is repeatedly derided in Deleuze's work. For Deleuze, the anus is occupied for an unexpected but productive, pleasurable activity: making monsters from the back retains the purposive and projective dimension of philosophy. We must admit it: a perverse patrilineality still retains the *paternus* that *is* the history of philosophy, just as Madame Edwarda's distended labia *is* God. Bataille, for his part, seizes "her body at eighteen years" and gives himself to the "intact anus." It begins to open, slowly at first, and then, increasingly distended, he draws it outside itself where it is prolapsed into an excessive surface of energy, circulation, contraction, and dilation, deprived of recognition as much as it is deprived of instrumental productivity in the frenzy of anal activity that cannot be properly termed productive or wasteful except under the imposed, external moral regime of value that restricts the general economy. Bataille's image of the anus is thus an image of philosophy as an activity of loss, expenditure beyond meaningful recuperation, and acephalic annihilation. As an affront to the Deleuzian project of affirmation and becoming, thinking is, for Bataille, as E.M. Cioran has suggested, always "thinking against

oneself," where touching what was presumed to be intact initiates an *unbecoming* of the whole through a poromechanics of impurity, injury, and defilement:

> There is no work that does not return against its author: the poem crushes the poet, the system the philosopher, the event the man of action. Some form of self-destruction, responding to his vocation and accomplishing it, is at work in the core of history; only he saves himself who sacrifices gifts and talents in order that, disengaged from his quality as a man, he is able to strut into being. If I aspire to a metaphysical career there is no price at which I am able to protect my identity, however minute are the residues that remain, it is necessary that I liquidate them [...] One always perishes by the self that one assumes: to bear a name is to claim an exact mode of collapse. (The Temptation to Exist, 33-34).

To bear the name 'philosophy,' the activity of self-annihilation engages its desire for extension while admitting: "I want to have my throat slashed while violating the girl to whom I will have been able to say: you are the night" (*Visions of Excess*, 9).

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Image: Detail from *Decomposing Territory* by Meredith Miller, 2012; image courtesy of the artist.

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Ethnographic Anecdotes from the Junk Shop

C Smith

On accidents and auto-ethnography

"Back from the dead," a transcript dated a few days after your first overdose, September 11, 2009:

~~*The dead*~~
~~*part a place*~~
~~*a feeling of having*~~
~~*come to pass*~~
~~*like so much*~~
~~*coming home*~~
~~*to sense*~~

or how polite you were
surfacing from nod
to the face of emergency
personnel, or her passing
as if in (cliché)
dream
dreamt all alone

and it's lovely to see you
and I apologize for my condition
gesturing
at the bed or the chair –
the all around situation in its
entire helplessness –
like something I wasn't supposed
to see, she later said

or earlier, when
she asked the first
responding official
idling in the flashing
lights who,
either confused
or intentionally evasive
said that 'a girl
was sick upstairs.'

She tells him that her friend
lives upstairs And maybe
lingers a moment or
two too long until the EMS,
subtleties dissolving, asks
if her friend gets sick
often
and she shakes her head
ambiguously but sort
of like no

or,
the EMS, doctors and nurses
and you're back from the dead
after 'blue lips' and 'you gotta
stop that shit,' not unlike
the cop in the emergency
room following the pavement-
kissing car crash
gash
a few months after
that first horrific
and prolonged kick
so many years back

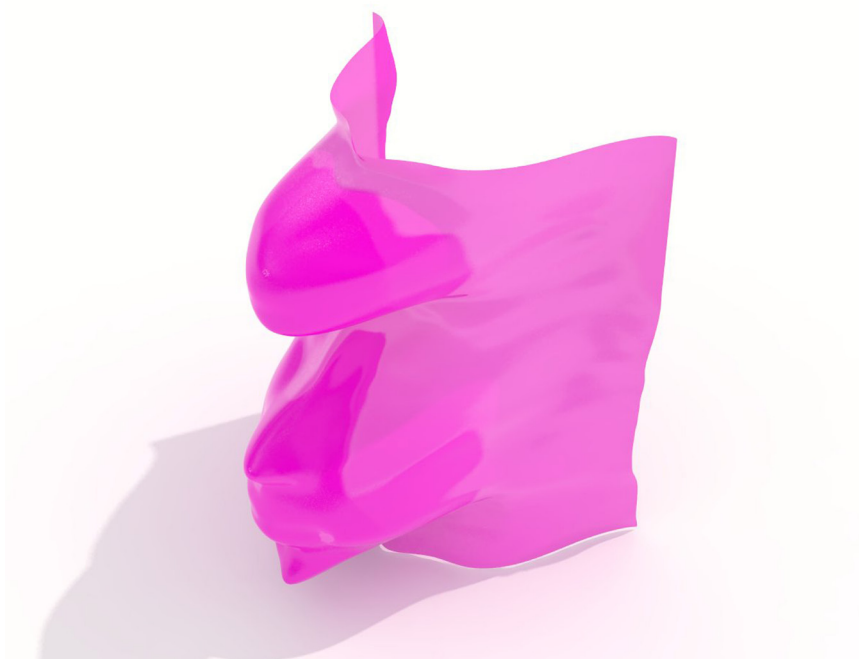
who said, as an aside, smirking:
'that looks like a pussy'
as if he might want to fuck
that open
wound
or else just didn't know
what else to say
in that awkward interval
before the opening was closed

‘Fractal interiorities’ and the poetics of insider ethnography

The fall having sped past in the blur of intense focus and work that is the oscillation between absent and ill, nodding and screaming, dopesick and *in my own little world*, I started the lit review feeling heavy. This material wasn’t going to be easy or pleasant to negotiate. I’d seen the pictures, peeked out the window as the bus sped past, saw the dirty bombed out zone of conflict, and knew the illusory, hallucination-inducing state of clinical, public health science research re. drugs: the numbers didn’t lie: my hourly wage as a consultant was almost equivalent to the worth of a flap of junk in those days – and at least on paper, at least in the beginning, I was working more than enough to maintain a healthy balanced habit; differently put, I was using so little that I hardly needed to keep track of my hours. Having watched this play out more than a few times before, I could just say that at the start of that contract, I was feeling whole again there for a while, in one of my ‘busy’ periods that interspersed the long bouts of flailing (what one of my old professors once called the ‘fallow-time’) in between – the volatile and unfixed threshold point where writing/production/getting-stuff-done became indistinguishable from junk, and work collapsed into using. And like any good conforming creature of capitalism, I threw myself into the material, splashing into the research, as they say, with both feet…

Image: “C looking out”. Photo courtesy of the author.

C Smith *grew up outside Toronto to become an unlikely and improbable academic by accident, and now teaches a discipline in which he has zero degrees at a uni in the Land of Oz (Melbourne, Australia). His habits include bending institutional rules, going to bed early, leading a virtually asocial, asexual existence, doing heaps of ‘consulting’ work (sometimes as the token dopefiend) for all manner of public health bodies, and junk, heaps and heaps of junk. His dealer is a 72 year old Mafioso grandma. Presently, his research explores the use of zombie metaphors in addiction treatment and mental health service user discourse, the recruitment of addiction treatment physicians, and the awkward intersection between middle class, educated white activists in the ‘Occupy’ movement and people who use drugs and have no home. C is really good at creating heaps more work for himself than is necessary, and in Melbourne he recently made a documentary about inequality in ‘(k) illadelphia’ with his friends there (where he attended a poison ivy league school to do his postdoc and his best friends were dopefiends and ex-crack dealers). C hates most conventional academics. With a burning, screaming passion.*



