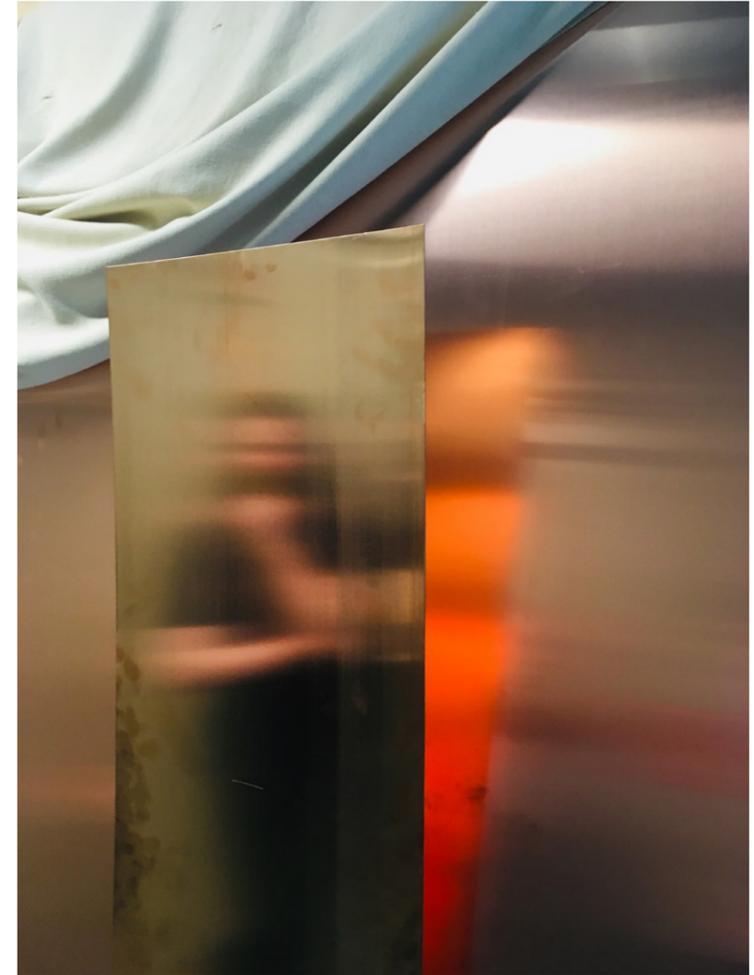


L I B I D I N A L E A R T H

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An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy (MPhil)



When I encounter Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown*, or Richard Serra's liquid lead 'splashes', or Ann Hamilton's mastic transformations, I turn to recognise a peculiar coupling of desire and matter, as if earth itself is libidinal, and we humans are its uncanny objects of desire. It is from this sense or sensation of a libidinal couple that my own research practice takes flight, a research practice of apprenticeship in what I can only call a *love of matter*, libidinal excessiveness in processes of working with and within the limits of my own capacities and the conditions of technical procedures. The contexts of my practice are threefold. Firstly, as a metallurgy technician at a School of Art and Design, my research is institutionally determined by the frameworks of a Master of Philosophy, whose outcomes are a body of creative practice and an exegesis that offers critical contexts for approaching (or leaving) the creative ensemble.

A second context relates to my practices of working with materials, what I emphasise as a perpetual apprenticeship to becoming-earth: defining and refining technical processes for working with heavy metals, soil, sand, and stone, involving machining, casting, melting, forming, forging, welding, rolling and bending. Along with these working processes there is also a woodworking practice whose folds permit an interstitial clearing, a making-room for libidinal earth. These practices, this apprenticeship, have a genealogy, familial circuits of inheritance, father and grandfather at home in their workshops, farming communities of the South Island. Earth's desire is chthonic, subterranean, buried remembrances, inter-generational.

A third context concerns a different kind of genealogical entwining. I have mentioned Smithson, Serra and Hamilton already. Their practices offer me not so much a supporting foothold but rather directions to the abyssal leap I need to make as one learning how libidinal couplings may yet happen. There are others as well, others who are crucial to establishing a critical and political framing of the assemblages I develop. How is a questioning of libidinal earth, and desire, a political issue? I engage the work of Deleuze and Guattari, both volumes of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. There is also Giorgio Agamben, for whom capitalism constitutes a making-sacred of things in their transformations from use-value to exchange-value, to be destructed by profanation's radical encounter with use. Desire, the sacred and profane are central to my concerns. Hence, the writings of George Bataille are pivotal, along with some of those who engage Bataille: Nick Land and Mark Fisher.

The outcomes from this Master of Philosophy research are provisional moments in what I recognise as a desire—that might otherwise be called 'life'—for becoming-chthonic, for becoming-earth. These 'outcomes' constitute a series of artefacts and assemblages in metals and wood, but also incorporating the residues of machine processes, the filings, shavings, waste materials, as if the most profane of materials yet harbours a concealed opening to libidinal earth.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHOURSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

ANGUS ROBERTS

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Deposited by my glacial working is a debt that I owe to all of the voices and ghosts that echo through this work. A debt that lies upon me, a moraine of unconsolidated debris, cementing in the impossibility of its return.

Mark and Emily, only your unwavering support dragged me through this. Without your depth of knowledge, commitment of time, and grounding this research would never have surfaced, remaining unseen.

My colleagues, who bore a perpetual, mournful grumbling and allowed my work to haunt corners of the workshop. Especially Harriet, who proffered motions and paths through, and allowed the long loan of a text which proved invaluable and fundamental.

Lexie, to whom I now return. A backbone of unflinching grit in the face of this drudgery.

INTRODUCTION



CHTHONIC DESIRE

In setting out to expound and illuminate the objects and artefacts of ritual that make up the practice-led body of this thesis, I encounter a torrent of desire flowing from the earth. The main body of this research is a set of creative works, processed and worked upon such that they open out to some other undecidable use. What this use might be and how it relates to the outpourings from a libidinal earth is what is explored in this exegesis such that an explanation may be reached for this drive to produce. This earthen desire has the outcome of being a temporal site, populated by assemblages and artefacts, thought into being as a house—capsule for a libidinal drive to becoming earth. What binds these tools and artefacts together with the earth? What do these deposited geological pieces have to offer, what do they do? Included within the produced elements of this research are not only objects but also practices which ritualise matter, naming the matter such that it can be brought forth into communion.

This excavation sets out initially by mapping a field as if by archaeological grid. Encountered within this field are practitioners of libidinal matter processing, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, and Ann Hamilton. How might these artisans of the earth direct me towards new territory, a seismic shift in the thinking of my making practice? To *think* the earth abstractly enacts a becoming-aware of geological time, where actions are caught up in intensive spirals, returning back on themselves, repetitively processing. To know the corroded moments entails eschewing the purity of modern matter processing. To engage the space of the body is the becoming-place where art happens, a site of experiential ritual creation. Where Giorgio Agamben's radical recontextualising of the sacred and the profane in relation to capital and religion is explorable by association and coherent. Both works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* are examined for their exploration of how matter may work, and complicate metallurgic processing around a body of capital flow.¹

Other thinkers are introduced as methodological prefigures, whose workings in the contextual field lend possible practices to guide a welding of the practical and theoretical work. How might I find methods for abstractly searching for entry into the underground of matter? Attempts at combining the practices of those mentioned above, within an earthen desire, amounts to an altered understanding of how human production relates to the earth. How does desire function, fluidising as a becoming-machinic? How does the machinic operate by

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Land (New York: The Viking Press, 1977); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).



a framework of engineering laws and primordial possessions? These methods are filters, sifting out, targeting, and cutting those flows which intensify the earthen desire of this research. They also give precedent to a placement within the flows of time which is at odds with the present, dedifferentiating matter from all that flows.

Following this surveying of the ground, focus moves in to a close examining of what actually happened or failed to happen. What was made while in possession and in reverence to some unnamed cult of the earth. The objects and artefacts spoken about above, and the methods and processes that shaped them are explored, now in relation to a reservoir of thought flowing into it from the past.

More and more the world resembles an entomologist's dream. The earth is moving out of its orbit, the axis has shifted; from the north the snow blows down in huge knife-blue drifts. A new ice age is setting in, the transverse sutures are closing up and everywhere throughout the corn belt the foetal world is dying, turning to dead mastoid. Inch by inch the deltas are drying out and the river beds are smooth as glass. A new day is dawning, a metallurgical day, when the earth shall clink with showers of bright yellow ore. As the thermometer drops, the form of the world grows blurred; osmosis there still is, and here and there articulation, but at the periphery the veins are all varicose, at the periphery the light waves bend and the sun bleeds like a broken rectum.²

The exhibition of artefacts that constitutes the balance of this research forms itself not as some answer or revelatory moment, but as a provisional plateau, a moment of suspension or ossification in the great flow. These works amount to a simple collection of experiments in the work of an apprentice—more precisely, the apprenticeship of a man of metal and earth.³ This assemblage may be thought of as compositional exercises in 'radical passivity', where the *Project* is always already corroded in giving it such a name. It can never work. And it didn't work! Yet, in failing, it intensified energies, disgorged drives from a desiring body onto its object-of-desire. Failure? Not because of misleading or improper questioning, but precisely because of re-petitioning: a continuity of asking, asks more. Nothing was or could ever have been answered. There wasn't ever anything to *learn*.

² Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 169.

³ On 'apprenticeship', see Gilles Deleuze's reading of Marcel Proust's work in: *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

CHAPTER ONE



RITUALISING
MATTER

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces a range of key fields, both practice-driven and critical, that form the ground-plan for this research. Three makers, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and Ann Hamilton, provide comparative encounters with material practices that I consider related to my own. They enable me to introduce vital themes concerning: ground, waste, fluidity, time, matter, body, and craft. In addition, I discuss two critical theorists in the context of key publications, Giorgio Agamben's *Profanations* (2007) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (2016). Each is assayed for its analyses of a politics of materialism, especially with Deleuze and Guattari, and a critical approach to ritual, the sacred and making, with Agamben. Georges Bataille and Nick Land add cadence and counterpoint. These inflect to the metallurgic and ritualistic practices gathered here, those of the practitioners I engage, as well as my own.

ABSTRACTING THE EARTH

Robert Smithson was a land artist⁴ or “abstract geologist” who chose to work with shovel and earth, eschewing the “gardening” and technological manufacturing of his contemporaries.⁵ By choosing non-idealised “dumb tools” and materials, he aimed to make conscious the primordial condition of matter, exploring art of the pre- and post-historic mind. This research draws from his engagements with detritus, or otherwise undesirable elements, and from the ways in which he views artists interfacing with their tools and time. Smithson had the view that, at times, technology is less an extension of ‘man’, as the common anthropomorphic definition would have it, and more a congealing of earth matter or “aggregate of elements.”⁶ That is, even the most precise and advanced technologies of the present are still only made out of collections of raw materials. Artists more favoured by Smithson use tools that have not been idealised and given objective meanings that set them apart. Such base tools, what Michael Heizer calls “dumb tools,” are those used in industrial processes by, for example, suburban contractors, to push dirt around.⁷ Rakes, picks, tractors, ploughs, shovels, drills, and explosives all have the capacity for disturbing earth, giving construction the look of destruction, creating piles of earth, and fissures, turning “the terrain into unfinished cities of organized wreckage.”⁸ This disruption of raw matter, in this case the surface of the earth, is very compelling, as the addition of entropy to an ordered system creates beautiful heaps of rubble, detritus strewn about in confusion: “These processes

4 Smithson is usually categorised as an “earth artist.” However, such a category hardly contains the works of Smithson which go beyond the mere creation of *objects*. He saw “being an artist” as an ongoing activity of engaging with abstract ideas and material presences unconstrained by material results. Jack Flann, ‘Introduction: Reading Robert Smithson’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flann (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), xvii.

5 By ‘gardening’, Smithson is referencing Anthony Caro: “Somehow, Caro’s work picks up its surroundings, and gives one a sense of a contrived, but tamed, “wildness” that echoes to the tradition of English gardening.” He continues referencing the English aristocratic garden: “The ‘gloomy’ ruins of aristocracy are transformed into the ‘happy’ ruins of the humanist. Could one say that art degenerates as it approaches gardening?” Robert Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, *ARTFORUM* 7, no. 1 (September 1968): 85–86.

6 Smithson, 82.

7 Smithson, 82.: “Common shovels, awkward looking excavating devices, what Michael Heizer calls ‘dumb tools,’ picks, pitchforks, the machine used by suburban contractors, grim tractors that have the clumsiness of armored dinosaurs, and plows that simply push dirt around.”

8 Smithson, 83.

of heavy construction have a devastating kind of primordial grandeur, and are in many ways more astonishing than the finished project—be it a road or a building.”⁹ This leads Smithson to claim that for too long the site of the artist has been confined to “the studio” within the city, giving the illusion that the earth does not exist.

This research engages the use of refined, industrial metalworking equipment within a workshop, bringing to question the differentiations immanent to such tools. Obviously, the idealised ‘tools’ that Heizer and Smithson are referring to are traditional tools of the artist: paint brushes, pencils, cameras and so on. However, other tools or processes have also been instrumental within this group, such as the hammer and anvil of blacksmithing, or the forge and furnace of smelting. Images of both of these industrial processes are much more available outside of workshop contexts. Their prevalence in fantasy or historical drama, encounters the role of blacksmith as highly idealised.¹⁰ To a certain extent, the lathe, milling machine, and welding equipment enter into this domain as well. Key to avoiding the mundanity of this state is to know of it, and render such differentiations meaningless, reintroducing turbidity:

At the low levels of consciousness the artist experiences undifferentiated or unbounded methods of procedure that break with the focused limits of rational technique. Here tools are undifferentiated from the material they operate on, or they sink back into their primordial condition. Robert Morris sees the paint brush vanish into Pollock’s “stick,” and the stick dissolve into “poured paint” from a container used by Morris Louis. What then is one to do with the *container*?¹¹

Operating a lathe “at low levels of consciousness” has this exact effect. The operation becomes ritualised repetitive motion, the stock in the chuck is no more important than the tool that engages it, or the handles, dials, and readouts that interface with the operator-machine. The whole system becomes an amalgam of metals grinding and meshing against each other, with the only outcome being the transmuting of a solid stock into swarf and chips. It is in this trance-like state that the grit in the machine becomes *the fundamental state of the machine*. The imperfect operability of the machine becomes its only quality. The lathe reappears from out of the flint scraper, becoming grit.

⁹ Smithson, 83.

¹⁰ I refer here to such notable ‘smiths’ as the Greek god, Hephaestus, and the dwarfs of Norse Mythology and J. R. R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth. This is also a trope of modern film, such as Hattori Hanzo in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* and American reality T.V., such as *Forged in Fire*.

¹¹ Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 84.

TOOLING MATTER

Smithson writes that for a tool to sink back into the earth, returning to dust or rust, a ‘de-architecture-ing’ will take place, setting the artist’s limits outside the studio. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the New York ‘Art World’ began to work with an ideology of technology and industry, collapsing notions of private studio “craft.”¹² This led to the high modernist fetishization of steel and aluminium by artists such as Anthony Caro and David Smith, who wanted to work like “steel welders” or “laboratory technicians,” their work being stamped with the mark of technological determinism. Though, as with the grit in the machine, rust becomes the fundamental property of steel, as that which interrupts or disrupts industrialised refinement. To the mind of the technician, rust evokes fear of disuse, inactivity, entropy, and ruin. Rust is a property of steel that arises from its oxidation and weakening from contact with water or humidity over an extended period, a decidedly non-technological process. Steel’s valuing as rust-free is a technological valuing, not an artistic one. Likewise, with smelting, metal ores are melted to separate out the ‘ideal’ product from ‘impurities’. These impurities are then discarded as slag or dross, though they are as base and primary as the desired ‘pure’ castings. *The purity of the laboratory or the studio is not sought here*. Ideal systems are enclosed, excluding the possibility to perceive anything outside of differentiated technological process. Rejection of these idealised or pure material forms is achieved in art by folding-back into the work that unrefined matter or waste product:

By refusing “technological miracles” the artist begins to know the corroded moments, the carboniferous mud, in the geological chaos—in the strata of aesthetic consciousness. The refuse between mind and matter is a mine of information.¹³

Smithson asserted in a 1969 interview that his “work is impure, it is clogged with matter,”¹⁴ such that mind and matter continuously collide catastrophically. Such collision aims to search out the limits of the mind, language, nature, matter. In locating them, it aims to reveal these limits to viewer *and* fabricator, legitimising the processual endeavour by acknowledging and occupying the rockhead it crashes up against. This amounts to *letting-in* the impurities of the real world, being continuous with the real world.¹⁵

¹² Smithson, 86.

¹³ Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 87.

¹⁴ Robert Smithson and P. A. Norvell, ‘Fragments of an Interview with P. A. [Patsy] Norvell’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flann (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 194.

¹⁵ Flann, ‘Introduction: Reading Robert Smithson’, xix.

When an artist has a “wet brain,” Smithson contends that the only solution is to go to the desert to burn off the water and dry out. Wet art, for Smithson, is that which suggests watery saturation, seepage, discharges that submerge perceptions in an onrush of dripping observation, evokes liquid states. The art looks drenched. As the muddy mind dries under the sun’s rays, it forms polygonal networks of cracks and fissures, “... the studio begins to crumble and fall like The House of Usher, so that the mind and matter get endlessly confounded.”¹⁶ When the viewer’s “climatology of the brain and eye” changes from wet to dry, Platonic “truth” and “ideals” turn into dust. With the sedimentation of a dry mind, “the brain itself resembles an eroded rock from which ideas and ideals leak.”¹⁷ Though Smithson is rejecting Platonic essentialism, he still views baking in the energy of the sun as a positive process or, at least, a process necessary to cleanse a soaked mind. This is in contradistinction to the solar understandings of Georges Bataille, who views the sun as a source of malediction, eroding the brain.

Nick Land, following Bataille, writes that as the cascades of energy pour down upon us, the brain is pounded into trash by the sun, eroded to bits—like a frangible dam—by a tumult of desire.¹⁸ Bataille and Land both describe the energy of the sun in ‘wet’ terms, seeing its momentary capture upon earth like that of damming a caustic river. In either case, both Land/Bataille and Smithson see the sun as a disrupting force, pulverising the contiguous state of the brain into ashes or cinders, ready for intense communion with primordial desire. For Smithson, this desire is geological time. When the boundaries of the brain are wrecked, the artist is no longer constrained by the limits and social structures that confine art. The sedimentation of a cracked mind becomes aware “of the layers of prehistoric material that is entombed in the Earth’s crust.”¹⁹ In this ocean of earthen matter, distinctions lose all meaning, the present falls backwards and forwards outside of history. Mere ‘object’ becomes art when it is seen through such temporality, ‘outside of history’. Smithson is so determined on this account that he writes: “... the existence of the artist in time is worth as much as the finished product.”²⁰ Art ‘object’ and artist are charged with the rush of ‘jealous’ time such that they both are unbounded by the commodification of their ‘work’ in the present. The present cannot support the cultures of Europe or archaic/primitive civilisations: “... it must instead explore the pre-and post-historic mind; it must go into the places where remote futures meet remote pasts.”²¹

16 Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 87.

17 Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 90.

18 Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 175.

19 Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 89.

20 Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 90.

21 Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 91; Robert Smithson,



Michael Heizer, *City* (1972)

MOLTEN PROCESSING

Richard Serra and Robert Smithson are essentially connected. They were contemporaries who, by all accounts, had significant influence on each other, and the movement with which they were associated. As Mya Dosch emphasises, key to this is: "... the notion that sculpture must critically engage the viewer bodily,"²² and not just pictorially, as on a planimetric surface, like wall or floor. The intention was for those viewing their works to be "active sculptural participants" breaching the boundaries of the work, instead of "passive, immobile viewers" scanning a graphic from the outside.²³ Speaking in an interview with Douglass Crimp, Serra emphasises that most people encounter Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* via an image taken of it from a helicopter. The flat plane of the photograph reduces the scale of the sculpture, making it fit for consumption and, in doing so, denies the "temporal experience" and "real content of the work."²⁴ The work 'in person' has none of this "graphic character," while Smithson preferred it to be documented through the temporal register of film which could trace the path of the jetty as a body would occupy it.