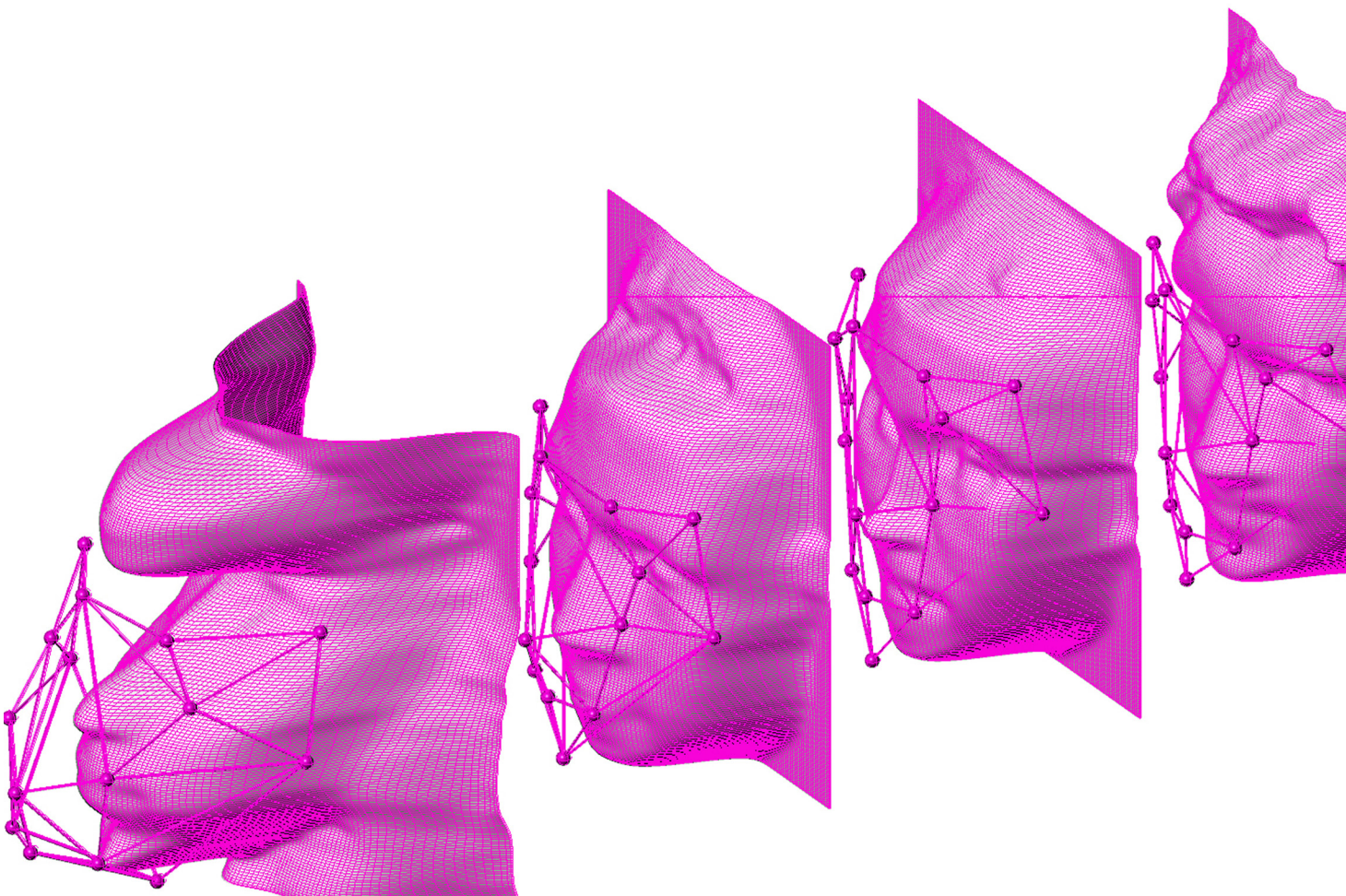
Imperceptibly Dirty

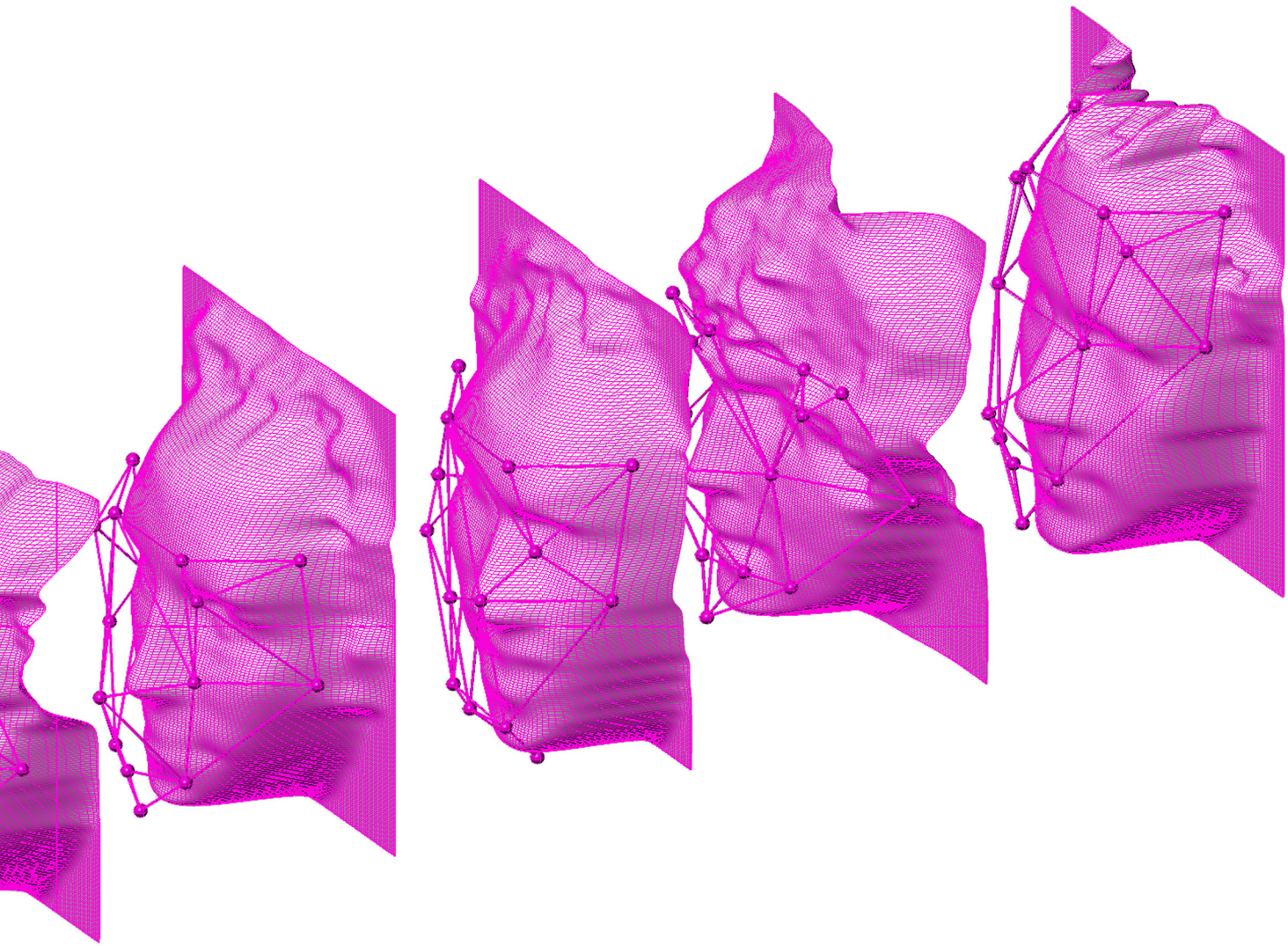
Zach Blas

D.I.R.T.

Dirt often evokes information trails, the pursuit and gathering of information – getting the dirt on someone, as they say. Today, getting the dirt might likely be for security or marketing purposes, where information is sought legally, illegally, or extralegally, by a variety of governments, persons, and private institutions. Perhaps D.I.R.T. (Data Interception by Remote Transmission) is a paradigmatic example, a Trojan program from the early 2000s that allowed US law-enforcement to surreptitiously monitor a suspect's computer as well as upload evidence to it. D.I.R.T. highlights the tactics at play in contemporary tropes of dirty political battles: get it any which way.

Google, Facebook, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, WikiLeaks, and Anonymous are all implicated in such hunts for dirt, that is, the retrieval and dissemination of information for various political causes and beliefs. Notably, there appears to be at least two kinds of this dirt: governments and private corporations collect and aggregate data on the public for criminal and marketing purposes and beyond, while activists and whistleblowers unearth the dirt on governments, private corporations, politicians, and CEOs, among others. Undoubtedly, the desire





to get the dirt grows with the production and encryption of information today. Yet, within this messy mixture of dirt, dirty information, databases of dirt, all moving through cycles of exposure and concealment, there also appears to be a particular political desire to become imperceptible and illegible, to make the dirt dirty or dirtier, one might say. In this instance then, imperceptibility suggests evading mechanisms of dirt collection, informatic capture, and data aggregation, but this also takes the form of a powerful political excess that defies quantification or informationalization to such applications of capture. Imperceptibility is a use of dirt that masks, black-boxes, camouflages, makes an unrecognizable mess of it all.

Dirt is, of course, an unclean and contaminating matter, a substance resistant to stable compositions of size, scale, and volume. Perhaps the phrase "imperceptibly dirty" can be used to suggest those political actions and tactics that use information mined and gathered (the dirt) – as well as the mechanisms doing the aggregating – in antagonistic ways to further evade participation and interpellation into a neoliberal regime of calculation, classification, and recognition. Certainly, these desires to evade detection span from the left to the right of the political spectrum, but I want to focus on actions that protest against exploitative and undemocratic uses of dirt gathering, actions that refuse to become perceptible to state and corporate control by tactically manipulating and subverting dirt of all kinds – digital, material, conceptual, aesthetic, and political.

Imperceptibility and Network Exodus

In *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* (2008), political theorists Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos explain that imperceptible politics is about existing outside representation. For them, representational politics is a form of policing, a neoliberal trap that fallaciously proposes that by being included or recognized by the state, one will become a rightful subject of democracy and equality; thus, imperceptible politics is not about state inclusion or recognition but escape, refusal, and the construction of new, amorphous bodies, materials, styles, and ways of existing. Similarly, artist Jaime del Val's "Devisual Manifesto" (2011) argues for a distinction between seeing or perceiving and visualizing technologies. He writes that our

culture of visualization is a culture of control, and therefore, devisualization disorients visualization's tools for recognition and identification. Devisualization, del Val claims, redefines perception and recognizable reality. Prescient in light of Del Val's diagnosis, media theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, in their book *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007), have described the current century as an "era of universal standards of identification," referencing technologies that bind identification with locatability, exemplified by biometric technologies and GPS. "Henceforth," they write, "the lived environment will be divided into identifiable zones and nonidentifiable zones, and nonidentifiables will be the shadowy new 'criminal' classes – those that do not identify." They further hypothesize about nonidentifiable action, suggesting that "future avant-garde practices will be those of nonexistence." Their tactics of nonexistence stress the development of techniques and technologies to make oneself unaccounted for. Black Bloc protests and Hakim Bey's writings on the temporary autonomous zone could both be considered tactics of nonexistence.

Imperceptible politics, devisualization, and nonexistence are crucial conceptualizations for exploring the imperceptibly dirty in social media networks, digital identity management platforms, and data mining software, the technological systems where today's dirt wars play out. For example, in the wake of continuously fluctuating terms of agreement regarding data collection, marketing, and privacy policies on social media sites like Facebook and Google+, artists and activists are devising exit strategies from these commercial networks. While les liens invisibles' project *Seppukoo.com* offers a Facebook suicide service and Anonymous has constructed its own social media networking site*Anon Plus*, artist Sean Dockray's "Facebook Suicide (Bomb) Manifesto" (2010) more directly evokes the imperceptibly dirty. Dockray writes:

> When someone disappears from Facebook, does anyone notice? Does this software retroactively invalidate all of the marketing data that has been collected from the account? [...] The answer isn't silence, but noise! Suicide on a social network is a matter of introducing noise into the system. It spreads viruses and misinformation. It makes things less interesting for others. It disrupts the finely calibrated advertising algorithms on which suggestions are made – for friends, groups, institutions, ideas, and so on.

Dockray urges users to like everything, become friends with everyone, and join every group, for it is only then that the dirt gathered becomes null.

Biometric Failure

Today, biometrics have become emblematic of informatic capture, recognition control, and the newest in D.I.R.T. technology. A multibillion dollar industry in security and marketing sectors, biometric companies produce devices like iris scans and facial recognition machines with the hopes of manufacturing the perfect automated identification tools that can successfully read a core identity off the body. Yet, as communications theorist Shoshana Amielle Magnet (2011) has argued, biometric technologies rely heavily on stable and normative conceptions of identity, and thus, structural failures are encoded in biometrics that discriminate against race, class, gender, sex, and disability. For example, fingerprint devices often fail to scan the hands of Asian women and iris scans work poorly if an eye has cataracts. Biometric failure fuels what transgender theorist and activist Dean Spade has concisely labeled "administrative violence," pointing toward the inequalities that emerge when normative categories are forced upon populations.

Recently, artists have begun to exploit such biometric failures in order to become undetectable to these forms of capture and data aggregation. Adam Harvey's *CV Dazzle*uses a combination of fashion, makeup, and hair styling as camouflage to escape facial recognition. In response to emerging scientific studies that link successfully determining sexual orientation with rapid facial recognition techniques, the art group Queer Technologies is currently developing a *Facial Weaponization Suite*. The suite provides masks for public protest, such as collective masks that allow a person to simultaneously wear the faces of many. The Fag Face Collective Mask, for example, is generated from the aggregation of biometric facial data of many gay men's faces. This facial data is gathered into a single three-dimensional plane; when plotted together in 3D modeling software, the result is a mutated, alien facial mask that cannot be read or parsed by biometric facial detection technologies. Within the last year, Occupy activists and Afghan civilians have been the target of massive biometric data-gathering sweeps by US police and

military forces. As persons and publics that deviate from mainstream nationalist agendas become increasingly targeted by biometric surveillance, creative acts of imperceptibility become all the more necessary.

In response to the global biometric project, Magnet writes that "human bodies are not biometrifiable," they cannot be rendered into a static and stable coded representation. Magnet's political position insists that the human body is beyond any definitive technological measure, and this opens a space to think another dirt: not dirt as information but a relational materiality, always dirty and contaminated, binding the human, earth, and universe.

Dirty Matters

Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos explain that "imperceptible politics involves*remaking the present* by *remaking our bodies*: the ways we perceive, feel, act. Imperceptible politics transforms our bodies." For them, imperceptible politics, which are processes of social change, do not result in a proliferation of differences but rather "a process of becoming everyone [...] a unity of multiple singularities." These authors, like Magnet, evoke the complex material components and agents, both organic and inorganic, that give form to us and the world. They insist on the dirt that materially and politically composes us all and yet makes us irresolutely singular. In the last instance, perhaps the dirt in imperceptible politics is this cosmic material element, beyond any informatic D.I.R.T. that attempts to stabilize, classify, and identify. There is a dirt beyond measure, beyond D.I.R.T., a dirty material transformation – continuous and unending – that is becoming everybody. This is as imperceptibly dirty as it can get.

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Whitedirt.com

A. Laurie Palmer

Wishing you health happiness excitement and good fortune!
— whitedirt.com

This is the pure white dirt you grew up with, the dirt you are made out of because you dug it up in the back fields and secretly ate handfuls of it as a young child, and because your mother ate it when she was pregnant with you—though it was only later you found out that your mother ate dirt—and after that you didn't have to be secret about it. You could dig together then, heading out to the tender spot in the back fields where no grass grew because the ground grew instead. This cache of pure white clay, a clay so smooth and creamy, so fine-grained, that your tongue ached to push it against the surface of your mouth, and feel it crush and fall apart, the inarticulate flavors of the ground releasing. This is the same ground that you stand on, or, rather, stood on, the ground that bore you, that bore your mom too, that held you, at least then, for a bit, at the start. This is not Georgia's famous red dirt but what lies underneath the red and the black dirt, its pure white inside, its middle—this is the same dirt! Shipped to you in a sterile Ziploc bag, packed in cardboard, you can hold it. We will send you some, from Georgia, to wherever you are, for you to hold and to eat. If you buy six boxes we will give you a discount and pay the postage, to wherever you and your kind have fled to, anywhere, so long as

it's in the United States. We will sell you back the dirt that you didn't need to own. The dirt that was just there, then, like the air was just there, along with the woods and the water, the crows and possums, the longleaf pine, the turkey oak and the little blue-stem.

Our white dirt is a pure and naturally-made product, derived from ancient times, when Georgia's rivers slid across the crystalline rocks of the upper Piedmont, then dropped their white silt at the fall line as their mouths opened into a shallow cretaceous sea. Our white dirt fanned out, sunk and rested there, for more than centuries, for eons. The sea rolled back. We arrived bewildered. We called it all ours and made you leave. We pushed you out of Dahlonega, where the dirt looked like it might turn a profit, and where we used your word for its name: yellow. We wanted you out of the way. We pushed you first to Tennessee, where John Ross wore a waistcoat and his daughters, high collars in spite of, or because of, being Cherokee. In 1838 we gave you blankets from the hospital, and no food, and we made you leave again. You had to walk without shoes or food, not even dirt to eat because the ground was either swampy or frozen, and we made you move.

We thought we would dig money out of the ground in Dahlonega, Georgia, in 1829. The first tidbits of gold flashed a false alarm; we couldn't make it pay. You left down a long road towards Oklahoma, where the dirt on the surface is also red. You left names behind in Georgia—Alapaha, Catoosa, Chattahoochee, Chatooga, Chickamauga, Chicopee, Echota, Hahira, Hiawassee, Muscogee, Nahunta, Ochlocknee, Senoia, Suwanee—and you left a flower. We made it Georgia's State Flower: the Cherokee Rose is white in the center for the tears of the mothers who watched their children die, gold for the gold we took from your lands, and seven leaves on each stem for the seven Tribal clans. We have that flower and we have those names, and now, finally, we have figured out how to mine the gold in Dahlonega and make it pay.

And now you can buy back some of the land that you had to leave behind, that you might just be craving: $9.95 for 2 pounds—it's a small price to own and hold

again some of what once was yours—or rather, I keep forgetting, you don't see it that way, and that was part of the problem with you. You never thought of land as something you owned but something that was just there, like the quail, and the mourning dove.

But you aren't allowed to exist unless you pay for the ground that you stand on, the dirt that supports you, that holds you—if you can't pay for it, you can't stand on it, there is no space for your body to be in the world if you can't pay for the space it takes up—and even if you can pay… Some of you are still not allowed to have land. The company men who arrived on your front porch, with clipboard in one hand holding the other glad-hand out, with a smile especially wide for Black farmers, those of you who had only recently acquired your land—how did you do that, anyway? It couldn't have been legitimate. You hadn't even been freed for that long, and you were also, technically, immigrants—well, so were we, but we had the clipboards, the whips—all the kaolin men were doing was finding a way to take back what was white.

But you can have some of it again—a small piece ($57 if you buy six boxes). It's gourmet. You can't find this particular dirt west of the Mississippi, or up in Illinois. Maybe in China, some companies call it China Clay. The kaolin companies have made a mint. White dirt is extremely lucrative, but its value is a secret. Everything about the kaolin business is a secret. Like when you went to the back-field to dig and guiltily eat the ground that you stood on, you didn't want anyone to know. The kaolin companies don't want anyone to know how lucrative their business is, and how much power they wield in the politics of central Georgia. The sand bank / fall line stretches from Augusta to Macon—like a belt across the fattened waist of the kaolin industry—including the towns of Sandersville, Gray, Hephzibah, and Deep Step, and the town of Gordon, named after John B. Gordon, confederate general, former governor, and founder and one-time Grand Dragon of the Georgia KKK. This looks like hard-scrabble country. The soil surveyors say it's a place of subsistence farming, but most of the farms have collapsed. The kaolin companies expropriated land based on flimsy legal precepts, leases signed with x's because Jim

Crow wouldn't allow you to go to school, or find a reasonable job, or hire a lawyer. The kaolin companies took your land, already so hard won—how did you come to get land anyway? Based on some kind of Reconstruction deal? But we know that reparations are a myth, forty acres is a myth—still, there was that fourteen-year window of permissions, of wildness, when we didn't know what to do about you. We didn't know what you might be capable of. Some of you slid inside the system and purchased deeds to your own land. But the kaolin companies took care of that later, at least in middle Georgia. It was hard to be a subsistence farmer of any color in middle Georgia in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, so when they offered a dollar an acre per year for the right to dig on your land should minerals be discovered some time in the future it didn't seem like such a bad deal (and if you had already dug your own white hole with your mother out in the back fields, it shone like a beacon to them, a little star from the helicopters).

How could you know that the small white hole you had dug with your mother was only the tip of a massive deposit of whiteness that would yawn wider the deeper we dug, until your barn and your cow and your house and your chickens and your truck were swallowed up, because there was no place left to stand, no land, no dirt, no substance that could be called "property"—left?