Serra started his art career as a painter before moving to sculpture, a transition that can be seen in his earlier sculptural works such as *Casting*, 1969, where he is literally wresting his work away from the "good form" of a gallery wall in an attempt to break the grip of the "image." Rob Marks writes that when he first encountered *Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift*, 1995, his impulse was to breach the border of the work. This desire to enter the bounding space of a sculpture may be what is essential to define sculpture as a medium, such that no sculpture protected by museum stanchions or viewed through a pictorial lens is ever 'truly' experienced.²⁵ Though Serra's works from the late 1960s



Richard Serra, *Casting* (1969)

¹ 'Entropy and the New Monuments', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flann (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 14.

²² Mya Dosch, 'Expecting Violence: Richard Serra's Gravity the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Countermonuments', *Sculpture Journal* 26, no. 2 (2017): 221.

²³ Rob Marks, 'Site Unseen, Time Unbound: The Double Life of Richard Serra's "Gutter Corner Splash"', *X-Tra Contemporary Art Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Summer 2016): 51.

²⁴ Richard Serra and Crimp, 'Richard Serra: Urban Sculpture: An Interview', in *Richard Serra: Interviews, Etc., 1970-1980* (New York: Hudson River Museum, 1980), 181; quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, 'A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara', in *Richard Serra*, ed. Hal Foster and Gordon Hughes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), 59.

²⁵ Marks, 'Site Unseen, Time Unbound: The Double Life of Richard Serra's

succeed in violating the sculptural conventions of pedestal art, he later looked back on these works critically, fearing that the spread of materials on a floor as a canvas plane succumbs to the same pictorial visual convention of figure/ground.²⁶ What was actually desired here by both Serra and Smithson was a movement to the body as the ground for sculptural experience, alongside the operation of working on material through physical process, to strip the work of art of all possible descriptors and representations. This amounts to embedding a piece's "existence in the world in which *tearing, rolling, or casting* physically takes place."²⁷

Sites for this *physical* action are within the industrial sphere, where outputs demonstrate more about the physical nature of materiality and the recording of processes used, than about the psychology of artistic temperaments.²⁸ During the recording of Serra's splash pieces, we see the artist wearing a gas mask that depersonalises him, transforming to the preconceived notion of a 'masked performer' (shaman, carnival celebrant, actor) with the addition of the depersonalising conditions of industrial labour. The industrial mask, unlike the performative mask, strips expression from the wearer. Instead, it expresses the collective conditions of repetition, seriality, uniformity, the condition of labour itself.²⁹ 'Creativity', in this case, is folded back into labour, existing as a set of tasks assigned in relation to a collection of materials, "in which operations are fixed by matter 'inspiration'."³⁰ Even when not wearing a mask, Serra is ensnared in this role of labourer by being shrouded in "studio grime," pictured as wearing "the dirt of his artistic life as a kind of filmy, glamorous veil."³¹ For Serra, this desire—or doom—to be caked in filth derives from his fascination with the 'noble' workman, Alberto Giacometti.³² For this research, such 'fascination' comes from the requirement to appear 'authentic' in the face of industrialised labour, a labouring whose *eyes* looks untrusting upon the knowledge and intentions of the artist.



Richard Serra, *Casting* (1969)

"Gutter Corner Splash", 51.

26 Rosalind Krauss, 'Richard Serra: Sculpture', in *Richard Serra*, ed. Hal Foster and Gordon Hughes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), 105–6.

27 Krauss, 105–6.

28 Steve Reich, "An Interview with Steve Reich," interview by Emily Wasserman, *ARTFORUM* 10, no. 9 (May 1972), 48.

29 Krauss, 'Richard Serra: Sculpture', 100–101.

30 Krauss, 100–101.

31 Krauss, 124.

32 During Serra's time in Paris, after leaving Yale, Giacometti was a formative idol in his transition from painter to sculptor. Serra and Philip Glass would frequent the restaurant *La Coupole*, to watch Giacometti eat, caked in plaster, after a day in the studio.

The final aspect of Serra's work that concerns this research is its quality of being "outside-of-time." The infamous image of Serra that adorns the front cover of *The New Avant-Garde*,³³ has him frozen in the act of throwing lead to create *Casting, 1969*. This image has the figure suspended in an 'infinitive', a stand-still of violent action which, in the image, has no perceivable effect. The image was wisely chosen, as one of the texts reproduced in *The New Avant-Garde* is a list written by Serra, which has 87 transitive verbs likewise in a tense of becoming: "to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to twine. . . ." These verbs are raw motioning, itinerant processes without ends, without a thing for them to be performed against. Relief comes when the set of tasks is followed by a set of indications of material or substance ". . . of waves, of tides, of time. . . ." With both list and image, we are deprived of an object. We instead have "to throw — of lead," a pairing which is repeated and folds back onto itself until the performance halts in a totality of eight corner mouldings. Until this supposed terminus comes into being, the action has a special relationship to time. It occurs 'in' time, but has no proper destination.³⁴

Even the state in which the work is left cannot be definitively called an end, as one corner moulding is left attached to the wall. The repetitions could continue to act, and act. There is no sense of *narrative* time here, as the production line has just halted. This particular 'exemplar' complicates itself, as this work was eventually sold to SFMOMA, as its original site was being vacated. The lead used was melted down and added to and then "to throw — of lead" was repeated again, resulting in *Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift, 1995*, now on—sometimes invisible—permanent exhibition at SFMOMA. The work is 'permanent' to the degree that if one were to remove it, that *act* would be to destroy the site. The work was often hidden behind a false wall, existing and *ongoing* as an 'artwork', even if unseen. Even when the work was unwanted by the curator, it still had a hold over the space it took up, making it just as prominent when it was 'invisible' as when it was on display. For Rob Marks, the process of making the new work and its duality of states leads him to believe it tells a parable that "we cannot know the full meaning of things until we have achieved an impossible state: knowing them over time, ultimately forever."³⁵

33 Grégorie Müller and Gianfranco Gorgoni, *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for Art of the Seventies* (New York: Praeger, 1972).

34 Krauss, 'Richard Serra: Sculpture', 103.

35 Marks, 'Site Unseen, Time Unbound: The Double Life of Richard Serra's "Gutter Corner Splash"', 72.

EMBODIED PRODUCING

Ann Hamilton is a maker, an artist of site-generated, perceptual situations and temporal interventions, whose interest is "in the relationships between things in space," exploiting tension between the real and the invented.³⁶ Hamilton is brought in at this point of the research in part to disrupt a "masculinist purity" characteristic of public space and, by association, the public art of minimalism, process art, and land art that has been discussed in the previous sections.³⁷ Hamilton shares many similar themes to both Smithson and Serra, such as scale, disrupting the hegemony of museum etiquette, engaging mystical or ritual practices, having a focus on production and craft, and emphasis on the treatment of time as a crucial 'material' in a work's production. Another prevalent thematic, that runs through Hamilton's *oeuvre*, is her deconstruction of hierarchies in our habits of perception.³⁸ Language—hearing—and sight become veiled, subordinated, to be treated in a similar way to other kinds of perception, our other senses—taste, smell, touch. The effect of this results in language no longer becoming the 'vehicle' for information. Rather, one must *sense* one's way through, in order to arrive at something. Academic writings about Hamilton's treatment of the senses often include evocative phrases such as: "hands become tools for listening and the mouth an aperture for seeing."³⁹ This implies that "our bodies lead us. Our feet and skin know things long before we can form language around them."⁴⁰ This "tactility of language" enforces an embodied experience, where the observer of a work is *within* or implicit in the work, while also being outside it. This seems to be echoing ways that both Serra and Smithson wanted their work to be engaged.

An *invitation* to the viewer to enter a work is a vital material component in Hamilton's installations. The intention here is that space is made in the work for others to inhabit. This allows for connections to merge, physical immersion, and an embodied transcendence, that she calls *witness*.⁴¹ This subsumption of the viewer *into* the work creates a commentary on, and transformation of, aspects of museum or gallery spaces that are reminiscent of "ancestor worship"

36 Joan Simon, *Ann Hamilton* (Chicago: University of Michigan, 2002), 13.

37 Mary Katherine Coffey, 'Histories That Haunt: A Conversation with Ann Hamilton', *Art Journal* 60, no. 3 (May 2014): 11.

38 Coffey, 14.

39 Ann Hamilton and Audra Wolowiec, 'Ann Hamilton and Audra Wolowiec', *BOMB* 145 (Fall 2018): 54.

40 Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick, 'Attending to Presence: An Interview with Ann Hamilton', *Canadian Art Review* 44, no. 2 (2019): 149.

41 Hamilton and Wolowiec, 'Ann Hamilton and Audra Wolowiec', 54.



Ann Hamilton, *myein* (1999)

or “monuments to the great and worthy dead.”⁴² However, a viewer is not alone when entering the work. They join live figures or “attendants” who, through repetitive actions and their very presence—overlapping with the timeframe of the work’s ‘objects’—make explicit this orientation to a ritualistic dimension. These figures within the work eschew roleplaying or enacting a script, as their actions seem to go on perpetually, operating somewhere between body and object. The attendants also offer comfort to the *witness*, bringing the immense scale and great abundance of material down to a grounding in humble, intimate activity.⁴³ This works much like the minute details on a Carlo Scarpa building, where discrete moments reveal macro-structure, and lend legibility to the greater architectonics at play within the site. The attendant’s motions are usually simple, hand-making gestures that, through repetition, work on the liminal edge of a body-object dialectic, echoing the physical labour of manufacturing and craft making.

For the artist, labour *is* the point. Hamilton often uses former factories, workplaces, and warehouses as staging-places for her installations. The attendants are there as labour, producing industrial artefacts which often become the only residual parts of the installation. The prolonged duration of their work makes strange their banal actions, emphasizing process and the temporalising of making. These ‘objects’ might be lumps of dough, imprinted with teeth marks after being pushed against the roof of the mouth (*malediction*, 1991), or mirrors that have had the black backing dutifully sanded off the glass (*aleph*, 1992), or books with every word burnt out by a stylus (*tropos*, 1994). Evidence of production in her later works shifts to mystery, as machinic operations hide behind walls, such that the installation takes on an atmosphere akin to ancient temples, where the machination of fluid transfer flows out of view for a collection of *offered* substances.⁴⁴ In either case, Hamilton uses the repetition of displaced elements, “each of which literally and poetically bespeak material histories.”⁴⁵ This dislocation of elements, made available for the “somatic sensory reach” of visitors, relates closely to gestures we can see with Marcel Duchamp’s 1938 *1,200 bags of coal* and Robert Smithson’s *Nonsites*.⁴⁶ With such works, the ‘objects’ produced and collected during the life of the work survive, so as to have their *own* resonance and memory of the work and the attendants who crafted them.

42 Jean-Pierre Criqui, ‘The Peacock Woman’, in *Ann Hamilton: Present-Past, 1947-1997*, trans. Bernard Hoepffner (Milan: Skira, 1998), 24.

43 Fisher and Drobnick, ‘Attending to Presence’, 144.

44 George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 40.

45 Simon, *Ann Hamilton*, 16.

46 Simon, 16.



Ann Hamilton, *privation and excesses* (1989)

As Bender and Wellbery note with respect to Hamilton's work, in this processing: "Time loses its character as a locational marker and becomes the productive medium that generates at an accelerating rate, innovative experiential configurations."⁴⁷ Thus, when the work is installed, it is not, therefore, being made public because of its completion, but because of a certain *other beginning* in the life of the work. The live presence and production of artefacts speaks to an "ongoingness," where the project opens up to attentions, energies, and unknowns of the process.⁴⁸ If we take Rob Marks's earlier comment that we are only able to reach meaning once we've spent *forever* with something, Hamilton explores how an installation might 'ask' someone to slow down, sacrifice or suspend time, in order to experience, especially when we are increasingly presented with experiences for rapid consumption. She emphasises this by recounting a point made by Anne Bogart, that "one of the most important things an artist can do is reset people's relation to time."⁴⁹ In this she succeeds. Patricia Phillips writes:

Hamilton's art dramatizes, but never sentimentalizes, the changing conditions of knowledge. Neither timeless nor simply timely, the work temporalizes experience. Beginning with the present, it travels to the past and future. Not souvenir nor symbol nor charm, the work is evidence of prolonged inquiry—stimulating our own immersion this plentiful, eccentric aesthetic production. Through attraction and trepidation, it emboldens us to fully embrace the sensual structures of thought, as well as the cerebral dimensions of sensation. In Hamilton's exquisitely errant art, this covenant may be our closest encounter with the timeless.⁵⁰

As intimated above, Hamilton describes the structural tempo of her installations as an "ongoingness" or a "perpetual present," that is created through the arrangement of excess materials and the figure(s)/attendant(s) who process the timeless objects of an installation. This build-up of residual production is only observable after the course of a day, becoming more evident during the full course of a work's several-month run.⁵¹ Even after the installation is finished, those remaining produced elements continue to be "underway" in a perpetual becoming.

⁴⁷ John Bender and David E. Wellbery, *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1; quoted in Patricia C. Phillips, 'Ineffable Dimensions: Passages of Syntax and Scale', in *Ann Hamilton: Present-Past, 1947-1997* (Milan: Skira, 1998), 116.

⁴⁸ Fisher and Drobnick, 'Attending to Presence: An Interview with Ann Hamilton', 164.

⁴⁹ Hamilton and Wolowiec, 'Ann Hamilton and Audra Wolowiec', 61.

⁵⁰ Phillips, 'Ineffable Dimensions: Passages of Syntax and Scale', 131.

⁵¹ Simon, *Ann Hamilton*, 20.

PROFANING

To delve deeper into the attendants and produced objects of Hamilton requires, for this research, a reading of Giorgio Agamben's *Profanations*. Chapter Four 'The Assistants' provides particular illumination into the naming of these bodies produced and encountered in the staging of Hamilton's installations. Agamben's chapter mainly focuses on "helpers," from children's stories and Kafka's novels who, like Hamilton's attendants, have no knowledge and do nothing but engage in their tasks and games. They provide a point of contact for the personal, adrift in an expansive space, and "whose very posture 'seems like a message'."⁵² Agamben likens these characters to the *gandharvas* of the Indian sages, who sit between the celestial and chthonic, and whose features speak to their belonging to a parallel world, a "lost citizenship," or sacrosanct elsewhere.⁵³ Agamben also writes that assistants can be found in the world of inanimate things, like the useless and somewhat base objects that we all hold onto as half-souvenirs, half-talismans. Of these remnants, he asks, where do they all go? Are they kept somewhere in storage like the *genizah* of Judaism, where old, illegible books are kept before being ceremonially buried, in case they contain the name of God?⁵⁴ What Agamben is getting at here is that these distorted, useless, forgotten objects are the divine present in profane things. They are representatives of the forgotten, laying claim to the oblivion that resides in all things. Therefore, these assistants and relics are figures of what is lost or, more properly, our relationship to what is lost. Agamben writes: "Throughout our lives, the measure of oblivion and ruin, the ontological waste that we carry in ourselves, far exceeds the small mercy of our memories and our consciousness. But this formless chaos of the forgotten that accompanies us like a silent golem is neither inert nor inefficacious."⁵⁵ Applying this to the human animal as a whole, the mythologies and knowledge that are lost to us drag behind us on chains, gouging out great chasms in our histories that ripple into futures as unknown desire. That which is lost, worthless in our currency, demands to remain forgotten and unfulfilled, thus unforgettable and aligned with redemption on the last day.

The 'form' or 'genre' of Agamben's books seems to be somewhere between 'detective story' and 'esoteric pamphlet', playing with the canon of popular literature, while promising to reveal "*arcana imperii*," or secret powers of a

⁵² Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 29.

⁵³ Agamben, 30.

⁵⁴ Agamben, 32.

⁵⁵ Agamben, 35.

mystical cosmos.⁵⁶ This is consistent with his view that there is an intimate solidarity that binds mystery to parody.⁵⁷ To evoke mystery, with anything other than parody, falls into bad taste and pretention.⁵⁸ To this end, Agamben calls the liturgy of the mass, modern mystery par excellence, parodic, finding support for this notion in the many medieval sacred parodies which were preserved by monks. The three practitioners discussed thus far create parodic mysteries. Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and *Asphalt Rundown* are of the same language as Avebury and Uffington *White Horse* respectively (pictured on following page). Equally, Serra's *East-West/West-East* speaks to the Menhir de Champ-Dolent (pictured on following page). The ancient formal elements are retained, while oddities specific to present production are added, rendering these structures undecidable and 'out of place'. Agamben writes that when "faced with mystery, artistic creation can only become caricature," citing examples of scatological chivalric poems which abruptly move from the prestigious sphere of the chivalric quest to the profane site of the dung heap.⁵⁹ This debasing shift renders indiscernible the threshold that separates the sacred and the profane. However, for Agamben, parody does not coincide with fiction but is its opposite. Parody does not call into question the reality of its object.⁶⁰ The object is so intolerably real that parody, operating as a threshold between world and thing, is required to keep it at a distance.

Agamben emphasizes that his interest in theology doesn't stem from a nostalgic, crypto-religious, or conservative position.⁶¹ Rather, it is in the body of these texts that he finds the genealogy of modern political establishment and ritual. Thus, his reading of the ceremony of the liturgy comprises a bureaucracy of angels singing of eternal glory after the end of governance, and the beginning of inactivity of the Christian God. Agamben warns, however, that this inactivity is but a metamorphosis of human inactivity—now attributed to God—through a glory-encoding taking place, as human inactivity is "captured" during liturgical ceremonies.⁶² Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

⁵⁶ Alexei Penzin, 'Profanation of the Profane, or, Giorgio Agamben on the Moscow Biennale', *Rethinking Marxism* 20, no. 3 (July 2008): 416–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935690802134008>.

⁵⁷ In this case parody refers to a being out of place, or an inversion of an existing Rhapsody, such that it requires a pre-existing structure that is transformed from something serious into something ridiculous and a preservation of the formal aspects into which strange and incompatible elements are added.

⁵⁸ Agamben, *Profanations*, 41.

⁵⁹ Agamben, 42–43.

⁶⁰ Agamben, 48.

⁶¹ Penzin, 'Profanation of the Profane, or, Giorgio Agamben on the Moscow Biennale', 418.

⁶² Penzin, 420.



Above: **Richard Serra**, *East-West/West-East* (2014)

Right: **Unknown Artist(s)**, *Menhir de Champ-Dolent* (5000-4000 BCE)



Above: **Unknown Artist(s)**, *Uffington White Horse* (1380-550 BCE)

Right: **Robert Smithson**, *Asphalt Rundown* (1969)



states that the human is born inactive and aimless.⁶³ It is this *ground* that allows human activity and labour. Penzin writes that from this thought it becomes clear why all festivals and celebration are so undecidable. On the one hand, they represent a specific inactivity in the human animal, whereas, on the other, they have been coded through Christian political theology as “waste products, scoria of this machine of power.”⁶⁴ To clarify, for Agamben, inactivity does not mean passivity, laziness, or idleness, but is rather closer to Spinoza’s “contemplation of the possibilities of acting,” a deactivation, suspension of all acts.⁶⁵ Therefore, this suspension of the standard biological functioning of a body opens it to gestures, actions, and eroticism. In like manner, art is the suspension and shift of the field of contemplation. Deactivation is not a stopping, but an opening outward, to *other use*.