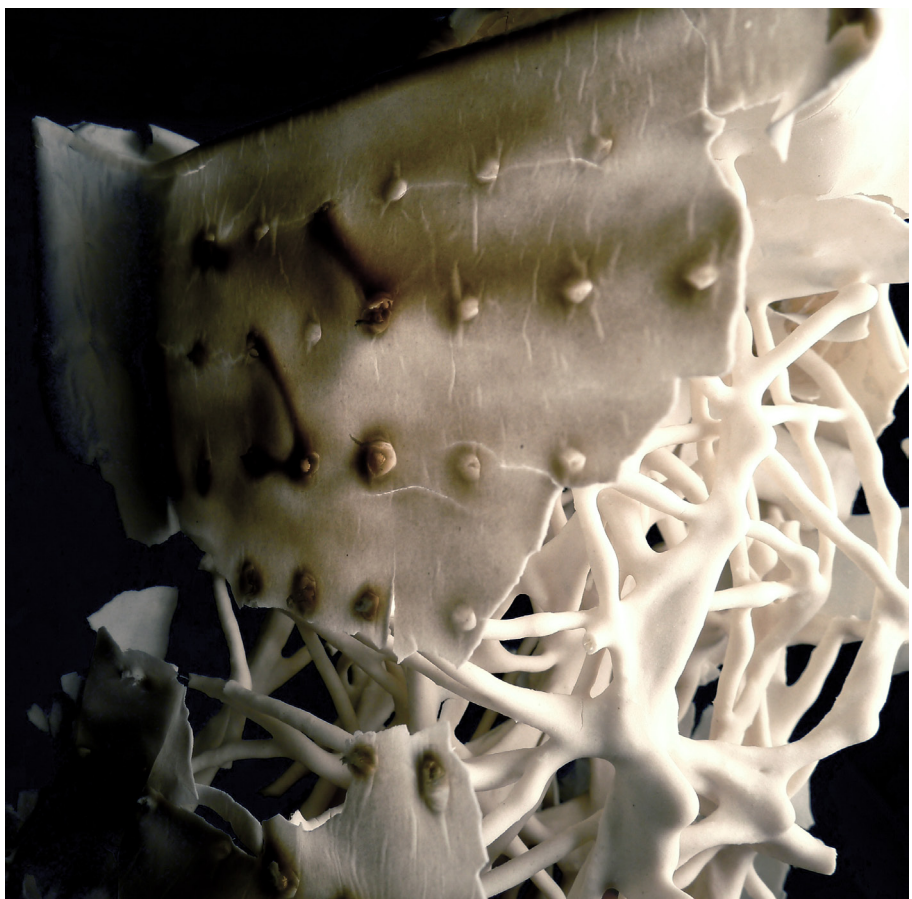
That x remains on the photocopied form—we have the clipboards, the lawyers who have all the tools to imprison you forever, again, or any one like you, for resisting. We dug a very large, white hole, and it is spreading—begun on the same spot where you and your mother had dug your tiny hole, where you would go and eat, secretly, guiltily, because eating dirt is called a sickness—crushing the clay, rolling it around on the roof of your mouth, and it would taste and feel so good. Plus, you and your mother shared a secret.

You both knew that clay could grow—that it does grow underground, that it is an expanding material, not a passive, inert material. You knew that the clay that was just there, like the grey fox and the screech owl were just there, like the bluegill, the wood duck, and the channel catfish, that this clay is connected to the fox and

the owl and the catfish, in that it's alive too—its thin plates of silica and alumina (so thin and so tiny, in fact, that it can take 800 years for a single clay particle to fall to the bottom of a glass of water)—these thin plates which had been broken down from rocks over many centuries of erosion, of wind and rain and battering. After all that, at some point the process of destruction has to conclude, and the tiniest particles, those tiny thin plates, start building new structures. They sandwich water between them and stack up, like dinner plates, curving and arching and growing in microscopic towers under pressure, underground, together— building and growing slowly, invisibly. Some claim that clay particles are the link between biological and mineral life—that they formed a primitive cell that sheltered RNA, back in the beginning of time. I don't know about this, but your mother knew, she knew that eating dirt could protect her from the awfulness of the world by absorbing it, and that this white dirt also has the power to invent itself—she ate it before she bore you. She ate it secretly. She wanted to take it in, and she wanted to make it disappear.

We have packaged this for you. We will sell you some.

A. Laurie Palmer *is an artist, writer, and teacher living in Chicago and California. Her work is concerned, most immediately, with resistance to privatization, and more generally, with theoretical and material explorations of matter's active nature as it asserts itself on different scales and in different speeds. Her work takes various forms as sculpture, installation, public projects, writing, and interdisciplinary research. Palmer teaches in the Sculpture Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. www.alauriepalmer.net; chicagotorture.org;artic.edu/~apalme/*



DIRTY WORKS:
Constructing an Efficacious Practice

Neal Robinson

"To break ground is the first architectural act."

– Peter Waldman (architect), citing Gottfried Semper (architect), on sighting the primitive hut.

"...and by breaking open the idea of ground, all Hell is loosed. There's a reason Modernism wanted to float above it."

– Neal Robinson (architect)

Dirt is all that lies beneath[1] (the idea of) us. It is the relative stigma from which technology, fine moral character, and notions of good health have sought maximum distance. Historically speaking, the urban and imagined intellectual worlds of the learned equated dirt with filth, and its cultural legacy is equipped with strategies of eradication and containment that all but the most rural (read: poor) can readily accomplish. The modern disposition, with spic-and-spanned white walls, large expanses of floor-to-ceiling clarity, and the use of innovative foundation strategies to float above the earth's soiled surface in order to attain a more rarified, machined, dead-level "clean slate," constructed a fantastic dirt-free world of crisp, bright denial. Philosophically, air – the domain of "pure" thinking and resoluteness of breath –

triumphed over all things earthen and dirty. Complimentary to this position stands the rural attitude toward embracing dirt as a productive medium that requires care and reverence. For the liturgical farmer, "Good Dirt" is a reference to not only the virility of the soil but also to the spiritual promise it holds. Dirt is toil. Toil is value and value is divine.[2] Sweat and lean muscle become outward testaments to one's dialog with weighty, difficult dirt, and in turn, dirt often functions as a positive descriptor of moral character. For example, "He's from good dirt," implies a hard-working, trustworthy person on whom one could unfailingly depend. In this archaic (?) scenario, living close to the ground with "know-how" prioritized over "know-of"; airish intellectualization has a tough time competing with tactile pragmatics. Care-full strategies of execution and figuring (out) seem far more revelatory in a condition where the stout mores of the inhabitants are often seen as more solid than the spaces they inhabit. In this case, Dirt is indeed fundamental.[3]

It is in the grotesque production of fundaments that *Dirty Works* take hold. Mixing geographies of modern culture (pseudo-scientific precision, whiteness, thinness, denial of gravity) with agencies of rural craft (quilting patterns, communal production, animal logics, material sensibility), the efforts strike a dialog that position (the architect's) "work" as having the primary responsibility of structuring social metrics through conscientious constructions. Providing evidence and strategies for accomplishing this is ultimately independent of both form and the hermetics of building.

Using "good dirt" from the rural veins of middle Georgia, this "Dirty Work" takes up colloquial earth as both building material and recalibrated "promised land." Kaolin – a dense, white, hard-working mineral that is also ingested as part of geophagic medicinal practice – becomes host to the architectural inquiry. This work then games with the perceptual alignment of dirt with mass, density, dankness, and mute weight, and trades it in favor of light, thin, and fleshy. Operating somewhere between the aerial expertise of a dirt dauber and the evangelic side of Shakespeare, we practiced with tacitly informed understanding, relative tolerance, and literal material slip as assets to discovery instead of a more exacting, clean,

and arguably remote conceptual practice. Giving figure to form in this way – with surface, line and dimension – produces a material anxiety that squared us between informed hunch and all-out faith. While neither fine art nor pure craft, these constructions witness a polluted, more homeopathic approach toward design. We kind of dig it.

Footnotes:

[1] "Beneath" is asked to perform several duties in this opening sentence. It is intended both as a "fundamental[3] support to the conceptualization of" and as a tentative, relative direction in relation to the upright body. It references the Christian narrative of God breathing life into the dust/dirt of earth in order to establish man as a living thing, the primordial "dirt soup" from which evolutionist theories sprout, and finally, in its atomized state (cosmic dust), the Higgs boson particle collection that gives "all" mass.

[2] Alluding to my own protestant schooling in which the degree of effort expended towards a goal is commensurate with the concept of worth and the establishment of something's value. I.e. "It has to hurt to be worth it."

[3] fundamental as in adhering to both the essential structure of or beneath[1] an idea and to Fundamentalism – contemporary Protestantism.

Images:

Neal Robinson _6 – Quilt
Neal Robinson _14 – Neuron

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Neal Robinson *is an Architect and design director of n_space architectures in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He is also an Assistant Professor of Practice in Architecture at University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. Engaging roles of craft and the "hand-made" in conjunction with post-digital logics, Mr. Robinson advocates the production and reclamation of public curiosity through attenuated socio-spatial constructions. Recent projects champion both intellectual labor and physical magic and include design-build commissions for culinary interiors, a pop-Italian gelato garden, Rockwellian specifications for suburban lawn mowing and a proposed wedding pavilion whose porcelain structure is completed by insects.*

Mr. Robinson received his Master of Architecture from Rice University and his Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology. After working at SOM/San Francisco and the Atlanta office of Cooper Carry and Associates, Robinson established a community design practice, SKYLAB Architectures, in Atlanta, GA and co-founded the design + build office of WETSU in Ann Arbor, MI. He is the recipient of three A.I.A. Honor awards for design excellence and has received design recognition from ID, Contract, Wallpaper and Wood Design + Building magazine. Current monikers include: Calorie-Counter, Dirt Dauber, Gastronaut, Quilting Mason and all-around fan of New Math.*

Falling for an Idea

Micah Donovan

A precipice

Richard Brautigan's oranges from Osaka, imagined into existence in a short piece of writing for the sole enjoyment of their possibility, are a poetic stretch, a meditation on the inconceivable. A torrential inversion of reality transforms an industrial city without orchards—more densely populated than Tokyo in the 1960's—through the simple, sensuous fabrication of fruit. What could be more revolutionary than the planting of an idea?

Figments of the imagination, Brautigan's oranges bypass bureaucracies and market forces, re-imagining the city. Like dirt—miraculous and mundane—ideas are a medium for conception: Osaka reconceived. Soft edged, pleasant, the thought of oranges cuts through millions of tons of cement to what lies beneath.

Imaginings of the unimaginable find an analogue in the strangeness of dirt. Incredibly complex, each tablespoon of soil contains within it a cosmos. Composed of minerals, microbial rhizomes, organisms, plants, liquids, and vapours, the living space of soil ranges from a few centimeters to a few meters in thickness, covering the planet like a skin. It breathes, perspires, and transpires.