This concept of the *other use* of things is discussed in the penultimate section of *Profanations*, ‘In Praise of Profanation’. Here, Agamben expands on the structural divide between the sacred and the profane. The ‘Sacred’ and the ‘Religious’, Agamben reminds us from Roman law, were things belonging to the gods—celestial and sub-terrestrial—that were removed from the “commerce of men.”⁶⁶ To consecrate was to remove from human law. To profane meant to *return* consecrated things to the free use of men. The Roman jurists, which Agamben draws upon, then set aside ‘purity’ as a place no longer aligned with the gods of the dead, now “neither sacred, nor holy, nor religious, freed from all names of this sort.”⁶⁷ Religion is therefore defined as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from the common use and shifts them to the sacred sphere.⁶⁸ The apparatus that effects this separation is sacrifice through rituals, which sanction passage from profane to sacred. Religion, then, is not what unites men and gods but what keeps them distinct. To profane, then, is the human right to open the possibility of negligence, ignoring this separation by deactivating the effect that has restricted an object’s potentialities, thus inviting new uses.⁶⁹ Crucially, profanation is distinct from secularisation, as the latter is a form of repression, leaving intact the theological organisation of the sacred. Profanation, however, neutralises the sacral power of whatever it profanes, thus causing it to lose its aura, returning all things and bodies formerly confiscated. Agamben posits, from a reading of Walter Benjamin, that late-stage Capitalism

63 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7.28

64 Penzin, ‘Profanation of the Profane, or, Giorgio Agamben on the Moscow Biennale’, 420.

65 Benedictus De Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Andrew Boyle (London: Heron Books, n.d.).

66 Agamben, *Profanations*, 73.

67 Agamben, 73.

68 Agamben, 74.

69 Marcelo Svirsky, ‘On the Mechanics of Profanation: Subjectivity and Zionist Divides’, *Cultural Politics* 10, no. 1 (2014): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-2397254>.

is not just a secularisation of Protestantism, but is essentially a religious phenomenon developed parasitically out of Christianity.⁷⁰ In it, everything only has meaning in reference to the fulfilment of the cult. There is no longer sacrificial rituals marking passage between the sacred and profane. Rather, there is only a single ceaseless process that assails every ‘*thing-as-commodity*’, where objects are radically exchangeable yet out-of-use and, therefore, unprofaneable.⁷¹ This Capitalist consumption leads to the “museumification” of life, where everything is owned as property and unavailable for free use.⁷² The dominion of this process is so complete that, according to Benjamin, even the three great prophets of modernity—Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud—are on the side of this “religion of despair” that creates guilt, not atonement.⁷³ My readings of Agamben on profanation, and Benjamin’s capitalism-as-religion, lean significantly to the works of Georges Bataille and Nick Land. This results, for me, in questioning the extent of any complicity on the part of Bataille or Land with the cult of capitalism. Even though Agamben and Bataille share an interest in the themes of the sacred, sacrifice, non-productive expenditure and sovereignty, Prozorov writes that what distinguishes Agamben is his lack of interest in the problematic of transgression.⁷⁴ Where Bataille elevates ‘bare life’ or ‘inoperative’ practices to a status of privilege, separating the normative from the transgressive, Agamben resists this, as any idea of separation runs counter to profanation. Meanwhile, Nick Land levels a critique at Brian Massumi and Manuel De Landa in their readings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, that they are too ‘moralistic’ and ‘personal’, a comment that could equally be pointed at Agamben’s reading of the “technicizing [of] commerce,” pulling social change into political theatre.⁷⁵ Though Land would seem to join in rallying against the Protestant theocracy of the modern state, meeting Agamben’s call to the coming generation to profane the unprofaneable, by twisting it to a ‘Deleuzoguattarian’ echo to “accelerate the process.”⁷⁶

70 The Benjamin essay it titled ‘Capitalism as Religion’, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004).

71 Sergei Prozorov, ‘Pornography and Profanation in the Political Philosophy of Giorgio Agamben’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 4 (2011): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411405076>.

72 Agamben, *Profanations*, 84.

73 Agamben, 80.

74 Prozorov, ‘Pornography and Profanation in the Political Philosophy of Giorgio Agamben’, 93.

75 Nick Land, ‘Machines and Technocultural Complexity: The Challenge of the Deleuze-Guattari Conjunction’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 12 (1995): 133.

76 Agamben, *Profanations*, 92. To follow the ‘quote-trail’ for the infamous “accelerate the process” line, see also: Nick Land, ‘Meltdown’, in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 448–49; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 239–40; Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘898: The Strong of the Future’, in *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter

HOLEY SPACING

We have circled around to Deleuze and Guattari, and in particular the plateau ‘1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine’ from *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of their collaborative “engineering manual”⁷⁷ *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Briefly, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* deals with constructing a “smooth space” of thought, through thought-becoming-nomad and the invention of a “schizocomplexity toolkit” of concepts for the censure of power that “packs a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying.”⁷⁸ ‘Nomad thought’, therefore, is among others Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*, Artaud’s *Crowned Anarchy*. As such, it joins with a family of thought flowing from Lucretius, Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson as critique of negativity, the cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the exteriority of forces and relations, the denunciation of power.⁷⁹ This thought does not attach itself to the organisation of ordered interiority but moves freely on the outside, riding waves of difference as wild undomesticated force, opening new vistas. Whereas power builds walls and restrictive divisions between subject, concept, and being, force multiplies associations through pure, boundless conductivity. Massumi, preceding Agamben’s references to capitalism, deploys this toolbox in the following diagnosis of postmodernity, as the ‘real subsumption’ of society by capital:

The neoconservative transnation-state corresponds to what is called ‘post-modernism’ on the cultural level, and in political economy ‘postindustrial society’ or ‘late capitalism.’ It is characterized by the breakdown of the Keynesian alliance and a renewed war by management against labour, accompanied by a dismantling of the welfare state.⁸⁰

The liquid flow of capital undergoes a process of self-organisation, once a certain threshold speed has been reached.⁸¹ Modernity is fluidised, as a

Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 477–78.

77 Nick Land, ‘Machinic Desire’, in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 326.

78 Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), 8.

79 Massumi, 2; Massumi, 6.

80 Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 128.

81 Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 15.

transition point ‘singularity’ where order spontaneously emerges out of chaos. The ‘Material Vitalism’ that we can read in Deleuze and Guattari, and through Massumi and De Landa, concludes in the realisation that “the maximally accelerated development of productive-force is the infrastructure of revolutionary potential.”⁸²

The plateau ‘1227’, named for the year of Genghis Khan’s death, more specifically describes flows of matter, and the fluidification of state power through the nomadic War Machine. Deleuze and Guattari describe the flows of matter or *machinic phylum* as “essentially metallic.” Metallurgy stirs to the surface something that is hidden or buried in other matter-operations.⁸³ Material operations occur between two thresholds: the matter prepared for the operation, and the form to be incarnated (clay and mould). The incarnated form marks the end of one operation, and can act as the matter for the next operation, creating successive thresholds. However, with metallurgy, the operations span the threshold such that they overlap: “so that an energetic materiality overflows the prepared matter, and a qualitative deformation or transformation overflows the form.”⁸⁴ They cite a number of examples: quenching following forging; in casting the metallurgist working inside the mould; the decarbonation of cast iron into malleable iron; and the reusing of previous casts through successive melting or ‘ingot-forming’.⁸⁵ In metallurgy, matter and form seem extremely rigid, yet a succession of forms is replaced by continuous development, or the variability of matter transforms into matter of a continuous variation. What metal and metallurgy refine, for Deleuze and Guattari, is a life proper to matter, a material vitalism, and consciousness of matter-flows which are usually hidden.⁸⁶

Metal is not a thing, nor is it living, but a *body-without-organs*⁸⁷, and metallurgy

82 Land, ‘Machines and Technocultural Complexity: The Challenge of the Deleuze-Guattari Conjunction’, 135.

83 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, ‘1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine’, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 478.

84 Deleuze and Guattari, 478.

85 Deleuze and Guattari make a note that the history of metallurgy is inextricably linked with the form of an ingot, and that this form is neither stock nor a commodity, rather monetary value derives from it.

86 Deleuze and Guattari, ‘1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine’, 479.

87 A concept of Deleuze and Guattari’s taken from Antonin Artaud which describes a structure or field without imposed organisation. A base product of an alienated social body and destabilising power on which desire flows as a process of experimentation on a plane of immanence. Kylie Message, ‘Body without Organs’, in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr, Revised Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2010), 37–39.

shares with alchemy an “immanent power of corporeality in all matter.”⁸⁸ The *artisan smith* who follows this material flow of pure productivity, delimiting this body, is primarily itinerant. Metallurgic artisans are not of the land, or the soil, but of the subsoil, and itinerant because they are led by mineral paths, mining or metallic lines of flight. These smiths have a relation to the state, and also to the nomadic, operating between both. They depend on the ascendent bureaucracy of the empire for its agricultural stockpile, while also establishing workshops near the forest for charcoal, and mines in the deserts. Smiths may have a tent or a house, though they inhabit them like metal itself, as an “ore bed” (*gîte*, shelter, home, mineral deposit), in the style of a cave or a hole, a hut half submerged. They are subterranean not intrinsically but out of artistry and need.⁸⁹ If the nomadic originates in smooth space and wages war on the striated space of the state, smiths dwell in *Holey Space*. Left to their craft, they would trans-pierce the mountains, leaving great holes in their wake from bore tunnels through the rock. This description of the metallurgic artisan by Deleuze and Guattari is accompanied by a still-image from the Marxist film *Strike*, by Sergei M. Eisenstein. A group of workers emerge from a ground-plain entirely riven through with holes. This image evokes the Biblical story of Cain,⁹⁰ where the ground acts with Cain to sacrifice Able: “It opens its mouth to take the blood.” God’s punishment of Cain was for him to restlessly wander the earth.⁹¹ This ‘first’ murder to haunt the depths of history is a possible originator of violence.

There is no doubt that blacksmithing is essentially entangled with both agriculture and warfare, whether or not one follows Deleuzoguattarian or Biblical myth-making. That smiths tear through the environment to create porous Holey Space, handing out tools to migratory flows washing against the bounds of the state, is only part of the story. The smith constantly contends with porosity or void-fraction in their work, as gasses or inclusions are trapped and folded into the desired product. For sand- and investment-casting, this occurs through the entrapment of unwanted air, oxide impurities, or residues in the molten metal body during solidification.⁹² Likewise for the welder, porosity



Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Strike* (1925)

88 Deleuze and Guattari, ‘1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine’, 479.

89 Deleuze and Guattari, 481.

90 Cain (Hebrew: קַיִן Qáyin, “produced; spear”) may even be a cognate to the ancient South Arabian word *qyn*, translated as ‘metalsmith’ by Richard Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1-11* (Neukirchen, Germany: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 24–25. This would align with Cain’s description in Genesis 4:19-22 as the forefather of tent-dwelling pastoralists and bronze and iron smiths.

91 Mari Jørstad, ‘The Ground That Opened Its Mouth: The Ground’s Response to Human Violence in Genesis 4’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 705–15, <http://dx.dot.org/10.15699/jbl.1354.2016.3010>.

92 United States Navy, *Foundry Manual* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958).

occurs when oxygen enters the field of intensity around the molten weld bead. Both of these outside-inclusions into the metal body occur through fluid turbulence, and are entirely unwanted, for they ruin the practical utility of the crafted product. Porous welds and cast objects are weak, inconsistent, and have leak paths, whereas the land, when porous, becomes weaponised (Cain and Able, 1556 Shaanxi earthquake, trenches, foxholes, Viet Cong tunnels). Just as Smithson's inclusion of rust into the artistic practice crumbles the studio, the accelerated production of leak-paths into the alluvial deposits of traditional authority causes uncontrolled decompression and erosion. For Land, it is not internal 'resistances' but the chaos of war, traffic crises, market pressures, and what De Landa calls "turbulent demographic phenomena" such as migrations, crusades, and invasions that compel power to devolve force downwards and 'nomadize'.⁹³ Where this differs from Agamben, as I have mentioned above, is that, for Land, this process of "institutional flattening and fluidification" is directed by thermodynamic disorder and noise that self-organises, not by the expected outcomes of conscious and calculated human action.⁹⁴

In what follows, I will be discussing my particular research processes, what might be called my 'methodology,' though this word and what it normally names is itself porously contaminated, a weak weld, but equally—or hopefully—weaponised with thermodynamic disorders.

93 De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, 14.

94 Land, 'Machines and Technocultural Complexity: The Challenge of the Deleuze-Guattari Conjunction', 138.

CHAPTER TWO



LIBIDINAL
ABSTRACT
ENGINEERING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the practice-methodologies that are drawn from the subsoil of abstracted theoretical work and their implication in guiding the making practice down into this realm. If this practice is to employ the earthen-engineering and desiring-production of those charted in the previous chapter, how might a path be discerned through the solid crust of the earth into its molten metal interior? A number of positions that relate the making practice of this research to the earth require exploration and crystallisation, especially the removal of the presumed distinction between what is natural matter and what is synthetic matter. To say that something—anything—can be made *from* the earth shows an incredible anthropocentric arrogance in the elevation it presumes of human fabrication ends and their differentiation from *nature* as machinic process of production.⁹⁵ The human-animal is a clay golem⁹⁶, always already *of the earth*, an animated machine processing the energy flows that litter the surface of its being. Human making, then, is not synthetic creation, as *creation* is an impossible, but a recording and consumption, a geological phenomenon no different from “sailing stones.”

In turn, the earthen machine is a body which processes the endless flood of energy dissipating from the sun. Following this radical destructing of anthropocentric production, how can I “make” and understand this “making” in relation to earthen desire? This will be explored through the radical exteriorising of desire *from* the human *to* the earth as my methodological un-grounding, following a series of “methods” by thinkers-of-desire-and-earth: Bataille and Land on Fluidic desire, Henry Miller’s phallic ‘distensions’, Deleuze and Guattari’s Body without Organs, and Mark Fisher’s Abstract Engineering and Hauntology.⁹⁷ However, as a ‘guide’ to my methodological

95 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 3.

96 This may not only be in Jewish folklore, as a thesis by Cairns-Smith, outlines the possibility that DNA’s very earliest subcomponents arose out of crystal-based chemical machinery of primitive clays. See A. G. Cairns-Smith, *The Life Puzzle: On Crystals and Organisms and on the Possibility of a Crystal as an Ancestor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

97 Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*; Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986); Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Hampshire: Zero Books, 2014); Mark Fisher, ‘Abstract Engineers’, *K-Punk* (blog), 10 August 2004, <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/003847.html>.

‘pre-hension’, what directly follows is a recounting of the processing of work that *preceded* this research, *Maw of Aeonie Rupture*.⁹⁸



Richard and James Norris, *Sailing stone in Racetrack Playa* (2013)

98 Angus Roberts, ‘Maw of Aeonie Rupture’ (Bachelor with Honours Dissertation, Auckland University of Technology, 2017), <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/11074>.

SOLAR DESIRE

In my practice-led Bachelor of Honours work, *Maw of Aeonic Rupture* (hereinafter referred to simply as *Maw*), I interrogated the myth of Plato's Cave, a key grounding moment of the Western philosophical tradition, with its gaze fixed upon a pure and illuminating sun. This was driven by an anti-Enlightenment sentiment arising out of cave dwelling and the exposing of a *black sun* or Solar Anus. Methodologically, this proceeded through four interrelated methods: 'pataphysics,⁹⁹ useless expenditure, ritual practice, and tacit haunting. These methods were activated to engage *how* materials would react with one another. This prior exploration of material interactions and reactions was not driven by experimentation derived from epistemology or science, but rather from a phenomenology of material investigations: how phenomenal *appearance* unconceals the matter essential to things. That is to say, my 'way' encountered *how* a material and aesthetic (*aesthesis—phainesthai*) collision "may 'work' without the intervening and defining recourse of the concept."¹⁰⁰ This required me to treat the studio as a laboratory of 'pataphysical experimentation such that material interventions were worked through a Bataillean lens of flesh and sacrifice. Experimentation was fed on and placed within a framework of ritual and mystic practices, for it to gather meaning as sediment upon form.

Simply put, 'pataphysics is the study of the tricks that produce an excluded outcome, instead of the laws producing the expected outcome, understood in the distinction between Alchemy and Chemistry. For example, lead is worked on not for its observed properties but for the impossibility that it becomes gold. For Alfred Jarry, the originator of the notion, this was a way of working within a literature that he intended to be a science of the virtual or imaginary, treating poetics as the real.¹⁰¹ This was employed in ways similar to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, combatting a field where truth and reason had become tyrannical, by searching for answers more cavernous than illuminating.¹⁰² Closely related to this was Bataille's notion of "useless expenditure" or *dépense*, which translated into my practice as a 'worklessness'. This is a practice where wealth in the form of matter is destroyed as sacrificial action. Thus, the antiutilitarian making of

99 The single apostrophe is intentional and included to avoid easy puns, as it is a contracted formation derived from Greek *tà epì tà metàphusiká*, meaning "that which is above metaphysics."

100 Roberts, 'Maw of Aeonic Rupture', 7.

101 Christian Bök, *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (Illinois: Northwest University Press, 2002), 9.

102 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974).

surplus things, with no other use but their destruction, as action in mimicry of the sun, and against the productionist metaphysics of design.

Maw explored both solar and cavernous desire, as Bataille and Land see desire as both productive *and* a lack far in excess of machinic productive capability. Bataille unrestrainedly describes the tremendous horror of the natural world as "sickening," exemplified in the sun's unilateral outpouring of energetic desire.¹⁰³ The human-animal is crushed, staggered into gaga by the wealth of desire raining down upon it such that its only option to not be "pounded into trash by the sun" is to seek to distance itself from the excesses of nature in the security of the world of work.¹⁰⁴ Social production, made possible by the erecting of taboos, attempts to soak up the energy of the sun for the creation of tools or things for survival. Even though Bataille, and Land following him, investigate desire prior to and extending beyond sexuality, they see dying as entangled with sexuality. Human mythmaking—desire for the sacred aiding in the search for intimacy lost in production—is intertwined with contradictory production, desire for self-preservation, to the end that eroticism is "a psychological quest not alien to death."¹⁰⁵

This practice also invoked ritual that echoed the past. Work aiming at sacrifice constitutes ritual action, whereby processing matter takes on repetitive or rhythmic cadence. Actions or procedures recurring at regular or irregular intervals, uniformed or patterned, become devices of inevitability. Processing that cannot but occur, in accordance with a beat or rhythmic movement, and with a certain formality, lend such actions their *power*. These acts process materials ritualistically "in order to sacralise the mundane in the filth of work."¹⁰⁶ This often infers approaching materials or processes without prior engagement or knowledge, in the *belief* that processing is informed by communion with matter, or *via* ancestral haunting. Repetitive action ultimately conferred tacit knowledge, either directly from materials or from inherited, unvoiced whispers emanating from a self, encrypted impressions left on the body by archaic scarring. Such haunting echoes, reverberating a work, reach from a distant past, as *my* desire reaches backwards, from *their* far future, meeting as ritualised working. Whereas *Maw's* desire was *inscribed* within cults of sun worship and prehistoric 'art', for this research desire encounters machinic phylum (explored later in this chapter), and loss.

103 Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*, 56.

104 Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*, 175.

105 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 57; Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*, 11.

106 Roberts, 'Maw of Aeonic Rupture', 9.

This research has three ‘objects’ of lost desire each of which, in psychological terms, is paternal. The first is the loss of the myth of transcendence with the death of god, the end of metaphysics’ onto-theology. The second loss is that of the artisanal, knowledge understood as embeddedness within the communal: those skilled in their craft. The third loss is that of genuine origins: a Pre-Socratic search for the lost *Arche*, or originary action. Desire for modern mythologies is conceptualised as desire to experience a primal chthonic continuity, underneath the discontinuous existence of individuated being.¹⁰⁷ This is not a transcendental engulfing religious code that denies the terror of nature, but return to an archaic undercurrent of desiring flow. Within my research, this is conceived as an exploration of new mythologies to reconnect with the lost intimacy of violent nature, obscured by humanism’s belief that its industrial productions lie outside nature. A further desire ‘shaping’ my methods is an accounting-for or gathering of ‘lost knowledge’. This knowledge is not truly lost. Rather, what is ‘lost’ is intimacy within the transmissions of this knowledge. For me, workshop techniques or artisanal skills were only passed on unconsciously, not learned first-hand from a grandparent or a parent, as there was a familial intention that I not follow this path. Rather, such acquisitions are transmitted through determined genetic encoding and the philology or hermeneutics of engineering texts and the ‘objectivity’ of audio-visual memories. My third desiring method implicates the perceived authenticity of a founding moment for some unfolding action. The *founding moment* is naïvely perceived as having an authenticity no longer present in its late-stage form. This tends towards encountering low levels of ‘technology’, such as the “dumb tools” referred to by Smithson. These require maximal interaction when compared to, for example, computer-controlled machines, that are allowed to run from pre-set instructions.

107 Simon Townsend, ‘The Exploitation of Sacred Desire: Rethinking Georges Bataille’s Political Theory,’ in *Theory & Event* 21, no. 4 (October 2018), 848-849.

FLUIDIFYING

All this unbidden, unwanted, drunken vomit will flow on endlessly through the minds of those to come in the inexhaustible vessel that contains the history of the race. Side by side with the human race there runs another race of beings, the inhuman ones, the race of artists who, goaded by unknown impulses, take the lifeless mass of humanity and by the fever and ferment with which they imbue it turn this soggy dough into bread and the bread into wine and the wine into song. Out of the dead compost and the inert slag they breed a song that contaminates.¹⁰⁸

Robert Smithson’s “flows,” in particular *Asphalt Rundown*, were a fundamental commencement-point for the molten character of this research. These works redirected large quantities of asphalt, concrete, mud or glue to be poured across parts of landscapes. In *Asphalt Rundown* a dump truck released a load of asphalt from the top of an eroded hillside in an abandoned dirt and gravel quarry. This powerful and annihilating gesture radically questioned the act of painting, a desire that stirred a current in the semisolid, viscous pitch, such that it flowed across the face of the earth. Here we see desire’s *effect* of constantly coupling continuous flows with partial objects.¹⁰⁹ The sun produces a flow of radiant energy, which is cut off by the earth as it sequesters this energy as heat upon its surface. This cutting produces the flow of earthen matter which is, in turn, cut off by human processing of earth. Such processing causes a flow of Smithson’s desire for the gesture of a work that cuts production. This *desire* finally allows asphalt to flow back across the surface, as partially-altered matter. For Deleuze and Guattari this is the definition of a machine: a system of interruptions or breaks related to a continual material flow that it cuts.¹¹⁰ The machine is a peculiar connective functioning: as a *break* in the flow of matter from a machine it is connected to, whilst also itself a flow or producer of flow for the machine connected to it. Though the organ-machine interprets the world from the perspective of its own flux, it is always part of a continuous river that flows away from it into the distant future, and backs up behind it into the distant past.

Such a totalising viewing-machine does not necessarily lend itself to the setting-out of a collection of rigorous academic steps-to-follow (methods), but reveals the indistinguishable character of all material interactions. Just as

108 Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 255–56.

109 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 5.

110 Deleuze and Guattari, 36.

Bataille sees a transcendent idea being materially indistinguishable from base matter, and Smithson sees rust as *the* fundamental property of steel, this research treats all matter as flow-and-coupling. This confluence registers in my practice as a ‘love-of-matter’, such that the rustic or rugged is included within or alongside the otherwise technologically ‘pure form’. Usually in technological processing there are two paths. One is the complete exclusion of impurities, typified in the removal of knots in timber for furniture manufacturing and the obsessive eradication of oxides in metal work. The other path is to idealise impurities, such as the use of figured burls in woodworking or the accelerated patination of metals such as bronze and corten steel. *Both* fall into idealising purity or impurity of matter, and are separated from the methodology of this research. Instead, this research utilises a practical and authentic response to all matter that flows through it. This is a humble realisation that I can only make use of the materials that are *at hand* with the tools that are at hand.

The contiguous state of steel and rust equally registers as a living/dying dialectic, whereby steel is hard and rugged, suggesting permanence and techno-ideality, in opposition to rust which streams from contact with moisture, is brittle, flaky, and reminiscent of the dead machines of metal scrap yards. Methodologically, this research recognises its desire to produce works that are *an earthen torrent of desiring-production by and of the earth*. An earlier ‘incarnation’ epitomising this is my 2016 work, *Jowls of the State* (pictured opposite). Molten lead was splashed onto silk to create stained and sacralised altar cloths. This research, in part, resuscitates this field where matter’s connectivity is always part of a liquid interaction.

For primitive people the moment of greatest anguish is the phase of decomposition; when the bones are bare and white they are not intolerable as the putrefying flesh is, food for worms.¹¹¹

The previous chapter briefly engaged a difference between Smithson and Bataille when each comes to recognise the effects and affections of the sun. Smithson’s sun dries out a ‘wet’ brain, while Bataille’s sun turns a brain to fluidity. Land’s book, *Thirst for Annihilation*, engaging Bataille, offers a chapter, ‘Fluent Bodies’, on the novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, by Henry Miller. Bataille and Miller are brought together not only for the obvious reasons that they were both responding to the surrealist culture of 1930s Paris, and that they both wrote subversive erotic fiction, but also because of a mutual attraction to the limitless expanse of zero and the liquefaction of the body. With ‘Fluent Bodies’, Land outlines a schema that is at play within the body: an encrustation edge between a static structure and fluid skin. Timeless interior skeleton directly



Jowls of the State (2016)

¹¹¹ Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*, 56.

contrasts with temporal flesh that envelops it momentarily. This hard/soft differentiation within the animal body has been used throughout cultures to discuss the difference between matter and death.¹¹² The body acts as this boundary. Over time, this shroud becomes liquid and falls away leaving the skeleton to transcend the immanence of the flesh.

At stake in this division is a questioning of matter, explored through Bataille's particular flow of 'libidinal'- or 'base-materialism'. Bataille viewed Classical Materialism as another form of Idealism, elevating matter through an obsession with its ideal form.¹¹³ Base Materialism was his concept to disrupt this, which is unilateral difference operating out of the undifferentiated. Phenomena gathered under the label 'spirit' are spiritually segregated from matter, whilst remaining materially integrated.¹¹⁴ Unilateral difference is simultaneously an inclination to separations *and* a persistence to continuity. The human animal, then, valorises its autonomy as it rebels against nature. All the while, its body succumbs to natural tidal desires of material dissolution. Miller is relevant here, as *Tropic of Cancer* became a sacred book for Base Materialism, despite his 'surrender' to the phallic rigidity of misogyny, clutching his "bone on" in the face of anxiety, terror of nothing, and patriarchal fear of castration.¹¹⁵

When Miller "looks down into that crack" he does not see the "empty crack of the prematurely disillusioned man" but Arabian Zero, the sign from which mathematical worlds spring.¹¹⁶ Zero is utter continuity from which everything flows. Zero lures desire from the cage of man, onto death. Confronted with "that dark, unstitched wound" a deep fissure opens in his brain and Miller falls back on the rigid structures of Western civilisations based in 'osseology'.¹¹⁷ This is not simply the study of skeletons, but the heterogeneous distribution between matter and soft tissue, "between what is perdurant, dry, clean, formal

112 It is not that matter, let alone organic matter, sits in opposition to death, but that dead matter lies inside, as structure to the fluid body of the living. The organic matter that shrouds the living marks it out as a very rare type of matter, but materially indistinguishable from the entirety of the universal material body. This thought follows Friedrich Nietzsche's: "Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type." Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 168.

113 Georges Bataille, 'Materialism', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stockl, vol. 14, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 15.

114 Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*, 123.

115 Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 11.

116 Miller, 249.

117 Land writes that not only is Western civilisation intently engaged with the thanatology (study of death), but osseology (study of bones).

in opposition to what is volatile, wet, dirty, and formless."¹¹⁸ This is seen in the logical operator between matter and death where Land sites the examples of opposition between eternal form and perishable substance, celestial purity and terrestrial filth, divine architecture and base flow, harmonious essence and tides of soft pathology, intelligent form and decaying mass of the sensible body.¹¹⁹ Land continues: "The savage truth of delirium is that all ossification—far from being a metaphysical separation from decay—is a unilateral deviation from fluidity, so that even bones, laws, and monuments are crumbled and swept away by the deep flows of the Earth."¹²⁰

Thresholds in the body between rigidity and fluidity are not enough to authorise "the irrigational idol of *rigid differentiation*."¹²¹ This idol is contested by the scurf-edge of the current, where sediments and detritus move between solidity and liquefaction. That time is conceived as a river that flows from the past into the future is a patriarchal representation built up around the ego. Humanity is a damned-up reservoir of labour-power tugged-at by an irresistible urge to dissolution in the inhuman flow. These monolithic architectures of flow-management cannot resist whatever surges out of zero. As Miller cries: "I love everything that flows."¹²² This research, then, does not attempt to resist these surges but realises that the ideal and the impure are materially undifferentiable, allowing them to flow freely into and out of this body of work as *produced* tides. For to *love everything that flows*, you cannot be discriminating nor judgmental. This love extends to "all that is fluid, melting, dissolute and dissolvent, all the pus and dirt that in flowing is purified, that loses its sense of origin, that makes the great circuit toward death and dissolution. The great incestuous wish is to flow on, one with time, to merge the great image of the beyond with the here and now."¹²³ Obviously, as my body completes this circuit, it liquifies or becomes slag and cinders, literally becoming part of the earth. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari outline other machinations that identify the body as already part of the libidinal flows of matter *while still operating*.

118 Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 248; Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*, 126.

119 Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*, 126.

120 Land, 128.

121 Land, 128.

122 Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 258–59.

123 Miller, 259.

BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

Images petrified her, gave birth to her, produced her. A body was bestowed on her, a body a thousand times more beautiful than her own, a thousand times more body; she was visible, she radiated from the most unchangeable matter: at the centre of nullified thought she was the superior rock, the crumbly earth, without nitrogen, that from which it would not even have been possible to create Adam; she was finally going to avenge herself by hurling herself against the incommunicable with this grossest, ugliest body, this body of mud, with this vulgar idea that she wanted to vomit, that she was vomiting, bearing to the marvellous absence her portion of excrement.¹²⁴

Ann Hamilton, Richard Serra and Robert Smithson have all been ‘branded’ with a desire to shift the ground for sculptural experience to that of the body. Such a position requires or, at least requests, a viewer—if not also a performer—to submit-to or liquify into the flows of a sculptural ‘object’. We are recontextualising *the human* as materially indistinguishable from the earth. Obviously this also includes material drifts that extend out of and contract into the sculptural ‘object’. The body itself is no less an element of sculptural flow than is the mundane or sacred matter that make up the commonly perceived object. That the human is included within a sculptural ‘body’ is exemplified with Hamilton’s sense-deprived, embodied experience and “attendants,” operating in her work. Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* and Serra’s “splash” works desire the body to enter into the work. Pathways of shifting sculptural experience from plinth or wall to body-positions construes the sculptural as “ongoingness,” relative to ‘time’. The very possibility or impossibility, absence or presence of a body within a work acts as flux, fluidifying the conclusiveness of the work into undecidability. The body enters into machinic assemblage with the work. The body is a machine-in-labour or social-production, recognised in Deleuze and Guattari’s decoding of desire¹²⁵ and production, by way of the Body without

124 Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, trans. Robert Lambertson (New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), 63–64.

125 Though desire has been analysed philosophically at least since Plato, it enters modern academic consciousness through the seminal psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud. For Freud, desire is highly sexualised, an emotional deficit constituted in lack, that is, constituting an *absence* requiring gratification, through the desired object. Freud developed his model through the Oedipal myth, such that the ‘law’ against incest dictates that every object of desire is a surrogate for the original object, forever lost. See Sigmund Freud, ‘On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love’, in *On Sexuality*, ed. Angela Richards, Penguin Freud Library (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 258. Since the *original object* of desire has been lost through repression, and since the endless chain of substitute objects is only every that and nothing more, the replacement can never be the true object of unconscious desire.

Organs.

Thus, “loss returns as the impossibility of perfect satisfaction.” Catherine Belsey, ‘Desire in Theory: Freud, Lacan, Derrida’, *Textual Practice* 7, no. 3 (June 2008): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502369308582173>. In Freud’s time, prior to the ‘Sexual Revolution’, it was standard for desire to wash against the social customs of the gentile, whose courtship rituals revolved around delays and deferments. Since pleasure was so forbidden by the cultural order, illicit relationships were sought out for fulfilment of this desire, leading Freud to the conclusion that where desire survives on the plane of the unconscious, *prohibition promotes libido*.

Initially Jacques Lacan doesn’t drastically alter Freud’s conception of desire, but builds upon it with one major distinction. As with Freud, Lacan recognises desire to be unconscious, sexual, and unspoken or incompatible with speech. See Salman Akhtar, *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2009), 76. For Lacan this last point was crucial to psychoanalytic treatment. To be able to put a name to or speak of one’s desire in the presence of the Other was to bring *it into the world, into existence*. However, in articulating desire *in language*, there is always something lost in the naming, a leftover, a surplus. This surplus is described in Lacan’s distinction between desire, ‘need’, and ‘demand’. ‘Need’ is a biological appetite for satisfaction, verbalised through a ‘demand’ for love. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 287. Desire, for Lacan, is therefore the excess ‘demand’ that is leftover after the gratification of ‘need’. That is, after the need articulated in demand is satisfied, the need for love remains unsatisfied *as desire*. Desire can never be satisfied, and its reason for existing is not to find full satisfaction but to reproduce itself as desire. If we were to compare the two, Freud’s desire would be Lacan’s desire-to-desire.

Set up in opposition to these psychoanalytic perspectives on desire, understood as an insatiable lack regulated by Oedipal law, is the work of Deleuze and Guattari, preceded by shifts in Lacan’s thought to something similar. The schizoanalysis that Deleuze and Guattari formulate in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the first volume of which is pointedly called *Anti-Oedipus*, is a critique of psychoanalysis and its dualist assumptions. For Deleuze and Guattari desire is positive, assembled, machined, and productive, supporting the conception of life as material flow. See Alison Ross, ‘Desire’, in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr, Revised Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2010), 65. If psychoanalysis recognises desire as internal and impotent, schizoanalysis places it in the realm of the social as an experimental force, able to form connections and intensify bodies. Equally, it attempts to de-sexualise and de-individualise desire, as sexuality is only one flow within a torrent of assemblages, not a privileged subject-orientated infrastructure (Ross, 66.). For Deleuze and Guattari, what prevents desire from being understood as lack is *desiring-production*, a coupling of Freud with Marx to described the process of investing libidinal energy to produce the real, not just its representation. See Land, ‘Machinic Desire’, 321–22. Likewise, social-production, the other face of the same coin, produces what is taken to be the real by the investment of labour power. Desire, then, in schizoanalysis, is not a fantasy of lack broken up by dissolution and discharge, but a continuous plane of psychical and corporeal production of what is wanted. See Eugene Holland, ‘Desire + Social-Production’, in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr, Revised Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2010), 68. Lack is secondary in that it is created, planned and organised through social production. It doesn’t propagate production out of pre-existing need or lack. The deliberate creation of lack is a function of market economies that infiltrate themselves, creating

“

When we had our clothes back on, we were sent off in slow-moving files, hesitant groups, in the direction where the stupendous roar of machinery came from. Everything trembled in the enormous building, and we ourselves, from our ears to the soles of our feet, we were gathered into this trembling, which came from the windows, the floor, and all the clanking metal, tremors that shook the whole building from top to bottom. We ourselves became machines, our flesh trembled in the furious din, it gripped us around our heads and in our bowels and rose up to the eyes in quick continuous jolts. The further we went, the more of our companions we lost. In leaving them we gave them bright little smiles, as if all this were just lovely. It was no longer possible to speak to them or hear them. Each time three or four of them stopped at a machine.

Still, you resist; it's hard to despise your own substance, you'd like to stop all this, give yourself time to think about it and listen without difficulty to your heartbeat, but it's too late for that. This thing can never stop. This enormous steel box is on a collision course; we, inside it, are whirling madly with the machines and the earth. All together. Along with the thousands of little wheels and the hammers that never strike at the same time, that make noises which shatter one another, some so violent that they release a kind of silence around them, which makes you feel a little better.

...

It's sickening to watch the workers bent over their machines, intent on giving them all possible pleasure, calibrating bolts and more bolts, instead of putting an end once and

for all to this stench of oil, this vapor that burns your throat and attacks your eardrums from inside. It's not shame that makes them bow their heads. You give in to noise as you give in to war. At the machines you let yourself go with the two three ideas that are wobbling about at the top of your head. And that's the end. From then on everything you look at, everything you touch, is hard. And everything you still manage to remember more or less becomes as rigid as iron and loses its savour in your thoughts.

All of a sudden you've become disgustingly old.

All outside life must be done away with, made into steel, into something useful. We didn't love it enough the way it was, that's why. So it has to be made into an object, into something solid. The Regulations say so.

...

Existence was reduced to a kind of hesitation between stupor and frenzy. Nothing mattered but the ear-splitting continuity of the machines that commanded all men. At six o'clock, when everything stops, you carry the noise away in your head. I had enough noise to last me all night, not to mention the smell of oil, as if I'd been given a new nose and a new brain for all time.

By dint of renunciation I became, little by little, a different man . . . a new Ferdinand. It took several weeks. But then the desire to see people came back to me. Naturally not the factory hands, they were mere echoes and smells of machines like myself, lumps of flesh convulsed with vibrations.

”

Deleuze and Guattari redefine a life-to-energy relationship—in wresting a notion of desire away from Oedipal psychoanalysis—that everything is a machine such that organ-machines (organic lifeforms, e.g. a baby) are plugged into an energy-source-machines (flow producers, e.g. its mother’s breast).¹²⁶ For Deleuze and Guattari this conjoining is the actual mechanism of desire as desiring-machine. This conjoining is thought to be so unilateral and inseparable that there are no such thing as independent circuitries. Production is immediate consumption *and* a recording process without any pause or intervention.¹²⁷ They add that the recording process and the consumption directly influence more production within the process of production itself, such that *everything is production*: the production of productions, since everything is immediately consumed, consummated, and reproduced. Within the production of productions, the desiring-machine makes us an organism and the body is impacted from being structured in this way. An escape from this is the Body without Organs (BwO), the unproductive, the infertile, the unconsumable, and imageless.¹²⁸ The coupling of machines, every sound and production of a machine is unbearable to the BwO. The earth then is a full body, or *socius*, which includes elements of social-production, desiring-production, and the antiproducer, all coupled with and within process. Capital functions as the BwO for the capitalist being, both as the fluid and freezing substance of money which produces surplus as the BwO reproduces itself. For Deleuze and Guattari, Capital’s role and use is a reconstitution of the earth into a perverted, bewitched world, recoding the entire process of the production of desire such that desiring-machines emanate from it. For example, in capitalism, it appears as though it is from the womb of capital itself, not labour, that production issues.

The BwO is desire, it is that which one desires and by which one desires. And not only because it is the plane of consistency or the field of immanence of desire. Even when it falls into the void of too-sudden destratification, or into the proliferation of a cancerous stratum, it is still desire. Desire stretches that far: desiring one’s own annihilation, or desiring the power to annihilate. Money, army, police, and State desire, fascist desire, even fascism is desire. There is desire wherever there is the constitution of a BwO under one relation or another. It is a problem not of ideology but of pure matter, a phenomenon of physical, biological, psychic, social, or cosmic matter.¹²⁹

empty space. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 28.

126 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1.

127 Deleuze and Guattari, 4.

128 Deleuze and Guattari, 8-9. The Body without Organs is derived from Antonin Artaud’s, “The body is the body/it is all by itself/and has no need of organs/the body is never an organism/organisms are the enemies of the body.”

129 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 192.

Capital spreads virally, as money communicates addiction, replicating itself through the host whose desires it reprograms. It is always on the move “towards a terminal nonspace, melting the earth onto the body without organs.”¹³⁰

How then do I make myself? Does this research make itself a Body without Organs?

Emergency stop pressed! Machines halt—

Deleuze and Guattari write that the BwO is not a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of desires which you can never reach or attain because you are forever attaining it, an asymptote, a limit.¹³¹ Whereas psychoanalysis translates everything in phantasy,¹³² the BwO conversely is what remains when you take everything away, precisely the phantasy and symbols. The BwO is the *field of immanence* of desire where desire is a process of production without reference to and beyond the betrayal of lack, pleasure, and phantasy. The organism is not the body, or the BwO; it is a division on the BwO of coagulation and sedimentation in order that useful labour can be extracted. It imposes forms, functions, chains, order upon the BwO, whereas “the BwO is the glacial reality where the alluvations, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoiling that compose an organism occur.”¹³³ Thus what is required is an emptying out:

This is how it should be done. Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continua of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO.¹³⁴

Deleuze and Guattari urge caution in this becoming, as *dosage* is important. You use a very fine file, not a sledgehammer. The goal is not to drain yourself of organs but to wait for the momentary point of dismantling the organisation of the organs. The BwO reveals itself as connected desires, conjoined flows, continuous intensities, and too high a sedimentation rate leads to tumour and caricatures. The goal, then, is to empty out desire *from* the organism (human) *to*

130 Land, ‘Machinic Desire’, 339.

131 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 174–76.