A living horizon assumed to be vast and endless is but a bubble, delicately balanced by the mass beneath, and the vacuum outside. Every bit of dirt is derived from helium, hydrogen, and the supernova furnaces that transform stars into planets, planets into beings. From some comes all.

The step

A child draws a thin line: a horizon that delineates nothing from everything. The drawing, a first step into language, finds its stride in physical descriptions of places we inhabit, turning into cities. Ed Ruscha gas stations, a horizontal landscape, so normal they disappear until painted, photographed or stepped upon, as in the case of the moon. With this latest step of language, we've situated ourselves in opposition to nature. We no longer live in the dirt but on it. We have created vertical space, with dirt in the basement. Greek tragedy would have us admire our vertical relationship with dirt, entirely essential to the inevitable fall: dirt as our end (having mistakenly thought ourselves above it all).

The distance

If technology is what we do, as Ursula Franklin suggests, it is inextricably connected to culture. The production and consumption of oil, as a primary action of our culture, has largely separated us from land, literally as well as figuratively, from vehicles to fertilizers. We bypass dirt in favour of oil. Our addictions to agency and instantaneity have led us to see our shadow above the ground.

For many, dirt exists between the edge of the sidewalk and the road. Dirt is a scar, showing itself from a construction site. A disconnect that starts in language extends to a rupture within the landscape. The more we distance ourselves from the shore, the more we risk not returning.

Randomness

In my artistic practice, I introduce dirt into non-dirt spaces and I want to introduce humans into dirt spaces. I want to break down the specialization and compartmentalization of knowledge and space. I received a text three days ago that read: "in the grow tubes, a crop of fluorescent yellow mushrooms are flourishing". To have introduced unidentified fluorescent yellow mushrooms into an office space is a minor accomplishment. I would love if next, someone sent me a text about bugs. All these things that are not supposed to exist in an office space, I think we need to reintroduce them to an office space.

I am inspired by Wendell Berry who, in a letter to Wes Jackson in 1982, wrote:

> I want to try to complete the thought about "randomness" that I was working on when we talked the other day. The Hans Jenny paragraph that started me off is the last on page 21 of *The Soil Resource*:
>
> 'Raindrops that pass in random fashion through an imaginary plane above the forest canopy are intercepted by leaves and twigs and channeled into distinctive vert space patterns of through-drip, crown-drip and stem flow. The soil surface, as receiver, transmits the "rain message" downward, but as the subsoils lack a power source to mold a flow design, the water tends to leave the ecosystem as it entered it, in randomized fashion.'
>
> My question is: Does "random" in this (or any) context describe a verifiable condition or a limit of perception?
>
> My answer is: It describes a limit of perception. This is, of course, not a scientist's answer, but it may be that anybody's answer would be unscientific. My answer is based on the belief that pattern is verifiable by limited information, whereas the information required to verify randomness is unlimited. As I think you said when we talked, what is perceived as random within a given limit may be seen as a part of a pattern within a wider limit.
>
> If this is so, then Dr. Jenny, for accuracy's sake, should have said that rainwater moves from mystery through pattern back into mystery.


EVERGREEN
garden market
Micro Farms


sustainability
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> To call the unknown "random" is to plant the flag by which to colonize and exploit the known. (A result that our friend Dr. Jenny, of course, did not propose and would not condone.)
>
> To call the unknown by its right name, "mystery," is to suggest that we had better respect the possibility of a larger, unseen pattern that can be damaged or destroyed and, with it, the smaller patterns.[1]

Randomness at best is simply under-explaining. Berry understands there is something very structured that is larger than us; most scientific discoveries are about finding patterns that already exist, but that tap into new forms of perception. People don't invent things, they don't necessarily make new relationships happen, they make new languages to understand the relationships that are there. In learning how to perceive differently, through conceptual orientations as well as through new instruments, we make new ways of perceiving possible.

What becomes important in the present moment is to embrace our non-understanding of dirt, our being with dirt, as a poetic gesture. Maybe the only tool we have to conceive of things larger than ourselves, like dirt, is the poetic. The poetic allows for a perception of the world that is about cyclical regeneration, rather than privileging notions of individual creation, author, inventor, or genius. We are conceivers of ideas, in that the medium for conception already exists in the world. Ideas can be created from their own destruction. And then it all starts all over again. From three elements ten billion years ago we now have more than a hundred. The way we conceive is the way the world is born.

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[1] Jackson, Wes. "Toward An Ignorance-Based World View (LR81)." The Land Report Number 81 (Spring 2005): 43 pars. www.landinstitute.org/vnews/display.v/ART/2004/10/03/42c0db19e37f4

Image:

Grow tubes, reception: Evergreen reception area where employees can grow food in the office under LED light, or in the window. Evergreen Brick Works, Toronto 2011.

Micah Donovan *is an artist working with food, water, and technology in partnership with Evergreen Brick Works, the YMCA, and Holland Bloorview Kids Rehab. A graduate of Kansas City Art Institute and Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, he coordinated art-garden-play programs at Bloorview, co-creative produced television series for Discovery Science and Food Network Canada and is a member of the Radical Education Research Collective.*

Of Worldliness and Being Otherwise: A Conversation with Elizabeth Grosz

Heather Davis

When thinking of questions of dirt, of its intricacies, its complexity, and its force, my thoughts immediately turned to feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz. This is not because she writes about dirt itself, but because she has been instrumental to a revitalization of biological and physical, or worldly, considerations within feminist philosophy. Her insistence on thinking with the complexity of the world, in its material, political, and cultural resonances, letting thought be guided or impinged upon by the problems posed by outside forces, recognizes the way in which we are intractably and irrevocably of this earth. For decades, Grosz has been central to feminist philosophy due to her attentiveness to questions of the (sexed) body, to what the body can do, and to its limitations. Most recently, these corporeal interests have led her to a reconsideration of Charles Darwin as one of the first theorists of difference. Grosz argues that sexual selection, fundamental to evolutionary theory, offers an understanding of difference itself as the generative motor of cultural and biological life. The differentiation of living organisms into (at least) two categories, and the desires and tensions of this difference, allows for the emergence of aesthetics, ethics, and culture. Think here of a peacock's feathers, or a good dance party: the processes and accoutrements of attraction often pose a liability to continued existence, seemingly counterintuitive to an evolutionary model, but feathers, music, and dance emerge and continue to proliferate because

they are appealing, sexy. And because each individual, and each group, has slightly different tastes, difference is continually generated as part of the excessiveness of life itself. I took the opportunity of rolling in the dirt that this issue afforded to ask Dr. Grosz about how the sciences, especially biology, offer new avenues for feminist thought and politics. This conversation emerged through a series of emails conducted over the past couple of months. I am continuously humbled by the intellectual generosity shown by Dr. Grosz, and am so pleased to be able to pass on this exchange.

Heather Davis: In your recent book *Chaos, Territory, Art* (2008), you draw upon the works of philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Luce Irigaray, as well as biologist Charles Darwin to offer a reading of art and artistic practices as primarily natural, that is, as deriving from the evolutionary, bifurcating, and differentiating force of the world. I am interested in the way in which your reading of art refuses to mark a clear distinction between people and other animals, the way you refuse the easy division offered by other philosophers who point to the caves of Lascaux (as the first known instance of representational art) as the birth of humanity. What impact does positing all life as generators of art have politically, for both artistic practice and for ourselves, as humans?

Elizabeth Grosz: I am not sure what political effects refusing the distinction between the animal and the human has in the sphere of art. It certainly means that the dating of 'first forms of art' is always problematic, and endlessly open to revision, especially dependent on where the arbitrary line between mammalian and human development is drawn. As is true in all anthropological speculations about human origins. Art in its most general sense – the framing of qualities and their use to intensify sensations – has always been a feature of those animals who are sexually differentiated into at least two categories as a mode of attraction. This means that the art undertaken by humans involves the use of the qualities and sensations that also effect various animal species, the reframing of the animal framings of qualities. Qualities, colours, shapes, sounds, rhythms, resonances of

all kinds please, intensify, and highlight: they do so for animals as much as for humans. Restoring the human to its place among the worlds of animals is the first step in the transformation of the millennia of human self-representation as above or superior to the worlds of animals. If animals have worlds, and not just a single world, humans no longer have the clear right to the sovereign regulation and management of the natural world.

HD: One of the things I find so refreshing about your recent turn to Darwin in *Chaos, Territory, Art*, and elaborated upon in *Becoming Undone* (2011), is your radical insistence on 'restoring the human to its place among the worlds of animals,' placing the mammalian beside the human, in the multiple worlds where ours is simply one. In this gesture you begin to undo, as you say, millennia of the naturalization of human domination, but you do so by equally refusing traditional environmentalist discourses. In particular, your insistence on becoming is radically different from the calls for 'sustainability.' I wonder if you could comment more on why sustainability doesn't work for you, and what becoming with the world may offer, as a conceptual apparatus, for what Ricardo Dominguez calls our 'no-future future' in the face of multiple ecological crises.

EG: This is a tough and complex question and requires some nuance. We are indeed one species among many millions of species. Mankind has relegated to itself the function of reigning over animals, harnessing them for human purposes, making the animal a different order than itself. I am not sure that the discourses on sustainability or environmentalism are any different. They still assume man as steward of nature, man as the one who both causes and can stop ecological catastrophes, man as both the misery and saviour of animals. Sustainability is surely what is sustainable for human use, human interests, human forms of identification, isn't it? That is why it is a continuation by other means of the discourses of liberal humanism, but a humanism that doesn't just represent humankind but all those animals (and plants) that humans find interesting. Which animals are saved (tigers, polar bears, baby seals, whales) and which are to be

destroyed in saving other animals (mosquitos, insects of various kinds, sharks) are those, perhaps, that humans find appealing. And this is itself not the overcoming of evolutionary forces but the latest torsion in the forces of natural selection, with human excess being one of the conditions that now make up the natural milieu of most species. The human assumes that it is exempt from the forces of natural selection – forces that are brutal in the extinction of the vast majority of species over time – but what ecological crises show is not only the vulnerability of species to human excess but also the vulnerability of the human to its own excesses. We need to no longer think of ourselves as the masters of nature, the stewards who represent the interests of all other species; the history of humanity in its vast variations has at least this in common – that the rest of the living universe was there for human needs alone. We have not caused a catastrophe for life on earth, for many, many forms of life on earth will long supercede mankind; we have caused a catastrophe for ourselves and the animals we need to perpetuate our existence. Politics everywhere relies on this assumption that even Marx relies on.