132 The translation of *Anti-Oedipus* deploys the word ‘phantasy’ rather than ‘fantasy’, presumably to differentiate between Kleinian “phantasy”, which is an innate unconscious process, and Freudian “fantasy” which is conscious and deliberate.

133 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 184–85.

134 Deleuze and Guattari, 161.

the full body (earth) such that matter is released to other use in a pure fluid free state, flowing without dams across the surface of a full body.

ABSTRACT ENGINEERING

‘Pataphysics described a poetics of technical craft (*a-thetic tékhne*) in *Maw*, and indeed carries on into this research, though it is intensified in certain aspects such that a confluence is found between abstraction, the ‘bricoleur’, and the rigorously technical. This technical aspect is not entirely new to my practice though has been heightened through employment as a metallurgy technician at a School of Art and Design. The concept of the ‘bricoleur’ however, is familiar to my practice, as an inherited familial way of working. Claude Levi-Strauss writes in *The Savage Mind*:

The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand,’ that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.¹³⁵

Bricolage is the ‘methodology’ of my father and grandfathers, who come from farming communities of the Canterbury Plains and volcanic peninsula, at-home in humble workshops far from the entanglement of capital. Working in this way, a way *of* the land, is a perpetual apprenticeship to becoming-earth, marked by labour resonant with that of Heizer, assembling life from out of heavy metals, soils, sand, and stone in the processing of livestock. These animated clay figures work the land, as desired objects of the earth in persistent repetitive processing. Their workshops were light and open, made of wood but filled with dust, soil, and old hand tools. Everything was made from whatever was *around*, scavenged or salvaged. On the other hand, the engineers of the family are ‘pariahs’. Fleeing the land for the big cities, they die young, stained in a much darker way by their craft. Visiting my uncle’s engineering workshop in Melbourne, I remember it as a concrete bunker, tunnelled into the side of a hill. The front housed his shop, filled with custom made engineering equipment and motorcycle parts. Grease stained everything and a reek of volatile chemicals lingered. His dwelling was behind this, deeper into the earth, a twisted vision of stark modernism, filled with technological gadgets.

¹³⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

As an Art and Design metallurgy technician, I work somewhere between bricoleur and engineer. Art seems always to require inaccuracies and conjured processing, though the tools and raw materials are openly available. Yet a technician's 'status' within the academy is an unstable one, as technicians are excluded from what could be termed 'academic theoretical labour' twofold. Firstly, the actual academic machinery of reviewed research and 'teaching' (in the very strictest sense) are excluded within the 'job-description'. Technicians, along with administrative staff are 'professional' employees, while research and teaching are the prerogative of academic staff. Secondly, the 'world' of material processing affords a kind of freedom, rejecting aspects of academic 'rigour'. I am also mindful of Smithson's criticism concerning the lure of high modernist fetishization of industrial labour. Exemplary, perhaps, in navigating technical rigour is the Austrian artist, Walter Pichler. As Friedrich Achleitner writes when introducing the works of Pichler:

Pichler talks to his neighbours about the making of things, about tools and machines. Expertise is the bridge of communication; trust is founded on skills, which can be mutually verified. Farmers and craftsmen have an incorruptible eye in matters of fabrication. The handling of wood or metal, of a circular saw or welding equipment, circumvent bluffing. The city dweller, whose actions are never perfectly clear anyway, can prove his worth here. Face to face, no one can fool the other.¹³⁶

This disposition is perhaps paradoxical inasmuch as it requires one to work *as if* one is *not like* a technician. My example here is a performance work at the Auckland Art Gallery, within which I deployed an oxy-acetylene gas axe. It was commented by someone spectating, unaware of the irony, that "I looked like the real thing," meaning that I *as a practitioner* have to accept that I am genuinely a trained maker. My 'pataphysics bricolage' takes on the guise or *geist* of technological determinism, engineering manuals and experimental laboratory reports. These, in fact, became the orchestration of my initial project for the M. Phil, to be outlined in detail in Chapter 3, though I discuss the Lab Report as research method below in this chapter. The Lab Report documents experimentation, in the first instance as a method for notating *empirical* dimensions of material processes, but also in documenting a critical *hermeneutic* field which acts as the interpretive framework for the experimental procedures, and a *speculative* lost outcome of what might have been. These laboratory processes are not a searching for a desired ideal result, but a 'pataphysical accounting for the unexpected.



¹³⁶ Friedrich Achleitner, 'Against All Better Judgement', in *Drawing Sculpture Buildings* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 9.

Abstraction is emphasised or fore-grounded in Brian Massumi's *A user's guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and Manuel De Landa's *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, both of which were written in response to Deleuze and Guattari's two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Reading across all four texts, I have become intently aware of a line-of-flight (thinking) that escapes the interiority-obsession of academic philosophy, intensifying in the wild, outside the Institution. Though Massumi held a 'legitimate' philosophical position, De Landa is primarily a lecturer in architecture and an experimental filmmaker. His book focuses more on fluid dynamics, technology and entropy than on philosophy. Land writes of these two:

Both have contributed to the reinforcement of an intellectual convergence that will entirely recast vast swathes of theoretical endeavour, whilst anticipating theory's replacement by something else. Of course, this 'something else' is already happening: in their different ways De Landa and Massumi affirmatively register a new experimentalism in accelerating collision with crumbling sedimentations of traditional authority.¹³⁷

This replacement of theory by 'something else' obviously goes much further back. But let's explore Massumi and De Landa's direct influence first. Deleuze certainly held a university position, though Guattari was a Lacanian-trained psychoanalyst and political activist. The two have a fascinating relationship to the philosophical establishment. Mark Fisher writes that the academic lockdown of Deleuze and Guattari occurs in the following way: firstly install 'Deleuzianism' as a research project. Focus on *Difference and Repetition* as "the last moment you could pretend what Deleuze was doing was academic philosophy."¹³⁸ Turn Deleuze's work into 'respectable' philosophy. Systematically ignore Guattari and downgrade the whole idea of collective authorship. Fisher continues: "It's all OK provided you don't take it seriously, i.e., provided you don't *really* ask 'how do you make yourself a body without organs?' When they say 'sorcery' they're being metaphorical, right?"¹³⁹ Inside the academy you're not allowed to talk about practices of intensification, let alone engage in them. In Fisher's experience, what you are ceaselessly mandated to do is deconstruct your own position, be concerned with the politics of taste, and develop negotiated readings.

Due to the academic reconfiguring of Deleuze and Guattari's work and the "sneering digs" at 'academic theory' during the early 2000s blog philosopher

¹³⁷ Land, 'Machines and Technocultural Complexity: The Challenge of the Deleuze-Guattari Conjunction', 140.

¹³⁸ Fisher, 'Abstract Engineers'; Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004).

¹³⁹ Fisher, 'Abstract Engineers'.

boom, Fisher coins the term 'Abstract Engineers', that is, theory occurring outside the academy with a focus on programs, toolkits, or process. He cites a few examples to join Deleuze and Guattari: Baruch Spinoza—worked as a lens grinder, was banished from the Amsterdam synagogue, who possibly tried to assassinate him. Although his theory is obscure, he never held a university position, and his work is packaged as a manual or executable program for disassembly. The Situationist International—never held academic positions, funded their activities through temp work, and though mislabelled as 'art-types' were critical of 'art' as "relatively autonomous aesthetic production."¹⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan—again a clinical practitioner, chased out of the mainstream Psychoanalytic movement and, according to Fisher, much darker and nihilistic than your Cultural Studies professor might let on. Friedrich Nietzsche—deserted his university appointment out of utter contempt, wrote many of his programs for joyful wisdom and intensity plotting while itinerant. Eventually succumbing to madness easily attributed to tertiary syphilis, though Bataille attributes it to his philosophy: "'Man incarnate' must also go mad."¹⁴¹ Fisher's attribution is to something more malevolent "total nervous collapse when the AOE¹⁴² neuronics microcops took over." Though the other two figures of modernity, Freud and Marx, also completed their most important works in the clinic or in exile, respectively. Both require decoding to function as Abstract Engineers proper. 'Abstract' refers to a non-teleological practice of the *now*, and 'Engineering' to overhauling perception of the world. Here is an extract, morsel or fragment of 'pataphysics bricolage in the guise of Abstract Engineering:

¹⁴⁰ Fisher.

¹⁴¹ Georges Bataille, 'Nietzsche's Madness', trans. Annette Michelson, *October*, Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing, 36 (Spring 1986): 44; Fisher, 'Abstract Engineers'.

¹⁴² AOE in my lexicon refers to area of effect, the splash damage radius from channelled firestorms or explosive and chemical weapon fallout, however searching AOE in relation to Fisher will lead you into the mines of 90s CCRU blog space, an assault of hyperstitions about The Architectonic Order of the Eschaton and time war. "It won't be long now, will it."

LAB REPORT WEEK 2: TURNING

Week: 2	Experiment: Machining Critical field: Walter Pichler and Georges Bataille	Office Use Only
Materials: Full Description	38mm Brass round bar, tapered length of Jarrah 1000x50-30mm	
Dimensions/scale	1000x50mm	
Equipment used	Chevpac SSB-7MK Bench Lathe, Hafco AL-356 Centre Lathe, Nova DVR XP Wood Lathe	
Processes	Turn Jarrah length into a ritual club Learn how to use metal lathe Grind tools for metal lathe Turn brass round bar into pommel for the end of club Learning to turn a thread (make a screw/bolt), then thread the tang of the brass pommel. Turn end of pommel into conical form	
Outcome	HSS lathe tools Threaded aluminium round bar Brass Pommel threaded and shaped Jarrah club	
Comment on success/ what you learnt	The learning process was/is steep and long. First learning how to run the lathe properly as this is knowledge that has been lost in the workshop. Then learning how to grind HSS tools for use on the lathe, each has specific angles and geometry it must meet to be successful. Then learning how to use these tools with the correct rotational speeds and feeds to get an acceptable result. Finally learning how to cut a thread, as well as all the mathematics that this involves, one had to open ancient Machinery's Handbook and scour immense tables for information.	
Anomalies	Breaking the lathe, a flying club, brass shavings, a constant smell (aura) of Kerosene and Way oil	

Segment Two:

This Gift was conceived of close to two years ago and has only just come into fruition. This puts it in an odd place as its theoretical field was considered alongside Bataille and Pichler in their ritual aspect. However, the material process was not considered until recently. Machining is a stock removal fabrication technique, that is, it starts with a piece of stock and removes or cuts to form the desired outcome. This process has some alignment with the theoretical field of loss that both inhabit.

Loss is also central to ritualistic practices and as such the club and the process of creating the parts of the club both sit within and are informed by the theoretical framework. If it is then a representation of this (though I am unsure), a primitive club is fairly explicit and lacks the nuance of Pichler's early machines for exit, having more to do with Bataille's account of Aztec ceremony.

For the wooden part of the club, a square section of wood is put into a wood lathe so that one end is gripped in a chuck and the other end is held in place by a live centre. A speed is selected for the spindle (and chuck) to spin at, in this case 1500 RPM. Then a chisel is placed on the tool rest and advanced into the wood so that it takes on a uniform rounded shape or the form of the tool in the case of cuts.

The Metal lathe works in a similar way except that the tool is almost never held by hand. It is instead attached to a tool post that slides along a bed or way controlled by hand cranked wheels or handles. This allows the tool to be moved into, along, or advanced at a predetermined angle towards the surface of the stock. Different tool shapes and orientations allow for many different operations, such as facing: smoothing an end of the stock so that it is perpendicular to the sides; resizing: moving a tool along the surface of a stock to remove a thin later and reduce its diameter; Threading: running a 'V' Shaped tool along the surface of the stock at a rate that is in ratio to the speed at which the stock is spinning to create a helix groove in the surface that after a number of passes becomes a thread; as well as a number of shaping operations.

Segment Three:

In the process of these operations, I had the club fly out of the lathe spinning at 2000-3000 RPM, as its centre of mass was slightly out of line with the centre of rotation. While learning to thread, I also crashed the tool post into the spindle of the lathe as I was unable to remove the half nut from the lead screw, this caused all the gears to lock up as the motor tried its hardest to keep rotating. This resulted in great terror and half a day of realigning gears so that they again meshed properly.

Some interesting by-products were the shavings that came off the brass piece, a little pile of gold quite at odds with the environment that they existed in and the use they had been separated from. Also, because the metal slide surfaces of the lathe need to be constantly lubricated and cleaned, Kerosene fumes seep into all of my clothing and my hands are slick and oiled. One really becomes to feel like a machinist instead of just playing at it.

It would have been nicer if the process was straight forward, but the three weeks' worth of knowledge and experimenting have been invaluable and very enjoyable. There is really a sense of work here, dirty, skilled, industrialised work that

reminds me of Bataille's text on the abattoir or some of D+G's more engineering focused writing.

The outcome of the club, even slightly unfinished has an interesting flow between parts. The wooden end is primitive, slightly warped and bowed, not pristinely finished, and the weaponised protrusions from it comparatively crude. Whereas the pommel is of fine production, glistening brass, perfectly centred and shaped. The question that arises is: how did these two parts come together? Throughout the history of warfare old or even ancient weaponry has been revived into service or repurposed into ritual weaponry through the restoration of missing parts and the addition of new ones. These additions either give it a ceremonial meaning in the sense of jewelled and gilded hilts and scabbards or a practical one when modifications are made to bring it up-to-date with current technology. There is a haunting here, basically a "nostalgia for lost futures" where the primitive club was still an appropriate weapon, ceremonial or otherwise, alongside the existence of the modern accurate centre lathe.

HAUNTING

"I am the depository for the dead. There are dead people who speak through me. . . . I am a burial ground, because we haven't been able to bury them in the earth."¹⁴³

... a nostalgia for a people and a soil you have never known, but which is in your blood, mysteriously there in your blood, like the sense of time or space, a fugitive, constant value to which you turn more and more as you get old, which you try to seize with your mind, but ineffectually...¹⁴⁴

This passage from *Tropic of Cancer* reeks of 'Blut und Boden', but accurately outlines personal desires of loss, of a bodily haunting. A large part of the drive to make that saturates this research finds its origin in this haunting, some hint of ancestral knowledge that I am trying to revivify or bring out of time to the surface. This connects to an unusual positioning of time within my practice, where I am placed as a limit on a continuum of historic knowledge or practice. Instead of a making *into* the future which appears to be the contemporary norm, I am making *with* the past. Gaston Bachelard describes a similar notion when writing about the temporal dimension of his ancestral forest, "... forests reign in the past. I know, for instance, that my grandfather got lost in a certain wood. I was told this, and I have not forgotten it. It happened in a past before I was born. My oldest memories, therefore, are a hundred years old, or perhaps a bit more."¹⁴⁵ An attempt was made to diagram this with the following collection of symbols. Where the 'C' is some *Arche* or originary event. From here, the field is littered with a flow of historical making that is broken by '|' which stands at my current position as limit, a cut in the echoes between past and future.



¹⁴³ 'Writing and Political Oppression', *In Our Time* (United Kingdom: BBC, 8 April 1999), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00545g8>.

¹⁴⁴ Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 202.

¹⁴⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 188.

Smithson too writes something of this in one of his earlier texts, ‘Entropy and the New Monuments’, where he discusses his contemporaries as bringing “to mind the Ice Age rather than the Golden Age, . . . instead of causing us to remember the past . . . seem to cause us to forget the future.”¹⁴⁶ Likewise in ‘A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey’, he writes of “memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures,” and “did I leave the real future behind in order to advance into a false future? Yes, I did. Reality was behind me at that point...”¹⁴⁷ These thoughts coalesce tightly with Mark Fisher’s re-conception of ‘Hauntology’.

In his text *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida¹⁴⁸ coins a puncept ‘hauntology,’ a homophonic pun on the philosophical concept of ontology, the study of what can be said to exist.¹⁴⁹ Hauntology was Derrida’s successor concept to the previous ‘trace’ and ‘*différance*’, and just as those earlier terms, was a reference to the way nothing can be said to enjoy a purely positive existence. All that exists is only possible because of a whole sequence of absences that proceed and encompass it, which allows for its readability and coherence.¹⁵⁰ What hauntology adds that these previous concepts lacked is a questioning of a thing’s placement in time, distinguished by *Spectres of Marx* often including the line from *Hamlet*, “the time is out of joint.” Martin Häggulund argues that all of Derrida’s work could be seen to be related to this concept of broken time, “Derrida’s aim is to formulate a general ‘hauntology’ (*hauntologie*), in contrast to traditional ‘ontology’ that thinks being in terms of self-identical presence. What is important about the figure of the spectre, then, is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*”¹⁵¹

146 Smithson, ‘Entropy and the New Monuments’, 11.

147 Robert Smithson, ‘A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flann (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 72.

148 I agree with Fisher that Derrida is a “frustrating thinker” and that his circumlocutions are a disintensifying influence. Fisher goes on to write that deconstruction, Derrida’s philosophical project, is a pious cult of indeterminacy, which at its most egregious made a courtly virtue of avoiding any definitive claims. Marked by a pathology of scepticism, hedging, frailty of purpose, and ordered compulsory doubt. Deconstruction elevates particular academic modes of practice such as “Heidegger’s priestly opacity, literary theory’s emphasis on the ultimate instability of any interpretation – into quasi-theological imperatives.” Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 16–17.

149 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994), 202.

150 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 18.

151 Martin Häggulund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 82.

Is hauntology just a figure of speech or a necromantic attempt to resurrect supernatural agency? Häggulund writes that the way out of this obstruction is to think of hauntology as “*the agency of the virtual*,” while the spectre is not a supernatural entity in actuality but that which acts without physically existing.¹⁵² Viewed through the thinkers of modernity, we can see different modes of this spectral causality. In relation to Marx, the world is governed by fractional banking and abstracted finance which is clearly a space where virtualities are potent, capital itself being the most ominous ‘spectre of Marx.’ The psychoanalysis of Freud is also a ‘science of ghosts’, namely how revenants spawn from reverberant events in the psyche. In Freudian relations, both mourning and melancholia are about loss, where the former is languid, agonizing withdrawal of libido from the lost object, in the latter libido remains clinging to what has disappeared. Haunting then is a failed mourning. The dead remain present, unable to be exorcised with proper totality. In employing and reversing another figure of speech, there is a refusing to give up the ghost, or refusal of the ghost to give up on us.¹⁵³ However, for Fisher, that which is at stake in postmodern hauntology is not the disappearance of a particular object, but the vanishing of a tendency, a virtual trajectory.

Fisher reemploys the term hauntology in its second “(un)life” in the 2000s, prompted by electronic musical artists such as Philip Jeck, Burial, the Ghost Box label, and the Caretaker. Of course, this does have something to do with them being ghostly but is more of a spectral aesthetic, where these musicians are confronting the failure of the future to materialise. Fisher claims that by 2005 music was no longer futuristic, and was no longer able to evoke a strange and dissonant future.¹⁵⁴ ‘Futuristic’ became like gothic, another set of concepts, affects, and associations. By this point, music is no longer innovative, such that we are living in Franco Berardi’s “after the future,” where what haunts you is no longer the past but the lost futures the twentieth century taught you to anticipate. This ‘obviously’ has links to Alexander Kojève’s or Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history,” where social imagination deteriorates as politics becomes administration of an established capitalist system. Postmodernism, the cultural logic of late capitalism, is the inability to find forms adequate to the now, or anticipate new futures. For postmodern cultural output, the future is experienced as a haunting presence, as a motivating vector conditioning and imposing on the present. The music mentioned above does not so much mourn the failure of a future-to-come into being, but the disappearance of this effective virtuality, seen in album titles such as *Sadly, The Future Is No Longer What It Was*. This music was at the heart of a culture-dominated “nostalgia mode,”

152 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 18.

153 Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 120.

154 Mark Fisher, ‘What Is Hauntology?’, *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 16.

a pastiche and reiteration incapable of conjuring representations of our own current experience.¹⁵⁵ This digital music is accompanied by a signature presence of vinyl crackle which renders time as an audible materiality and represents degraded memory.¹⁵⁶

Fisher writes that crackle, particularly in the music of Burial, is “materialist sorcery” which suggests a city haunted not by the near future but by the ache of a future just out of reach.¹⁵⁷ The thread used to be a homesickness for the past, but has become the impossibility of the present, no longer a longing to get *to* the past, but the inability to get *out* of it. “Isn’t, in fact, theoretically pure anterograde amnesia the postmodern condition par excellence? The present – broken, desolated is constantly erasing itself, leaving few traces.”¹⁵⁸ The origin is out-of-joint. This haunting allows us to travel back in time, and the ghosts to move forward in a kind of possession. For these artists, anachronisms and dyschronia arising from such possessions are integral to their methodology, where the joins in the audio are too discernible, the samples too jagged, for the music to sound like refurbished artefacts.¹⁵⁹ What is built from this is a “reservoir of collective unconscious material.”¹⁶⁰ My practice dwells in this “postmodern impasse” where the work doesn’t really deceive the viewer that it is something *archaic*, but simply invokes a past. In doing so its ‘things’ mark out our distance from practice, destroying the illusion that we are co-present with what we are experiencing. I do not make for the Non-Future as it is not for us. Nick Land—ever the joyous doomsayer of capital—would say that the contagion of capital from the future has already taken over.¹⁶¹ Likewise, there is not really a ‘now’ in this work, not anymore. A drive to make can only ripple out of the past.

Geological time haunts forward as earthen-desire to make, opening to use the flows that multiply across its surfaces. The human is, perhaps, nothing other than a being-possessed of desire calling upon it, such that geo-time can only do what it does. No other position is possible. Capital reaches backwards, from the future, as seismic shockwaves, destabilising the ground plane as ridged schist jolts through alluvial deposits. The following chapter describes these deposits and artefacts, those that bubble through when torrents of earthen desire overflow, venting from cracks in geo-time.

155 Mark Fisher, ‘The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology’, *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 5, no. 2 (2013): 45.

156 Fisher, ‘What Is Hauntology?’, 18; Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 98.

157 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 98.

158 Theoretically pure anterograde amnesia is a condition where sufferers do not commit new things to memory, but can remember things from the distant past. Fisher, 113.

159 Fisher, 137.

160 Fisher, 138.

161 Land, ‘Machinic Desire’, 337–38.

CHAPTER THREE



LEITOURGIA
(λειτουργία)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the creative works realised—and unrealised—during candidature. Accounts of the completed works draw from the preceding chapters, in my desire for temporal moments of becoming-chthonic, becoming-earth. These include works that make-room-for, or clear the way for, libidinal earth as well as those that present openings to the earth. Those things un-completed, along with the ‘failures’, reverberate with Bataille’s ‘uselessness’, and Agamben’s profanation of the unprofanable.

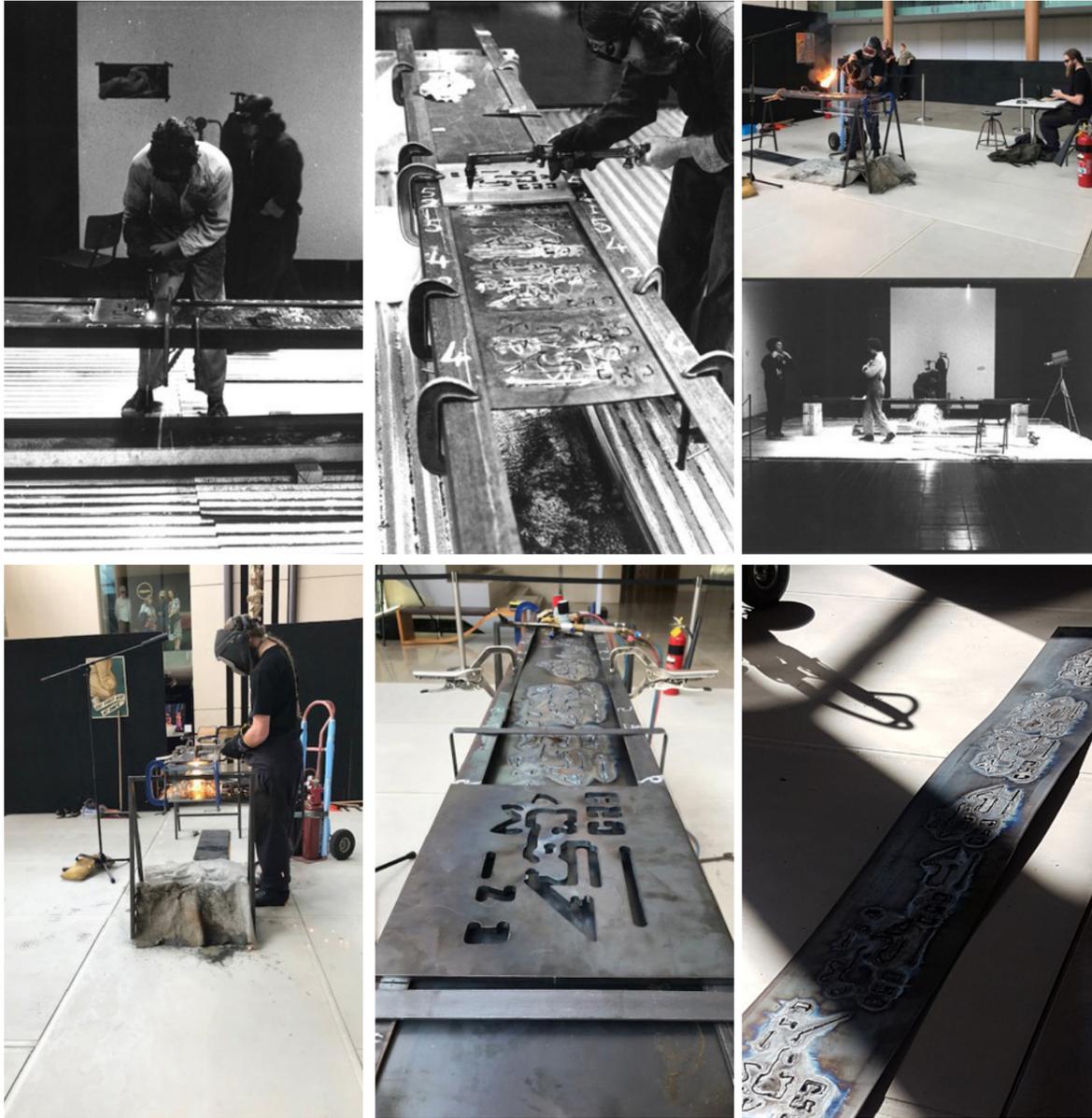
PREQUEL - ‘SUPERIMPRESSION’

The beginnings of this research were prefigured by the restaging of a performance shortly before the research commenced in earnest. As part of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tāmaki’s exhibition ‘GROUNDSWELL: Avant Garde Auckland 1971-1979’, Kieran Lyons’s work *Superimpression, 1974* was re-staged, alongside other performance or conceptual art from this moment of transformation in the art of Auckland.¹⁶² This work involved two “metalworkers” repeatedly cutting into steel the logo for ‘E-Z-Gro’, a fictitious business. They did their ‘labouring’ between games of cards, while a salesperson spouted business jargon to convince the crowd to be branded with the ‘E-Z-Gro’ logo.¹⁶³ Though this was performed in 1974, the curator went to considerable lengths to retain authenticity to the original work, with one of the original performers undertaking his role again. However, the roles of the metalworkers were filled by Oliver Roake and myself. This work was significant, if not pivotal, for me, as this was my inaugural performance piece. It coincided with my ‘apprenticeship’ at AUT University, learning to be a metalwork technician, after having transferred from a background in furniture manufacturing.

The reperforming of a work, over 40 years after it was initially staged, leads to many questions concerning authenticity and purpose, model and copy. In material terms, we examined the 1974 documentation—mainly photography and Lyons’ notes—to set up the ‘workshop’ to approximate, as much as possible, the original. Though, a number of elements were reengineered to avoid damaging the originals. Inclusion of replica artefacts destabilises the ground of authentic retelling, especially as art at this time had ‘conceptual’ leanings, rejecting physical objects *per se*, for exhibition. This flowed into the gestures of the performance itself: how closely should the work follow the original, and could it reflect the changes in attitude of corporate structures and public reception? This was highlighted by an awkwardness both Oliver and I felt, within the performance. We were informed by Geoff Chapple, the original performer, that the original metalworkers were loud and boisterous. We are not. Every now and again, we would let out a half-hearted “Snap,”

¹⁶² Natasha Conland, ‘Groundswell: Avant-Garde Auckland 1971-1979’, Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tāmaki, accessed 29 May 2021, <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/whats-on/exhibition/groundswell-avant-garde-auckland-1971-79?q=%2Fwhats-on%2Fexhibition%2Fgroundswell-avant-garde-auckland-1971-79#about>.

¹⁶³ Kieran Lyons, ‘Superimpression, 2019 (1974)’, Kieran Lyons, accessed 29 May 2021, <https://kieranlyons.uk/index.php/work/superimpression-2019-1974/>.



while playing cards. Though, this was more 'unnatural' than our usual quiet talking and diligent material processing. Performing the work left me uneasy, though I was intrigued by how fascinated people were to watch us complete relatively mundane metalworking tasks, and how these tasks were transformed when taken out of the context of a workshop environment.

THE GIFT

The research began ‘in earnest’ with the first set of works that went under the title, *The Gift*. *The Gift* asked for the making of a series of ‘gifts’ for philosophers, thinkers, or makers, where what supposedly most concerned this research about their ‘thinking’ was brought into the metallurgy processing of a ‘gift’. This was thought of as *rapid experimentation*, which allowed for the learning of techniques through a *tekhne* related—via structural or semantic resonance—with each thinker’s ‘thinking’. Ten small objects were developed, through ten technical exercises. Tangential complications were brought in through Jacques Derrida’s notion of the *impossibility* of the unconditional gift, and Martin Heidegger’s writing on Aristotle’s ‘four causes’ of human making. In *Given Time*, Derrida sets out the apparent irresolvable paradox of ‘giving’. Is giving possible without entering into a circuit of exchange, such that a gift’s giving establishes obligation or debt?¹⁶⁴ He posits that the only ‘true’ gift, as such, is one a ‘giver’ doesn’t know they are giving, and a ‘receiver’ doesn’t know they are receiving, such that no compensation—or exchange—needs to be given in return.

Derrida’s *gift* is considered alongside Heidegger’s transposing of Aristotle’s four causes, discussed in Heidegger’s ‘The question concerning technology’.¹⁶⁵ His example is that of making a silver chalice. Aristotle positions human production as stemming from four causes arranged in a hierarchy that begins with matter, then form, purpose (*telos*) and concludes in human agency (producer). The human producer is placed at the pinnacle. For Aristotle, the producer has a purpose in mind (a ritual), conceived as form to satisfy that purpose (a chalice), made of a material suitable for forming (silver). Heidegger acknowledges this schema of four causes, but asks them to be reconceived in something like a reversed order in terms of giving, and *thanking*. It is not that the silver, chalice and liturgy need to thank the human for their coming into being, but rather, it is the form that thanks the material, the ritual then thanks the form and the human who thanks all three for their giving.

With this initial project, we are able to consider the permeability of materials, forms, purposes and agency: for example, stone forming an altar for ritual

164 See Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I, Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

165 See Martin Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

sacrifice. It is only because stone opens itself to the capacity to be worked and holds rigid structure that the form of an altar is possible. Likewise, it is not that form is beholden to the function of ritual, but that form allows for ritual to have substance, and give thanks to the stone. Lastly, the maker gathers (*logos*) into communion the stone, altar, and sacral practice, giving thanks to materiality, to form, and to *telos*. Each of the ten ‘gifts’ and their technical exercises was accompanied by a dossier or Lab Report (as mentioned in Chapter 2), which detailed, firstly, the empirical dimensions of the experiment, followed by a section which discussed the relations between the critical field of the ‘thinking’ and the experimental field. Lastly, there was a speculative segment, concerning what might have happened, or unexpected outcomes. Hence, the elusive or philosophical engagements with the field or framing of this first project is to be contrasted with the technical, prosaic empirical record of materials and processes. The aim was to explore these extremes of working, as the very enactment of a research process.

The first gift was made for Donna Haraway. It considered the field of technofeminism in her *A Cyborg Manifesto* and Laboria Cuboniks *Xenofeminism*, explored through the rudimentary technical process of rolling and bending.¹⁶⁶ I found this technical process to be a difficult terrain. Perhaps because this was the initial ‘exercise’, I was unsure how even ‘wild’ experimentation needed to proceed. What was formed out of it was a rather simplistic aluminium framed cube, with rolled lead ‘skins’ stretched over its structure. This came literally to *represent* Haraway’s three structuring fields of the twentieth century, that allow the post-human Cyborg Myth. These are the boundaries between animal and human, through Evolutionary Biology, animal-human and machine, through complex machines, and physical and nonphysical through microelectronic physics. High-tech culture thus creates a challenge to the antagonistic dualism of the Western tradition, leading to the forming of a chimeric, monstrous world of fusions between animal and machine. Instead of thanking the thinking, important for this research, this first ‘gift’ simply represented ragged scraps of lead-hide from some fusional organic-machine hybrid. Notes from the lab report show that a fusional process, like forge welding, may have had better technical resonance with the critical field to be explored.

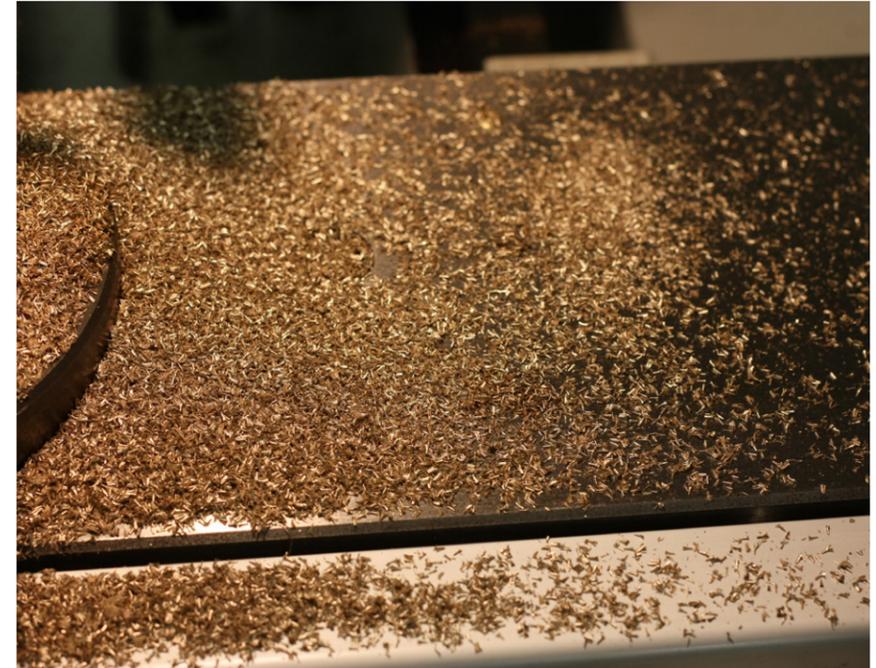
166 Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Laboria Cuboniks, ‘Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation’, *Laboria Cuboniks* (blog), accessed 9 June 2019, <https://laboriacuboniks.net/manifesto/xenofeminism-a-politics-for-alienation/>.



The second gift exploited the technical practice of machining or turning, that is, using a lathe to round precision objects or tools. This gift was for George Bataille. I thought of it as a ritual curiosity that would sit on his desk, alongside the image of *Lingchi* (slow process, or death by a thousand cuts). This gift emerged as a Jarrah club with a brass pommel, both of which were made on lathes using the process of stock removal. Stock removal consists of scraping the surface of the part with a tool made of a harder material, such that the part takes on the form of the tool. Shards and slivers of wood or metal fly off the piece as it is spinning. These chips or swarf are normally removed or recycled, but in and of themselves make for a tactile collection of refuse. This technique was brought into the orbit of Bataille, as what he has given me is a radically altered view of loss, a view that centres around ritual practice. Such considerations of practice *elevate* those processes which sacrifice vast swathes of time, energy, or matter to some summoning or destruction.

The process of learning to work a metal lathe was not straightforward, as there was no other technician in the workshop who could teach me. I thus relied on the *Machinery's Handbook*, an engineering taxonomy of collated knowledge, tables, diagrams, and calculations, resembling, for me, some Kabbalah text.¹⁶⁷ This

¹⁶⁷ Erik Oberg, *Machinery's Handbook: A Reference for the Mechanical Engineer, Designer, Manufacturing Engineer, Draftsman, Toolmaker, and Machinist*, ed. Christopher McCauley, 27th ed. (New York: Industrial Press, 2004).

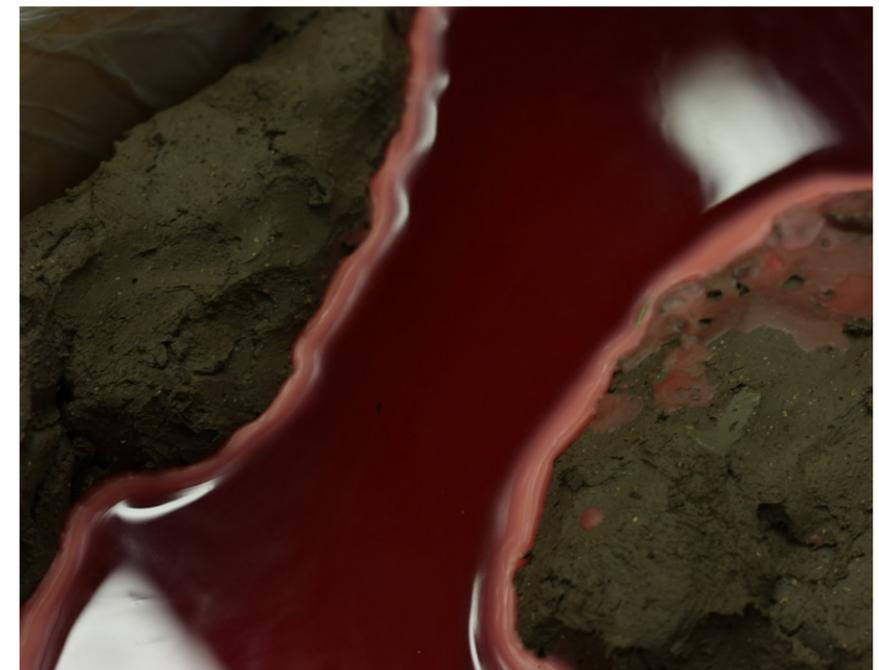


hermeneutics was not without destructive character, as I once broke the lathe by running it into itself. On another occasion, the club flew out at me from its fastenings. Both of these hazardous episodes required me to spend much time with the machine, much longer than these rapid-making exercises had allowed for. In effect, this created the ‘operating system’ of an organ-machine plugged into a desiring-machine, produced from out of the misfirings and breakdowns of the machinic feedback loop. Eventually, after three weeks, I began to take on the odour of kerosene and way-oil, and felt the aura that surrounds machinists. I wrote in my report: “One really becomes to feel like a machinist, instead of just playing at one.” Bataille, writing about slaughterhouses, notes that the general population are entirely inconsiderate of those marked in such a way by their trade. They are, instead, wrapped up within their own insatiable need for cleanliness.¹⁶⁸ The machinist, like the butcher or the farmer, is marked by the stench of work, by base matter that they must interact with, in order that it be turned over to capital flow. The other outcome from this gift were three High Speed Steel lathe tools, custom made by me, in order to complete the task at hand. The tools, themselves, become artefacts of production.

The third gift was to be made using lost-wax investment casting, and to be given to Henry Miller. The work was to play with the figures of dripping machismo, through Nick Land’s “Fluent Bodies” and Boccioni’s *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, a bronze figure of seepage, of the liquefaction of the body. Lost-wax casting clearly resonates with this kind of ‘thought’, as it repeatedly relies on the transformation of materials from solids to liquids and back. Wax is melted into form, and then carved. Wet plaster is cast around this form and then left to set. The wax is melted out of the form, while bronze ingots are melted into a crucible. Finally, metal is poured into the mould to harden. Thresholds between rigidity and fluidity are consistently crossed, resulting in an ‘irrigational’ idol.¹⁶⁹ But such an idol of rigid differentiation is condemned to give way to the deluge that preceded it. Unfortunately, this gift never passed beyond a wax sculpture. At the time of its making, the workshop was not equipped to support bronze castings. This deficiency has since been rectified, and I have completed multiple bronze castings for students. Though I did not return to this gift for its completion. The detritus from these castings, however, are held closely as keepsakes, waste materials that harbour secrets to libidinal earth. Sand casting, which was to be gift six, for Michael Heizer, also falls into this category, something that couldn’t be completed at the time, though a technique that has since been completed for student works, after acquisition of the furnace. Sand casting differs from investment-casting, using a solid pattern to mould sand. This pattern is not lost, but reused.