HD: Could you say more about how politics everywhere relies on the assumption of humans as the stewards of other animals and forms of life, including Marx, and your own intervention into this discourse where Darwin figures so prominently?

EG: There is of course a very close connection between Darwin and Marx. Marx saw in Darwin's work the biological preconditions that explain the explosion of human culture as a struggle for existence. But where they differed – and I am not clear whether they were aware of this difference – is precisely in how each understood nature (and thus the worlds of animals and plants). For Marx, the human can be defined in terms of its ability to work on and transform nature, using nature as raw materials in the production of goods that human labour has created. Human society produces itself through its overcoming and transformation of nature, including animals. Human society is thus fundamentally different from natural societies to the extent that humans annul and rework nature according to their own needs, thus producing new needs. Darwin, whose view of human

culture and creativity never removed it from the world of nature, has a more differentiated and less oppositional or dialectical understanding of nature, including all other life forms. Human society is not different in kind to animal societies, which are abundant in the natural world; they too are subjected to the operations of variation, natural selection, and sexual selection. In creating human society, humans do not move beyond nature but always remain a part of it, one variant among many, many others. For Darwin, I believe, the idea that humans must become stewards of a nature that is now in jeopardy must be regarded as ludicrous, and as narcissistic as much of human self-evaluation tends to be: humans are neither the problem nor the solution but a momentarily dominant or privileged species.

HD: You say in your introduction to *Becoming Undone* that the turn toward materialism in your thought can be understood less as a 'new materialism' and more as a "new understanding of the forces, both material and immaterial, that direct us to the future." I've often wondered if the current emphasis on materialism in contemporary philosophical thought is being pushed by the force of the world, as our way of living, our way of conceiving of the world is being increasingly impinged upon by anomalous weather events, massive crop failure, and poorer and poorer air quality. Are these events and forces pushing theorists and philosophers toward questions of material reality?

EG: I am not sure what prompted the so-called 'new materialism,' which doesn't seem to me to be all that new. Feminist theorists, with some notable exceptions, have always claimed to be materialists. A generation ago, the form of materialism was historical materialism of the kind Marx elaborated. And even now, there are many kinds of materialism, most of them claiming some direct connection with the world, whether the world be understood in terms of the most pressing political events of the present (the Arab uprisings, the Occupy movement, the war on terror), or in terms of the most abstract concepts of matter. I don't think that the 'new materialism' that many people are talking about within and outside of

feminist theory is directly prompted by political events, for the more urgent and pressing events are, the less theory has much to offer directly. I think that in my own case, this interest in the question of the real is ontological rather than political, conceptual rather than practical. I clearly cannot speak for everyone in this. It came, for me, from an intellectual dead-end, the demise of a certain kind of theory in which the real moved increasingly into the background to be covered over by sovereign or representational norms.

HD: Yes, you say that in order for feminism to break out of its conceptual impasse – that is, a theoretical framework that is overly concerned with questions of the subject, of who the subject is, its experiences and affects – feminism should now be concerned with directing "itself to questions of complexity, emergence, and difference that the study of subjectivity share in common with the study of chemical and biological phenomena." What does this move toward the biological sciences, an ontological orientation that displaces the human, offer for you conceptually, as a feminist philosopher? You argue that the inclusion of the biological, the physical, offers a future orientation which aids in the creation of new worlds, new possibilities, where "feminist theory has the potential to make us become other than ourselves, to make us unrecognizable." I wonder if you could say more about this impulse to be rendered 'unrecognizable' or imperceptible.

EG: This is a difficult question to answer. I think that ontology, how we understand the real, the world and its components, is the basis of not only epistemology, but also politics, ethics, and aesthetics. What we understand the world to be is shaped by how attentive we are not only to the scientific representations of chemistry and biology, but also to the work of those in the humanities who can address what the key questions and methods might be in our understanding of the chemical and biological worlds – worlds in which we are ourselves only a small part that doesn't adequately understand its place or the nature of chemicals or biological entities. We live in a world that is atomic, sub-atomic, metallic, biological only because, without caring for it much, we are ourselves expressions, partial expressions of

this world. How things and processes mix together, what are the conditions for and effects of their possible inter-relations, are also questions about ourselves, not necessarily questions about how we are masters of the world and the agents which regulate it, but questions that remind us of where we come from both personally and as a species. For me, this is a possible new path of feminist (and other forms of minoritarian) philosophy: how to bring about new mixtures, new forms of engagement, not only among ourselves but also with all other living beings, and even the inanimate forces that make animate life possible. In the wake of religion, we have only physics, chemistry, biology – but not as they currently exist, in their generally unselfconsciously patriarchal forms, but as they could exist, a new religion of worldliness, of the complexity of the world, and the conditions for being otherwise that it contains.

Image: is courtesy of Nathalie Casemajor Loustau.

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Elizabeth Grosz *is the Jean Fox O'Barr Professor in Interdisciplinary Feminist Studies in the Women's Studies Program at Duke University. She is the author of* The Nick of Time *(Duke University Press, 2004) and* Chaos, Territory, Art *(Columbia University Press, 2008).*

If This Rock Could Speak: A Tour of Mark Leckey's BigBoxNaturalAction

Louis Kamenka

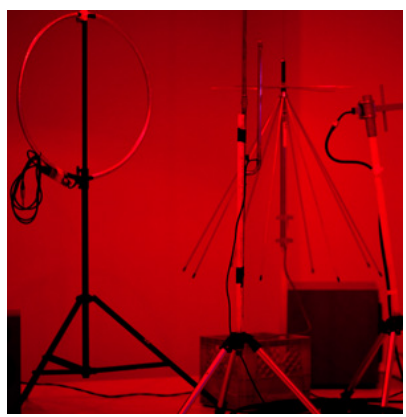
Is it possible to make a two hundred and twenty million year old rock give up its secrets? This is one of the questions underlying Mark Leckey's installation and performance BigBoxNaturalAction, recently on view at the Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre. A large speaker stack, which stood across from an equally sized piece of rundle rock, emitted a series of noises in attempt at direct communication with this ancient object. For over ten years, Leckey has been using large sound systems to offer a different modality of communication with sculptures, a steam engine, and here, a locally quarried rock. BigBoxNaturalAction continues this series, investigating the animism found in supposedly inert objects.

As part of the Walter Phillips Gallery public programs, curator Jesse McKee invited geologist and quarry owner Louis Kamenka to talk about the rock his quarry had generously leant the gallery for the exhibit. In Kamenka's discussion, he gives a detailed natural history of rundle rock, his personal relationship to artisanal quarrying, and offers a fascinating account of the place of rock in relation to human culture.

This is an edited recording of the tour given by Kamenka:
Louis Kamenka at the Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre.
http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/if-this-rock-could-speak-louis-kamenka

Image: Mark Leckey, BigBoxNaturalAction (2012) courtesy the artist and the Walter Phillips Gallery.

Louis Kamenka *is the owner and operator of Rundle Rock Building Stone Quarry near Canmore, Alberta. The family run quarry, established in 1954 by Louis Kamenka Senior, specializes in traditional stone masonry, which involves the quarrying and splitting of each stone with a chisel and hammer. The highly skilled artisanal approach to quarrying, selecting one piece of stone at a time, hand-splitting the finest bedding plane, sorting by size, thickness, colour, and workability assures that each of Kamenka's stones retain their integrity and natural shape. Kamenka received both a BSc and an MSc of Geology from the University of Alberta in Edmonton. During his tenure with the Geological Survey of Canada, Kamenka researched the Quaternary, a geological period spanning the most recent 2.6 million years of earth's history; geology in southwest Alberta; glaciers in Banff National Park; open pit coal mines in Alberta and British Columbia; and worked on the Canada National Coal Inventory Project. For the past twenty years, he has instructed, lectured, and led community classes and geology field trips in the Bow Valley and the Rocky Mountain area. He has worked extensively with the Festival of Peoples, local students, and the Canmore school mentor program.*



Brouillards électroniques. Conversation avec Jean-Pierre Aubé

Nathalie Casemajor Loustau

Dans le studio de l'artiste montréalais Jean-Pierre Aubé, on trouve une collection de vinyles, une pile de couvertures insonorisantes provenant de sa dernière exposition au centre Clark (*Electrosmog* - 2012*,* présenté dans le cadre de la Biennale internationale d'art numérique) et un hula hoop. Ce dernier objet insolite a été transformé en antenne par l'artiste, qui s'intéresse depuis 2000 à la captation des phénomènes électromagnétiques. Couplé à un récepteur radio et à un logiciel informatique, cette antenne lui sert à balayer le spectre des fréquences radio pour recueillir des données sur l'*électrosmog*, aussi qualifié par certains groupes écologistes de « pollution électromagnétique ». Pour documenter ce brouillard d'ondes (radio AM et FM, téléphones cellulaires, lignes électriques), Jean-Pierre Aubé s'est rendu dernièrement à Berlin, Mumbai, Istanbul, San Francisco et Hong-Kong (*Electrosmog World Tour 2012)*. Les données collectées lui servent de matière première pour composer une esthétique du paysage sous la forme d'installations et de performances. Confronté à l'amplification sonore et visuelle de phénomènes habituellement imperceptibles, le spectateur est invité à expérimenter la saturation de son environnement urbain et à s'interroger sur la représentation traditionnelle du paysage.

Nathalie Casemajor Loustau : **Dans l'histoire de l'enregistrement sonore, on a tenté de débarrasser le son de ses impuretés, de le « purifier », de le « clarifier ». Pourquoi prendre le contre-pied et choisir l'« électrosmog » comme matière première pour créer des objets esthétiques ?**

Jean-Pierre Aube : « Il y a un texte de Raymond Gervais dans *Parachute* où il explique comment les VLF (Very Low Frequencies), la « radio naturelle », constituent le premier son électrique. À l'époque où l'on a commencé à vouloir amplifier un signal électrique, on a perçu un bruit qui ne faisait pas partie du signal que l'on voulait moduler. C'est-à-dire que par-dessus la voix, on entend des crépitements qui sont d'origine mécanique, électronique, liés à l'objet lui-même. Il a fallu attendre les années 70 pour comprendre que les petits crépitements qu'on entendait étaient dus à un phénomène électrique naturel. Donc l'idée de bruit au sens de « ce que l'on ne veut pas avoir » dans l'enregistrement d'une voix par exemple, cela fait intrinsèquement partie de l'histoire de l'électronique. À l'origine, quand j'ai construit mon récepteur VLF, c'était pour capter ces sons naturels, tout en connaissant le lien de ces sons avec l'histoire de la musique électronique. »

NCL : Comment as-tu été amené à explorer le territoire (au Québec et ailleurs dans le monde) pour capter des paysages sonores ?

JPA : « Au début je n'étais pas intéressé à travailler avec le bruit, je m'intéressais plutôt à l'absence de bruit. Sauf que dans l'espace urbain, l'absence de bruit n'existe pas. On n'entend pas les bruits naturels, on entend un autre type de bruit, qui est généré par les lignes électriques. Donc je me suis intéressé aux bruits urbains dans la mesure où l'expérience de trouver des bruits naturels était extrêmement difficile. Il faut toujours s'éloigner de plusieurs kilomètres d'une source électrique pour être capable de capter ces sons-là.

La quête ultime, c'était de trouver un phénomène que les scientifiques appellent le *chœur boréal*, qui est relié aux aurores boréales visibles ou non visibles (ce n'est pas parce qu'on ne les voit pas qu'il n'y a pas de phénomènes électromagnétiques).

En me rendant proche du cercle polaire en Finlande [pour *VLF-Natural Radio*, 2000-2003], je m'approchais du phénomène. Mais cette quête est longue, il faut s'éloigner, regarder les cartes, trouver une île au milieu du fleuve Saint-Laurent sur laquelle il n'y a pas d'électricité. Au fur et à mesure, c'est devenu une forme de preuve que le territoire est constamment occupé par cette vibration électromagnétique induite par les lignes électriques qui nous entourent, et c'est devenu un sujet de travail en soi. Donc je suis passé d'une sorte de quête de « l'absence du *noise* » à une recherche sur l'occupation du milieu urbain par les vibrations électromagnétiques ».

NCL : Dans ton installation *Save the Waves* à la Fonderie Darling (2004), tu proposais de sonoriser et d'amplifier la pollution électromagnétique. Pourquoi jouer sur un slogan écologiste dans le titre ?

JPA : « Quand je suis arrivé avec ce projet, il n'y avait pas grand monde qui parlait du fait que les téléphones cellulaires grillaient les cerveaux. C'est sûr que mon expérience m'a amené à expérimenter le milieu urbain avec un outil qui permet de percevoir quelque chose qui est là, mais qu'on ne peut pas sentir. Je savais à l'époque que le *wireless* et les autres phénomènes électromagnétiques que l'on génèrent nous-mêmes augmentaient. En même temps, le titre c'est une boutade sur ce qu'on veut sauver d'un point de vue écologiste. « *Save the Whales* » c'est le premier mantra écologiste de Greenpeace. Ça joue sur un côté totalement absurde, la volonté de sauver quelque chose qui ne se sauve pas. Une onde, c'est rien, ça ne veut rien dire. C'est comme dire « sauvons le rien ». Mais le rien c'est quelque chose qu'on ne peut pas palper, qu'on ne peut pas comprendre. »
« Une petite anecdote : en Amérique du Nord, la norme du courant alternatif a été fixée à 60 hertz par Nikola Tesla. Certains pensent que Tesla a choisi ce standard de 60 hertz parce qu'il y voyait la «fréquence fondamentale de l'univers», correspondant au « om » de la culture hindoue (Tesla était passionné par la mystique hindoue). On ne sait pas si c'est vrai, mais ce que je trouve intéressant, c'est que Murray Schafer (l'inventeur du terme*soundscape*) parle dans un de ses livres de l'expérience d'un anthropologue qui a étudié dans les années 50 les

“ Au fur et à mesure, c'est devenu une forme de preuve que le territoire est constamment occupé par cette vibration électromagnétique induite par les lignes électriques qui nous entourent, et c'est devenu un sujet de travail en soi.

représentations du « son primordial » : qu'est-ce que serait le son transcendantal ? Dans la culture hindoue c'est le « om » qui est cité et bizarrement, dans les endroits électrifiés, c'est le même son, le son de l'électricité. Donc l'hypothèse de l'anthropologue, c'est que l'électrification aurait transformé notre rapport à l'environnement sonore en assimilant ce « om » comme partie intégrante de notre monde. Toujours dans la même étude, mais d'un point de vue plus biologique, il fait un parallèle avec la capacité de notre oreille à enlever le bruit. C'est-à-dire que ce n'est pas comme le visuel : si on n'avait pas cette capacité d'éluder ce *noise*, ce bruit de fond, on ne serait pas capable de s'entendre. C'est comme parler à travers le vent. Donc on pourrait dire que le son de *Save the Waves* est biologiquement construit pour moins l'entendre. Plus il est présent, plus on peut s'en accommoder ».

NCL : Comment travailles-tu la question de la musicalité et de la création à partir des données sonores que tu collectes ?

JPA : « C'est un mélange de deux choses. La science c'est mon sujet, mais ma pratique est motivée par l'art et l'histoire de l'art. Je suis totalement dans le monde de la musique électronique. C'est sûr que mon oreille est un peu « distordue » par l'écoute de Stockhausen et Pierre Henry. Mon histoire de la musique inclut des formes qui peuvent sonner pour certains comme un four micro-ondes sur le point d'exploser ! Donc quand j'ai construit mon récepteur VLF, quand j'ai branché mon hula hoop et que j'ai entendu le « om » électrique au lieu d'entendre les aurores boréales, la première fois ça m'a surpris. Pour moi ça sonne comme une expérience de musique expérimentale des années 70. En même temps, l'idée du phénomène d'origine qu'on prend pour en faire de la musique, le passage de l'un à l'autre ça ne m'intéresse pas. Moi je suis happé par mon oreille d'électro-acousticien. Sauf que je suis un artiste en art visuel, je suis un paysagiste, j'ai un rapport à la représentation et puis je suis un peu intello aussi, et un peu écolo radical, et je suis surtout documentariste. Mon approche de la photographie m'a appris à montrer des choses avec un certain rapport documentaire. Donc ma musique électronique n'en est pas une, au sens où j'essaie de garder la source des données avec tout leur sens. Pour moi c'est ça qui est important ».

NCL : Ton discours sur l'écologie est assez distancié : c'est une préoccupation présente dans ton travail, elle apparaît surtout dans tes titres, mais tu joues avec le discours écologiste pour mieux le critiquer.

JPA : « Je n'ai pas le choix. Parce que le discours écologiste d'aujourd'hui est parfois assez conservateur, dans le genre « sauvez les arbres ». Zizek dit que les écologistes ont besoin d'une psychothérapie. Disons que ce n'est pas le sujet qui m'intéresse dans mon travail, mais j'aime l'idée que notre définition de la nature est erronée. La représentation qu'on en a est héritée du paradigme chrétien de la nature originelle qu'il faudrait retrouver, ou de la philosophie occidentale qui nous pose d'emblée dans un rapport d'extériorité avec la nature. Ce sont des débats moraux, et on les retrouve dans beaucoup de discours écologistes actuels. Comme artiste mon but ce n'est pas d'avoir une position écologiste pour faire de l'art caritatif, mon but, en quelque sorte, ce serait de jouer sur la définition de la nature. La « radio naturelle », c'est un antagonisme qui semble ne pas pouvoir exister et pourtant ça existe. C'est contradictoire par rapport à notre définition de la nature. Pour moi il y a un enjeu là-dedans ».

Image Credit: Jean-Pierre Aubé. *Electrosmog S.J.s.R.* 2011. Courtesy de l'artiste.

Nathalie Casemajor Loustau *est chercheure postdoctorale (CRSH) au Département d'histoire de l'art et des études en communication à l'Université McGill. Elle détient un doctorat en Communication de l'Université du Québec à Montréal et un doctorat en Sciences de l'information et de la communication de l'Université Charles de Gaulle – Lille 3. Ses travaux de recherche portent sur la mémoire photographique, les archives numériques et la culture urbaine. Au cours des dernières années, elle a travaillé comme coordinatrice, administratrice et chercheure dans divers collectifs citoyens, organisations culturelles et projets académiques.*

Artist and programmer, ***Jean-Pierre Aube*** *holds an MFA from Universit du Quéec a Montréal. His work has consistently used recuperative technology and data acquisition systems to question nature. Since 2000, he has worked on capturing the sounds of the aurora borealis through the use of very low frequency receivers. His VLF.Natural Radio project was presented as a performance and installation. In 2004 he created Save the waves an 20 000 watt ocotophonic sound system able to monitor electromagnetic perturbations in real time, as well as Nocturne, a piece for 8 led, 2 photocell and a lighthouse. Later, Titan and beyond the infinite replays Stanley Kubrick's 2001 Space Odyssey using data collected from a Nasa spaceship. He is now working on ElectroSmog a ultra large band radio receivers system using an array of antenna which monitors 480 000 radio frequencies and draws a picture of the presence of electromagnetic spectrum.*

Watering the Dirt

Micha Cárdenas

Dirt is what you build home with. That was what I thought as we carried the dirt in from the car. After months of being unhappy with Los Angeles's excessive urbanity, the noise, helicopters, concrete, and speed of it all, you started gardening. I thought you were finally making a home for yourself here, finding something soothing to spend your time doing, shaping a space that made you feel comfortable. You walked around the neighborhood stealing clippings of succulents from all the rich people's mansions in the Silver Lake hills and came home and planted them in dirt.