168 Georges Bataille, ‘Slaughterhouse’, trans. Annette Michelson, *October* 36 (Spring 1986): 10.

169 Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*, 128.



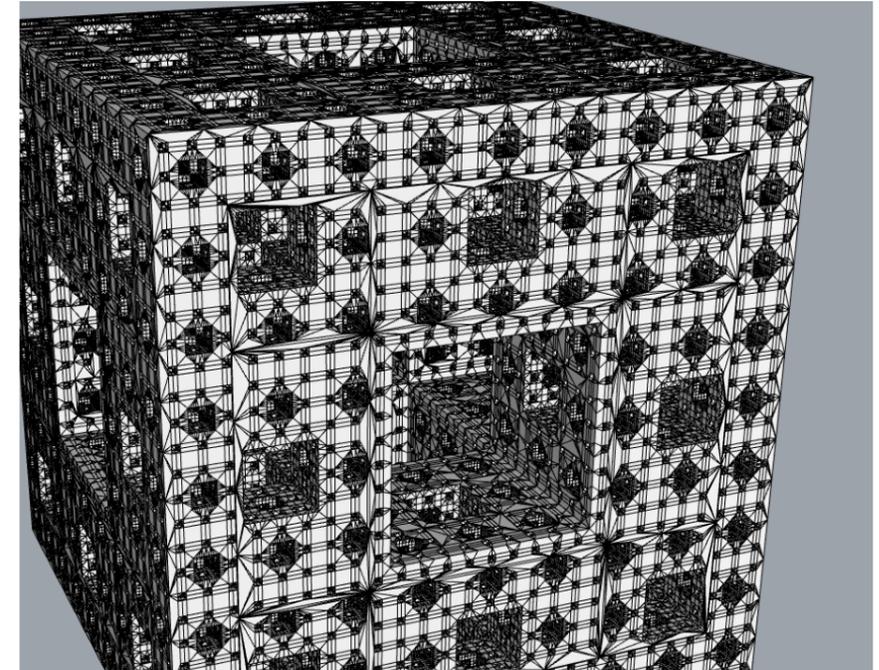
The fourth gift was intended to be a Menger or Sierpensky Sponge, made using Selective Laser Melting (SLM) to form this mathematical object, that is more than a surface, and less than a solid. The Menger Sponge is discussed in both Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*¹⁷⁰ and Land's *The Thirst for Annihilation*.¹⁷¹ It gives a fractal mathematical representation to smooth space, and 'The Composition of Beings'. A Menger Sponge is an equation for describing a cube, that is split into 27 different cubes, of which the middle 7 cubes are removed. This is stage n^1 of the equation. n^2 follows, in that you then take the remaining 20 cubes, split them into 27 and again remove the middle 7, repeating this to n^∞ . As the equation approaches n^∞ , the volume of the cube approaches zero, and its dimensions 'sit' somewhere between 2 and 3. For Land, this implies that bodies are not volumes but coastlines, riven through with holes: how many orifices does the human body have?¹⁷² With the modelling software with which I am familiar, I was only able to map the equation of an n^4 , with the intention of having this made of metal using SLM. SLM is a process that takes metal sand and melts it together with an ytterbium fiber laser, such that layers of metal are built up to create the modelled shape. This highly technical robotic machining fits well within Nick Land's milieu, and so this gift was meant for him. However, this 'giving' also ended in non-completion, perhaps ironically due to its capital intensiveness, its cost; ironic given that it is for the capital accelerationist, Land. As well, working in this way reinforced my distrust and ambivalence for digital processes. Creativity tends to elude me when facing the grey screen. This may well be due to such 'making' not being hands-on. Possibility for human error is removed from fabrication and is placed solely in the drawing. With my research, I have found that the most engaging assemblages have been ancillary, which digital processing lacks for the most part, unless errors occur. Mistakes hide within rigid operation.

At this point, after two failures in processing, theoretical frameworks and deepening influences started to drop away. The processing became much more frantic, raw, in an attempt to have something to 'show' by way of attaining experience with techniques, with or without genuine philosophical alignments to the actual project of the gift. Gift Five, then, was created using the process of cold forming, or sheet metal work. All the information I could find about how to do this process came from two famous metal shapers, one from Australia and one from Austria. Panel beating or metal shaping in this way is now mostly absent from industrial processing, when it comes, for example, to car body work, as machines sublimate sheet metal fabrication. However, fine silver and copper vessels

170 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 567.

171 Nick Land, 'The Labyrinth', in *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 160–83.

172 Land, 161.



are still raised in this way by various craftspeople. For the most part, the piece being worked-on is worked between two surfaces. In the cast of an English wheel, this is between a rolling-wheel and a shaped-die on the bottom. By hand, this can also be between a hammer and an anvil, dolly, or stump. The hammer or wheel puts pressure on the sheet to conform to the shape of the object below. The gift created was a sheet steel bowl, for holding the brass swarf made during Gift Two. This was done by first making a shrinking stump out of a lump of wood. This is a piece of wood that has had a dish hammered or machined into it. This allows for a cavity to sit under a flat piece of metal that gives its form to the metal when hammered. This shrinking is repeated until the initially flat piece of metal resembles a clam shell, at which point the edge is hammered flat to form a uniform round edge.

Gift Seven also failed to launch at the time, or rather misfired for a slightly more pressing reason. This gift was to be using the familiar technique of forging or blacksmithing, that is, heating steel alloys to a malleable temperature with either a forge or oxy-fuel torch, and hammering them into shape around an anvil or die. This process was chosen in reverence of the smiths of Holey Space. Lacking their tools, their commitment, the framework and positioning, the gift was always going to be a poor imitation. As I do not have access to a forge, the plan was to make this gift for Deleuze and Guattari using an Oxy-Acetylene torch. To make this more efficient, I ordered a rosebud heating tip for the setup we had here in the workshop, only to find out when looking up the settings that we had been running our Oxy-Acetylene torch in a flagrantly unsafe manor. Basically, we were drawing too fast from the small cylinders we were using, causing acetone to be released with the fuel, degrading all rubber parts along the way, including all the seals. This caused malfunction, instability, and the possibility of explosion. This instigated a Health and Safety lockdown of the equipment, requiring explanatory reporting and an eventual switch to an Oxy-LPG system which has become a frequently utilised tool in current workings.

Gifts Eight and Nine, constituting experimentation in welding and milling, were not explored at the time, as time had run out, the flow had been lost. Like these other processes, they have now been explored deeply with welding now being a skill I have a better grasp on than many of the others. Milling has only been explored recently, again due to tooling limitations. Finally Gift Ten involved the umbrella process of “fabrication,” which, for metalworking, includes a number of the previously outlined processes but particularly welding and gas cutting. This work I made as a half-remembered version of the E-Z-Gro stencil, done by organ-machine instead of by computer-machine. What was summoned was a 10mm thick piece of square steel plate with the form of a sketched map cut into and through its surface. Lines on the plate tell of the shakiness and inexperience of the operator.

These ten gifts were intended to be created over ten weeks but stretched out to between four to five months, with many remaining incomplete. The original intention for their making, however, remained intact as I was rapidly given a toolkit of techniques, developed out of anti-production, to be employed in the processing of matter. These became a set of engineering names that I could conjure up for the working of flows and developing of potentials. Once I was able to name and understand the processes of working earth, the base flow of earthen processing became open to me. Or rather, I was opened outwards to earthen processing. More complex processing, utilising more energy, redirecting more flow became possible as knowledge was gained and processes were able to be fused and mixed. This actioning was also a seeding of transversal desire as my confidence in working the earth increased.



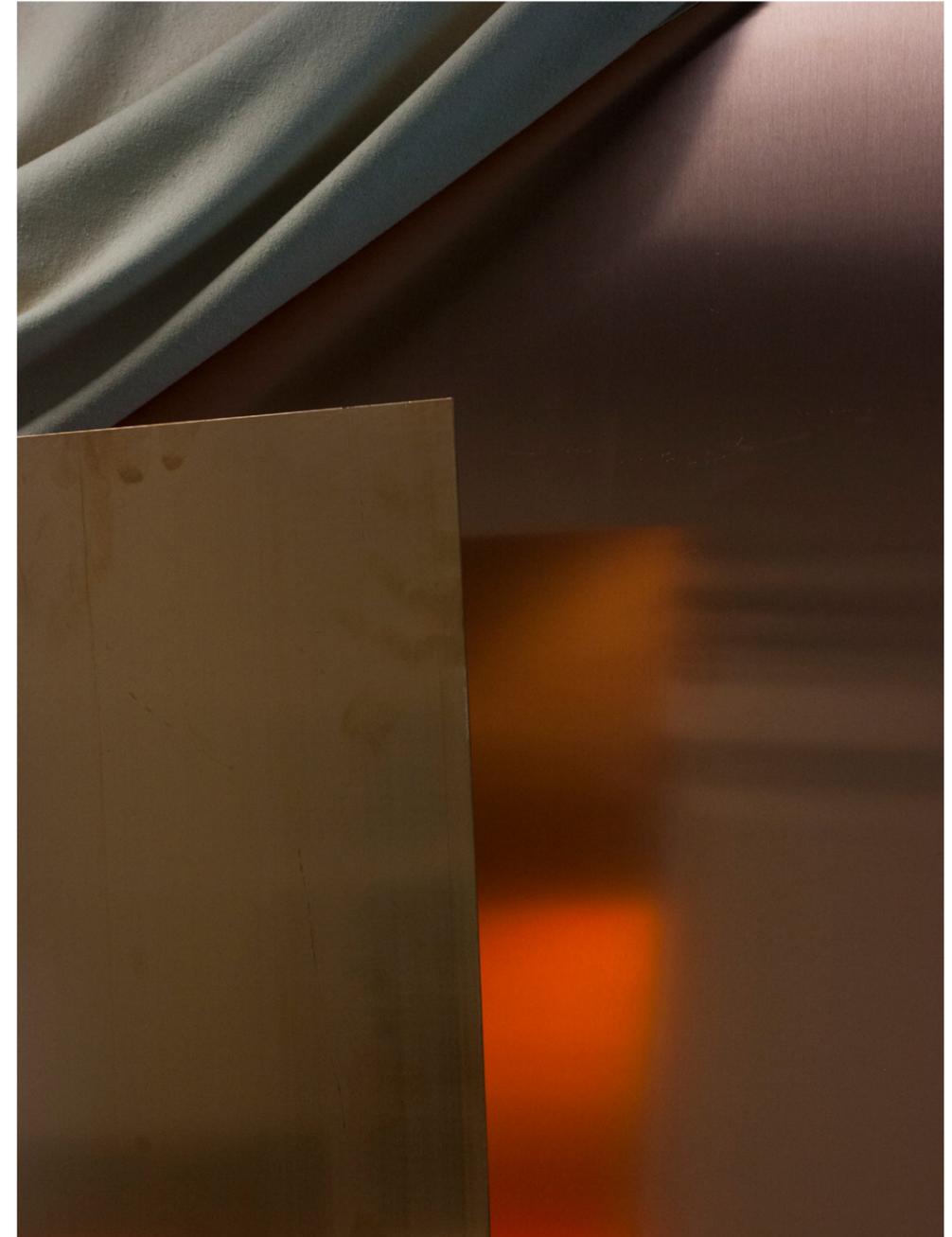
UNVEILING

After these relatively intensive making projects, there came a hiatus from processing materials. The approach was instead to *act on* materials through ritualising them, having them transmute or transfigure through profanation and sacralisation. This meant a break from machining, fusing, melting, casting, and forming. Yet, the materials now being worked ritually were precisely those I had acquired with these metal-working processes in mind. Essentially, I was looking to a shift in focus, to a small plot of new land to occupy, in order to ‘ex-tract’ liturgical transformation. In a similar way to *The Gift*, this was quick prototyping technique. Instead of *technical* production, I engaged in ceremonial pro-*ducing*, as the accumulating of liturgy. As ritual, the method implicated active repetition and recording, such that matter was altered by successive movements and markings. The ceremony comprised a repetitive veiling and unveiling of two sheets of metal: a 2400x1200x0.9mm sheet of copper and a 1500x300x1.2mm sheet of bronze. The sheets were ‘housed’ upright in a threshold space separating two workshops, one an engineering and the other an art workshop, a liminal place of impotentiality. Each was covered with raw silk and supported by a wooden brace, preventing bending. The ritual unfolded as follows:

Unveiling Ceremony

- Method:
1. At the start of the day open locked sliding door and approach the sheets
 2. Pull back silk and hang it on the top left corner of the timber brace
 3. Move the bronze sheet with hands positioned on either side and place it in front of the steel girder, adjacent to the copper sheet
 4. Stand in front of the two sheets, taking sufficient time to observe differentiations within the milieu of repetitions
 5. Leave the space, relocking the sliding door, and record observations as an archival record
 6. Repeat the process in reverse when veiling at the end of the day.

The intent was for this ritual to be performed each day at the same time, 8:30am and 4:30pm, such that they became something like a monastic task. Of particular importance when making observations was to recognise differences in light and sound conditions of the space, and also any wear and tear sustained



by the metal sheets. Along with the written record or observations, there was a physical record of handprints, collecting on the sides of the bronze sheet as it was moved daily, giving witness to various oils and greases that measured the grime on my hands and thus my workshop labour. The archival notes follow.

Log of Unveiling

Prior to today, the times and conditions of the ceremony are unknown as they have not been recorded. By the build-up of fingerprints already marking the bronze it is assumed that it occurred as it does now, once daily uncovering and recovering.

11/11/2019

10:53 - Security door opened accompanied by regular rhythmic beeping. Silk cover torn in some places. Both sheets show imprints of handling from previous ceremonies. Removed silk, placed bronze next to window. Light condition was blue/grey, turning rose to yellow after reflection from the copper and bronze respectively.

17:33 - Moved bronze back onto copper sheet. The top corner has been lightly gouging the copper. Light before entering was concrete blue. Fluorescent diffusion turned it yellow. Carefully draped over silk. Closed security door.

12/11/2019

08:30 - Opened magnetic door to start the beeping of the vital signs monitor. Light was dark grey. Stood long enough looking at my reflection in the copper that the motion sensor lights turned off. The bronze clashed against the steel girder and rang like a symbol. The bronze is impressive under low light.

16:30 - Light was a pale white. Small corner of the copper is bent (from previous movement?). Shall I make repairs or leave in current condition? What do they look like from below? Can you even see them?

13/11/2019

08:30 - Bright sunlight tinged with yellow fluorescence. I saw an ancestor in the bronze this revealing, and neglected the copper for this reason.

16:30 - Low light, blue grey. Dirty, oily hand prints getting darker

14/11/2019

08:45 - In hurry. Didn't look at metals. Rain streaming down window.



Dark light. Faint alkaline smell.

17:15 – In a hurry. Partially intoxicated. Must be more pious tomorrow. Almost forgot to move the bronze. Silk rippled beautifully. Light bright sunlight.

15-18/11/2019

– Record keeping interrupted, veiling and unveiling ceremony conducted as usual.

19/11/2019

08:30 – Silk pinned behind board. Bright white light. Attempted to stop rhythmic beeping. Distant whirring reverberation.

16:30 – Entirely silent. Cold grey light.

20/11/2019

08:30 – Light green light. Sound of rapids from air conditioning, like putting a shell to your ear.

16:30 – Took photos of the draped over silk in its new position.

21/11/2019

08:30 – Silk ripples in the air conditions when draped over the bronze. When unveiling the bronze started oscillating by itself. Red/gold reflection.

16:30 – Copper entered into more protective, long term storage. Bronze removed to be worked on. Silk folded and reserved for another use. End of ceremonial recording.

IMMANENT BODIES

The second proposed work for my M. Phil research was a focus on jointures, and the interplay between the hard and soft parts of an organic body. As outlined earlier, Nick Land's chapter 'Fluent Bodies' discusses this schema at work in the body, between static transcendent structures and fluid immanent flesh. This reading of an assembled body was positioned alongside the sculptural works of the Austrian artist, Walter Pichler. His works are, likewise, assemblages of materials, brought together with intricate and fore-fronted joints. Pichler's jointing emphasises the thresholds within the body of a piece and are themselves machines, partial objects attached to flows.

A Pichler/Land amalgam comes about through two thresholds, the first being the gap and shift between Pichler's early works and those of his later years. This project more directly addresses the thematics of his early works. For example, *The Bed* (pictured on following page): if this was actually used, it would draw away the temporary liquids of the body from the permanent skeleton. All that would be left, after engaging in the ritual it offers, would be the transcendent. Pichler's early visceral works reinforce Land's distinction between flesh and bone, exemplifying the temporality at play between the momentary and the eternal. Though these furniture works lead to the demise of the impermanent, they first invite the body to be housed or encased in the way of a coffin, or a papal glass case.

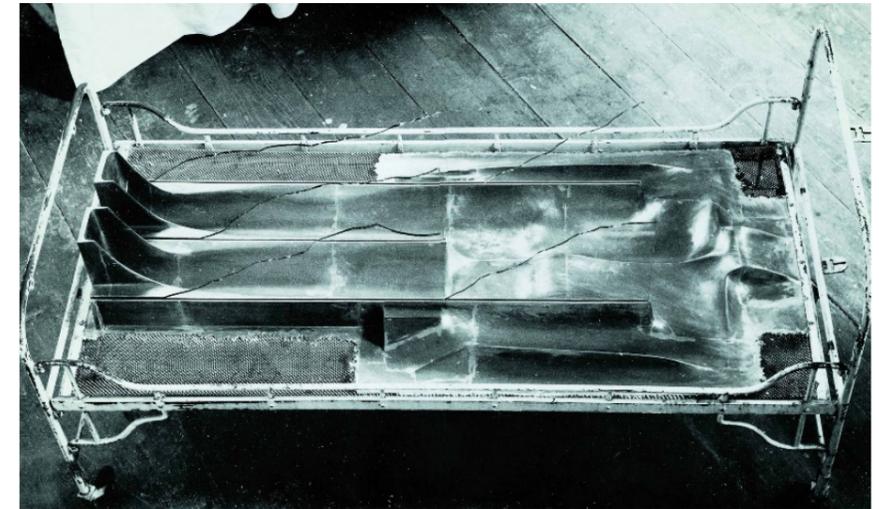
However, Pichler stopped creating these violent works when he left Vienna for the countryside, where the remainder of his time was spent. In this quiet, removed location, the thematics of his work shift from machines for dying, accentuating a body's absence, to idealised, but melancholic sculptures of the body itself. It is said of Pichler's sculptures from this time that he created them in the hope that God would make a mistake, and would choose them over him, as though they were decoy idols of himself, ripe for transcendence, leaving his flesh to remain.¹⁷³ Junctures within Pichler's works draw attention to variations in materiality, such that the qualities of structural materials, stone or wood, meet at limit points of fluid materials, cast metal, glass, or clay. This combination of individual elements brought together, forms bodies or assemblages. Thus, a further unrealised work of this research, *Immanent Bodies*, asked for the bringing-together of a select few of the technical experimentations from *The Gift*, in order to engage the scurf edge between soft coverings, and the rigid skeleton,

¹⁷³ Emilio Ambasz, 'Introduction', in *Walter Pichler: Projects* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1975).



Walter Pichler, *Movable Figure* (1982)

that is at work within the animal body. How might the arrangement of earthen and metallic matter forefront the immanence and molten flow of matter, while exploring those parts of a machinic assemblage that project into forgotten futures or unrealised pasts, as traces of action? Though this project was never actualised, it directed me to the realisation of the project outlined below, a descendent, in a way, of Pichler's ritualised assemblages. *Altar* was developed from out of the residual outcomes of *The Gift*. At this point, a collection of artefacts and refuse had been amassed, but without a scaffold or support for encounter. Before bringing together technical procedures from the first set of works, it seemed prudent to bring together the works themselves, before calling that project 'complete'.