In the song "Dirt," by Submission Hold, on the album What Holds Back the Elephant*, Jen Thorpe's voice hauntingly soars, backed by long vibrato notes on strings, punctuated with aggressive hits of drums and guitars together: "She is a survivor / She is a survivor / Testifying. She is a survivor / Death defying."*

A body lies on the table, covered in dirt. In Regina José Galindo's performance *Alud*, which translates as landslide or avalanche, she lies on a metal table with raised edges, conjuring an image of a morgue, with her entire body covered in dirt. It is caked on her skin, seeped through her hair, and lies in large chunks in some areas. The audience is invited to clean her with a hose and small cloths, and they do.

In an artist statement on the Thessaloniki Biennale's website, she states,

> My body not as an individual body but as a social body, a collective body, a global body. To be or to reflect through me the experience of the other; because we are all ourselves and at the same time we are others.
>
> A body that makes and makes itself, that resists and resists itself; creating projects that reflect reality while also intending to modify it.
>
> Each piece, each action are quotidian scenes of day to day, or they could be. In each one of these scenes, power relations are always present, and this is what I find most interesting, to work with power, so to subvert it, and like this create a parallel reality where power loses its strength.

Reading this, I am both inspired and challenged. I am inspired by the potential of the body in performance, without language, to potentially enter into a liminal state of global signification. Yet at the same time I am unsure whether or not I think that any artist's body can become a global body. I wonder how my own body, as a mixed-race Latina with light skin, may or may not read as global. Or how the gender of my body, as a genderqueer/transgender woman who has been on hormones for about five years, may prevent my body from being seen as global or collective with some other bodies.

"I'm not gay," was the first thing you said to me after you flew home to your parents' house in that small town and called to say you weren't coming back. What hurt wasn't just the words, or the fact that you had told me months earlier that you thought you wanted to be a lesbian and now after seven months together decided that you are not. What hurt was also the way you stretched out the syllables, twisted the inflection of your voice when you said it. That sentence didn't even sound to me like your voice, but the voice of someone else who I didn't know. "And you clearly want to be a woman, or want to think of yourself as a woman," was how you followed up that thought. When I talked to my friends to process the intense pain of your leaving, and they told me they thought some of the things you said in our breakup were transphobic, I told you so. You said then that I was "spreading horrid gossip," giving people the dirt about you so you

couldn't come back, which wasn't true at all. I was just trying to find a way to bear the absolute grief of losing you. I still am. You had a round-trip ticket because you said you were just going to visit your family, but now I know that you're not coming back. Today is the day you were supposed to come back. Today is the worst day.

Galindo's complexion is clearly not white, and reads to me as Latin American. Yet Latin Americans have a vast range of skin tones, as Diana Taylor (2003) describes, "visual practices and technologies of identification that have developed in the Americas to fix and catalogue racial categories – from the casta paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to nineteenth and twentieth-century photography – stall before the dilemma: Latino/as are not identifiable by race" (122). Yet the off-white skin tone that Galindo appears to have in some photos can be read as the kind of mixed-race coloring that is often associated with neoliberal efforts towards multiculturalism. For example, a recent issue of *Los Angeles* magazine featured interviews with a handful of mixed race people who live in Los Angeles as proof of how racism has been overcome in the twenty years since the Los Angeles riots. Does the body of a Latin American artist become a global body because of the fact of the global migration of peoples in the post-contemporary age, or through a neoliberal rhetoric of colorblindness? Galindo's performances are highly critical of neoliberalism and its resulting global economic dominance by the United States, so her concept of a global body opens up possibilities for other ways of bodies to be global. Does a body like mine, with parents and ancestors from Europe to South America, become a global body with all of its connections that cross continents? Or, in the case of *Alud*, does Galindo's body represent a global or social body in its apparent state of death, pointing to the global persistence of violence against women and necropolitics more broadly? Do bodies become global through shared embodied experiences, like heartbreak?

My skin isn't white as the porcelain mask you hung in our bathroom, like your skin, which I always thought was so beautiful. You were breathtaking getting out of the bathtub and sitting on our burgundy microfleece blanket. Mine is brown, but not brown like dirt, more brown like the sand by the lake you swim in now. My mother has skin like

yours but my father is Colombian. He still has light skin, but not white, and he has lots and lots of freckles.

A major part of my aesthetic as an artist has been a choice to place personal risk and intimacy at the core of my practice. This choice is inspired by artists such as Carollee Schneeman, Sophie Calle, Gloria Anzaldúa, Linda Montano, and Hannah Wilke, who have chosen to make their personal lives and their intimate relationships the subject of their work. Often, this is a feminist strategy of making the personal political.

As Chris Kraus writes in *I Love Dick* (1997), an intensely personal and theoretical book of memoir/fiction, "to be female still means being trapped within the purely psychological. No matter how dispassionate or large a vision of the world a woman formulates, whenever it includes her own experience and emotion, the telescope's turned back on her" (196). In another part of the book, on the work of Hannah Wilke, Kraus says that Wilke's work was focused on the question "If women have failed to make 'universal' art because we're trapped within the 'personal,' why not universalize the 'personal' and make it the subject of our art?" and says "to ask this question, to be willing to live it through, is still so bold" (211). I'm still trying to understand this and live it and all its complications with my life. I'm trying to understand how this kind of poetry and writing functions in a world where TMI Facebook status updates are common to the point of banality, yet poets like Ariana Reines and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who write in a direct personal style, still move me to my core.

The song "Dirt" careens through angry, fast, loud portions. Growing into a crescendo with these lines "It's the world rearranging and transforming / Despite all opposition, against all downward motion / She is a survivor."

After the succulents, you started planting food, in a plot that has to be watered at least once a day. Then you started composting and we bought bags of dirt and a box of worms. The worms were so gorgeous, shiny and bright pink like creatures made of freshly lubed latex, writhing on top of the dirt, burrowing in, making their homes. I never saw them again after the first day.

You said to me that I didn't need a pussy of my own because I had yours. But now you're

gone and I miss your pussy and your calm presence and your warmth in my bed and your love, so, so deeply. I've been crying for two weeks straight, any time I'm alone. I cry so hard I get a headache and then I keep crying and I get nauseous. I cry until I'm about to puke and then I take too many Advil and try to wait until the pain goes away a little bit. Now I'm the one who waters the garden, which I was never very good at. I water it everyday, the basil, oregano, strawberries, and yellow squash, and think about how much I miss you. I emailed you to ask how much to water it and you said "until there are little puddles everywhere." I'm building my own home now, or trying to learn how to.

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Image: Courtesy of Regina Jose Gallindo by Eleftheria Kalpenidou

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Dirt Piles

Lisa Hirmer

The Law of conservation of mass states that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. It can only be rearranged. This means that the by-product of a certain kind of place—sprawling, well-drained parking lots, ribbons of level suburban backyards, and topographically featureless industrial lots, for example—is extra material, dirt mostly, that needs to be rearranged and put somewhere.

Site grading, the process of re-sculpting terrain prior to building, evens a building site out to create a smoother surface, better for placing generic buildings and eventual vehicle access. The ideal site grading is one where the "cut" is equal to the "fill," meaning the material of any high points can be used to fill in shallow areas. But this is rarely the case. Usually extra material remains – earth, rock and gravel – scattered with torn-up fragments of the former landscape. Neither useless nor particularly valued, it is heaped into a pile somewhere out of the way until a use for it is found or it can be moved somewhere else. Sometimes these dirt piles are quite ephemeral, remaining for only a short period of time during construction, but oftentimes they remain for long stretches of time, at the unfinished end of a suburban street, or looming behind new big box stores, perhaps dissipating from consciousness but never from physical presence.

The dirt pile is both relic of the landscape that used to be and a monument to the act that changed it. It is a measure of the forces of technology, industry, culture and economy that make the large scale reshaping of the terrain possible, profitable and desirable. It could be understood as the reciprocal form of how and what we build, a visible sign that marks the production of a certain kind of site and the logic that makes this profitable, with its demand for undemanding, generic buildings, easy vehicular passage and parking areas. The dirt pile in this way is a strange reflection of the built world.

I photograph the dirt piles because they, like most landscapes, are complicated. It is a deformed landscape, a landscape that has been taken apart and reassembled into a new form – the pile – which is itself also a whole landscape, stitched back together with its own weedy logic. A sense of disorientation, perhaps even an ungroundedness surrounds it.

In a traditional landscape, I imagine dirt as that which lies between the occupiable surface of the world and a firm ground, the *terra firma* as it is sometimes called, the solid earth beneath our feet. But the dirt pile reveals the fickleness of the earth's surface. It has become something that is infinitely malleable, something that can be opened up, turned inside out, rifled through, piled up. The ground plane is not a stable reference point, nor, can we assume, a permanent horizon. Any place can be modified into any imaginable conception of what it could be.

Driving around, dirt piles are easy to find. They are speckled across our new construction topographies, placid but humming beasts. Though the dirt piles have been assembled in an act of deferral, they do not wait. The fresh earth is fertile and vegetation quickly takes advantage of the open soil. Things begin to grow and the torn-up landscape stitches itself back together, assimilating the leftover bits of tree, old tires, and brick into its weedy mess. And, as it grows, the distinction between the world of humanity and nature dissolve. The natural, as a temporal measure of what came before human activity, is dislodged. Here the natural and artificial have been torn up and piled on top of each other, sometimes repeatedly, till one is no longer sure where one ends and the other begins. They become the same thing: quiet banal, and generally unnoticed, wildernesses growing in the most uncanny of places.

Lisa Hirmer *is an artist, designer and writer based in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. She has a Bachelors of Architectural Studies (2005) and a Masters of Architecture (2009) from the University of Waterloo, where her thesis work won an Ontario Association of Architects Award of Excellence and was placed on the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's Honour Roll. Her photographic and graphic work has been exhibited and published in projects across Canada, in Europe and the UK. She is also a founding principal (along with Andrew Hunter) of DodoLab, an experimental research collective.*