Walter Pichler, *The Bed* (1971)

ALTARS

The conception of an altar followed on from the unrealised *Immanent Bodies*, whose task was to bring together the disparate relics created during *The Gift*, onto some plane that operated between workbench and altar, a supposed de-differentiation of the sacred and profane. Intended by this bringing-together was a reading between objects as a binding liturgy. This liturgy would itself compose these fabrications—tools, relics, and refuse—as a collection. In a sense, a ‘reverse-archaeology’ was to take place, following the famous “archaeological axiom” that “One stone is a stone, two stones is a feature, three stones is a wall....” If a dozen objects are arranged on a crafted plane, a myth is conjured to illuminate their nearness.¹⁷⁴ What is also brought into question is a *making sacred* of the acts and rites of the workshop, such that the mundanity of this space is sacralised, while every horizontal plane now becomes sacred, as workbench becomes altar. Liturgy is derived from the ancient Greek λειτουργία (*leitourgia*), literally “work for the people,” and as such is the participation in the sacred through the activity atop of these altars. The sacralising of workshops has precedence, for example, in Greek mythology, where volcanos were seen as the workshop of Hephestus, the god of artisans, as places where smiting and forging can happen in the bowels of the earth.¹⁷⁵ Aztec and North Island Māori also viewed volcanos as points of sacred production. Popocatepetl and Tuhua, respectively, were essential for the making of obsidian tools.¹⁷⁶ Likewise, in Norse mythology, terrestrial workshops referenced magical workshops of dwarfs, situated in Nidavellir/Svartálfar, the world below Midgardr. Workshop were seen as something below or of the earth.¹⁷⁷

174 See Eric H. Cline, *Three Stones Make a Wall: The Story of Archaeology* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

175 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, III.9

176 Thegn N. Ladefoged, ‘Social Network Analysis of Obsidian Artefacts and Māori Interaction in Northern Aotearoa New Zealand’, *PLoS One (Online)* 14, no. 3 (2019): 1–26; Buddy Mikaere, ‘The Obsidian Island’, *New Zealand Geographic*, September 1989; Megan Lawrence et al., ‘Geochemical Sourcing of Obsidians from the Pūrākaunui Site, South Island, New Zealand.’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 49, no. 3 (1 October 2014): 158–63, <https://doi.org/10.1002/arco.5032>; Nicholas J. Saunders, ‘A Dark Light: Reflections on Obsidian in Mesoamerica’, *World Archaeology* 33, no. 2 (October 2001): 220–2336; A. S. Packard, ‘Ascent of the Volcano of Popocatepetl’, *The American Naturalist* 20, no. 2 (February 1886): 109–23.

177 Lotte Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400–1000* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 160–61.

Of particular importance to the design of the altar was that each relic had its tailormade receptacle, such that everything belonged. Also critical was that the construction quality and style suggested ambiguity. This ambiguity was grounded in the intention to locate the altar within the actual workshop precinct. Yet, it was to be both machine-space *and* ritual bench, at the same time a surface for work to be done but not a worksurface. Refuse collected from fabrication processes then became reagents in some unknown ceremony. Likewise, tools with unambiguous use *and* artefacts without any sense of use co-mingle, coincide. The fabricating of these relic housings and altar was just commencing when Covid-19 interrupted the entire functioning of the workshop, if not the nation, if not the planet. The pandemic instituted much greater regimes of ritualised practice, confounding any clear lines to be drawn between use and uselessness, between religion and capital, between health and hostage. This disruption lasted, as we are all aware, a couple of months, and then some more.

While confined to my domicile, I fabricated a maquette of the altar. This piece was rugged in nature, owing to the limited, at-home, availability of materials and methods for making. The material I used comprised remainders from previous works, material that had been held in storage for some, until then, undisclosed other use. This ‘sketch’ of an altar, like some haphazard miniature shrine or travel altar, was made of solid Jarrah framing. Housed within this frame was a stack of cedar shingles atop a grate. Below the grate was a clay bowl. Lying on an alpine schist altar stone was the disinterred carcass of a bird, shrouded by a thin sheet of lead.



On the Winter Solstice (late June), the stack of cedar shingles was set alight, rapidly igniting into a pyre that would turn the cedar to ash, the lead to molten droplets, and the flesh to dust. What was sought in this event was the profanation-and-return of hoarded materials, to use, the liquifying of past works, and the ushering in of a new body of work. Though this crude altar-immolation lacked the refined junctures expressed in the project-framing of *Immanent Bodies*, it did begin to play between the material boundaries of what remains, after burning. This work was documented by both image and moving-image, so that what would remain after the ceremony were the skeletal remnants of the altar itself, a bowl of ash and cinders as the remaining body, and a filmic record attesting to the practice. Recording in this way tracks the stone as it shifts along the earth, an enchanted recording of entropic breaks and flows.

Once over the rigid Covid-19 lockdown, work on the original altar was again possible. The fabricated piece is a standing two-sided altar bench of Black American Walnut and brass, employing Japanese joinery. This timber and woodworking technique was chosen for its idealised positioning within the cabinetmaking world. Both timber species and fabricating technique are recognised as being of the highest quality. These were chosen as if to ironically juxtapose container to content, or support to what is being supported. The 'contents' are normally viewed as the most base. They are seen as barely more than rubbish, by-products, waste. The 'working-side' of the altar has an inlaid copper panel on its horizontal surface. To the right of this are three tool-posts for lathe tools. On the left side are three vessels for housing or containing metalworking by-products: bronze casting dross, steel clippings, and iron oxide dust. On the worktop sits other items produced during *The Gift*. Held aloft, above this worktop, is the ritual club. This is the side on which, ritually speaking, stands the one ordained to perform the work, the one utilising the materials and tools. On the opposite side of the altar, directed out toward a congregation, sits a steel map (or grate), held within a skeletal frame. Below it, the steel bowl, holding its brass swarf, is perched on a brass shelf. It seems this arrangement may presuppose a liturgy. Yet, 'reading' the altar, within its workshop environs, raises the questions: who is this altar for? What does it do? Where does it sit between the sacral and the utilitarian? Are sacrifices made to/ on this altar, on behalf of others?



A number of descriptive images were written, while making this ritual surface, to explore a potential mysticism or mystery, given to commonplace technical actions that occur on other such workbench surfaces within the workshop.

A worshipper stands hunched over a metal table. They slide a wooden tablet around the table-top in a circular, even motion while staring intently at the spinning, whining gadget that protrudes from the centre of the table. The elliptical motion they trace with the tablet produces pitch and volume shifts in the whirring machine. These drones and chants are accompanied by shavings of wood jumping from the tablet and falling to the floor.

Another figure kneels on the concrete floor. They hold some tool in their hands and drag it back and forward over the floor. One is reminded of *The Floor Scrapers*. Though where that image is accompanied by the soothing sound of metal scraping against wood, this scene is much more aggressive, the tool howls as it meets the floor, sparks flow in a great stream of burning shards away from the tool as its target is ground smooth. When they are finished an arc of black dust moves outward from the smooth ground. The dust is only broken by two round indentations of clean floor.

An alchemist cowers in a tiny room flooded with an unnatural light and the hint of swirling air. Attached to their face is a curious breathing apparatus, behind which sit eyes clotted out in terror as they attempt to experiment with the unknown. They begin mixing obscure fluids in a transparent vessel, stirring and folding until all of a sudden, the contents of the vessel turn a deep black. The alchemist peers into the

vessel with apprehensive satisfaction. Proceeding by taking out various glass tubes and plungers employing them to transfer the black treacle into the cracks and crevasses of the dark and twisted wood in front of them. The alchemist pays close attention to the timber, applying more of the queer fluid as it disappears into the knots and checks. Satisfied, they produce a burning blue torch, passing the flame over the timber tentatively, their gaze now even more alert, they start getting agitated. The process is malfunctioning. They grab the vessel back off the table and stir it frantically, the liquid begins to hiss and smoke, boiling like tar. The alchemist cautiously but with furious speed places the vessel on a metal contraption inside the peculiar cubical and disappears from the area.

A child walks into a zone that is not yet for him. They see their parent walk in here every night, followed by a loud screeching and howling, as light spills out away from the zone across to them. The door protests as it is pulled aside, yet what it hides is not what they expected. It is dark, not only because light filters through one tiny louvred window but because it is caked with dust, in fact black dust covers every surface, a thick layer of silt. Rudimentary tools lean in one corner, but in the centre stands the altar table. This bench and its mechanism is where all the black issues from. To the child the two vertical disks have no discernible use but there they stand in a position of power, the noise maker, the spark maker. Around the remainder of the outside of the space sit objects and reagents that look to be used on the main machine. In looking under one of these objects the child discovers that the dust, though still present, is slightly thinner under it. Ritual repetition, recording, recurring procedure.

GROUND

Both of the works made during my Honours study, under the title *Maw of Aeonic Rupture*, now reside on Waiheke Island, at Wharetana Bay. These are works whose remnant materials went into the burnt altar. A third work, patrimonial in nature, is intended for this same site. This would complete a triptych, so to speak. This work requires the casting of a brass plaque to be affixed to an extant unmarked historic gravesite, relating to the 1860s homestead that these three works would triangulate. The gravesite sits on a headland at the northern end of Wharetana bay. The Sun Goddess Shrine is built near a river to the south of the bay, and the Black Sun Shrine is found within bushland, deeper into the river valley. The project is a restoration effort for a living memory-trace, an overgrown and untended gravesite, such that it is not simply the designation of a moment of the past. In its current state the grave signifies forgotten futures, where evidence for the remembrance of a body buried here is destined to be lost. Thus, efforts were undertaken by the homestead occupants to stave off this disappearance, by restoring the gravesite. The fashioning of a plaque bestows a name to what is currently nameless.



ETHEREAL PARTITION

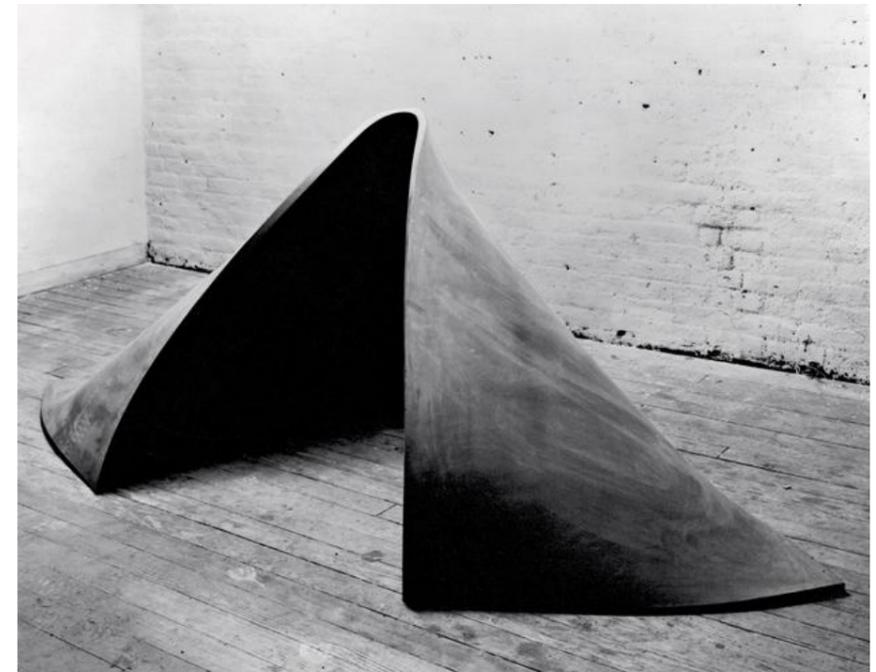
The final work, *Ethereal Partition*, acts as a veil defining consecrated ground for works it conceals. It is also, ambiguously, a work in itself, fully revealed. Such a veil, that ambiguously reveals itself as being and not-being ‘art’, has archaic roots in a Greek Myth. According to Pliny the Elder, writing in *Naturalis Historia*, there was a competition between the two best painters of the fourth century BCE, Parrhasius and Zeuxis.¹⁷⁸ Zeuxis made a painting of grapes so realistic that birds flew down to try and peck at them. Impressed as everyone was by this realism, Zeuxis asked Parrhasius to draw aside the curtain that was covering Parrhasius’ painting, only to discover that the curtain was, itself, the painting. Zeuxis acknowledged his defeat, declaring “I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis.” My veil aims to deceive no-one, or everyone, perhaps like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra.¹⁷⁹ The veils I have included, below, also act as passageways, for passing-through, for transiency. Though, to experience the passage from one side of the veil to the other is not, at all, to pass through it.

This piece was considered in response to the site of the exhibition, such that it follows the intensive contours of the volume, both limiting it and being limited by it. As a veil, this partition acts as separator, dividing the volume into that which houses sacred objects and the refuse of earthworks, and that construing an ‘outside’ vestibule-passage, to be crossed before entry. In some sense, the veil may be considered the primordial or originary work, even if it is the last one ‘conceived’. It sets-out or gives boundary—binding—to the momentary apparition of an embodied, sacred workshop. Perhaps like Lautreamont’s sewing machine, umbrella and operating table, this collection of artefacts, assemblages, and residues for becoming-chthonic operates somewhere between Henri Michaux’s schizophrenic table and Robert Smithson’s Non-Site. Michaux describes the schizophrenic table as a process of desiring production. Neither simple nor really complex, it becomes the volume of an exhibiting space, de-simplified in the course of its making. A table of additions, ‘overstuffed’, becomes more and more an accumulation and less and less a table, not intended for any specific purpose. One doesn’t know how to mentally or physically handle it “as a freak piece of furniture, an unfamiliar instrument ... for which there was no purpose.”¹⁸⁰ That is a dehumanised table lending

178 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXV.36

179 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

180 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 6–7.



Previous Page: **Richard Serra**, *To Lift* (1967); **Marcelo Danze**, *REBOOT* (2016); **Ann Hamilton**, *passion* (1992); **Simon Battisti, Leah Whiteman-Salkin, and Abäke**, *I Have Left You The Mountain* (2016)

itself to no function: petrified flow, stunned, suggesting a stalled engine. On the other hand, Smithson's Non-Sites usually involved vast contrasts between the immediate present and the most remote past of geological time, between the enormous mass of the earth itself and a minor but overflowing significance that can be captured within a small housing of it. Between Site and Non-Site there is a "mirror-relationship," where Site is part of the full body of the world itself, unrefined or cut down, full of possibilities of flow, redolent but without a defining structure or *logos*.¹⁸¹ Conversely Non-Site attempts to hold part of the site itself, caked in symbols, to some extent standing in for the site itself out of place. Smithson writes that a Non-Site is a "three dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it . . . To understand this Language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construct and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three dimensional picture which doesn't look like a picture . . ." ¹⁸² The Non-Site functions, in part, as a bringing-close of the site with its geographical and psychosocial margins intact, to be placed within a place apart.

As an assemblage, the exhibition 'houses', first of all, two essential or primordial 'parts': veil and altar. This double-origin already replicates the essential elements of monotheistic religion, but also a 'deeper' paganism. Yet, these elements may also be thought as essential elements of hermeneutic enquiry or even knowledge itself: truth—the highest good—shrouded or veiled. The veil is lifted. As the bringing-close or making-present of a *familial* workshop of earthen desire—as a stalled engine—this volume calls for further de-simplification. Hence, this heavy-handed, closed reading of religion and truth is smashed a little, or a lot. An immanent field of interference, wasteland of scattered, or impassable ground-litter disturbs the orderability of things, such that a 'sacred' ground of veil and altar is contaminated: tainted and stained, bringing to profanation earthen matter previously made sacred.

¹⁸¹ Flann, 'Introduction: Reading Robert Smithson', xviii.

¹⁸² Robert Smithson, 'A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flann (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 364.

CONCLUSION

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LANGUID PASSAGE

Fillmore is full of ideas about gold. The “mythos” of gold, he calls it. I like “mythos” and I like the idea of gold, but I am not obsessed by the subject and I don’t see why we should make flowerpots, even of gold. He tells me that the French are hoarding their gold away in watertight compartments deep below the surface of the earth; he tells me that there is a little locomotive which runs around in these subterranean vaults and corridors. I like the idea enormously. A profound, uninterrupted silence in which the gold softly snoozes at a temperature of 17¼ degrees Centigrade. . . . When Rembrandt hit par he went below with the gold ingots and the pemmican and the portable beds. Gold is a night word belonging to the chthonian mind: it has dream in it and mythos. We are reverting to alchemy, to that fake Alexandrian wisdom which produced out inflated symbols. Real wisdom is being stored away in the subcellars by the misers of learning. The day is coming when they will be circling around in the middle air with magnetizers: to find a piece of ore you will have to go up ten thousand feet with a pair of instruments—in a cold latitude preferably—and establish telepathic communication with the bowels of the earth and the shades of the dead. No more Klondikes. No more bonanzas. You will have to learn to sing and caper a bit, to read the zodiac and study your entrails. All the gold that is being tucked away in the pockets of the earth will have to be re-mined; all this symbolism will have to be dragged out again from the bowels of man.¹⁸³

The body of this research has been marked by a perpetual and unquenchable aching ‘to do’, as if tormented by Serra’s list of transitive verbs, while at the same time being a continued misfiring and stalling of the machine of production. The echoes of an earthen inheritance of familial desire gnaw at the base of my brain as an intensive drive to make. This is a desire that is forced upon me by a haunting which flows through the race from the earth itself as it attempts to expend the energy that clogs its surface as flows of matter. This research has done its best to resist this energy by having a flat tire, by perpetually intending or needing to produce without actually producing. This energy builds up behind me as a torrential flow, a great reservoir in the subterranean recesses, in the store house of the unconscious. Such a flow doesn’t sit idly by but thrashes against the body as unsatisfied desire, threatening to erode its enclosure. However, there is some recourse for relief through tradition and ritual. Production dictated by ritual or religion exists on the fringes of or before the unleashed pulverising drives of capital. Bounded by its traditions, it doesn’t change, doesn’t grow.

It is in the environments created for memory by the societies of the past that we find relief from capital. These are languid, peaceful eddies of production where memory is lived unselfconsciously embedded in ritual and traditions. It is the small, the mundane, the ordinary joy of a single person making quietly in their workshop far from the view of the market which ‘rescues’ us from late

¹⁸³ Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 244–45.

capital, profaning that which has been separated from use. Tradition, through its taboos and rituals, slows down a tiny trickle of the great flow but, for the most, part cannot withstand it, eventually being overcome. Tradition allows for the forming of rivulets of matter—open-to-use—to flow through the human, from the primordial ocean of matter, tolerating the rest to dissipate, unharnessed as matter sacralised by capital. No one is being fooled here though. Capital rages on from the future, a great flooding flow of creative destruction, turbulent and chaotic. This is only a small refuge, a still pond alongside the rapids in which the human realises its industrial production could never keep up with the demands put upon it. It was always already superseded. Capital desires something other as its producing machine. And just as a pond, on the banks of a river, becomes completely engulfed as snowmelt floods the riverbed, so too must tradition be regenerated and reformed as the flows wane.

This mode of working with matter is the *bricoleur* mode of my forebears, farmers and labourers, whose work is never seen, never released from its rural seclusion in that form. This is also a mode exemplified by Walter Pichler, but also to a certain extent the larger works of Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Ann Hamilton, as well as Anselm Kiefer. They don't allow *easy* capital valuation. These works can sometimes be totally unmarketable except as photos and books, completely removed from the bodily occupation intended by the artists. Remembering Rob Marks' comment concerning sculpture that the viewer is excluded from bodily: it is not sculpture at all, is never truly experienced. As a metallurgy technician, my work is likewise unseen, unoccupied. It flows into the works of students, where one may get a brief glimpse of it once a year before it is sent to the great mounds of refuse we sequester in the earth or squirreled away in some dusty corner. This exegesis and exhibition are another of these small glimpses through the veil, allowing the unseen, a non-exhibition, to be experienced by other bodies as a machinic assemblage of my ritualised workshop.

Such a conception of work is arrived at through an exploration of the artists mentioned above, who work by sequestering time, slowing it down, turning it into material reality. At the forefront of their methods is ritual, ritualised practices that work myths as they work matter. These artists 'consume' and record immense sections of matter-flow that, however, still pale in comparison to that consumed by industrial processing *of* the earth. And these artists attempt to shift the plane of sculptural experience to something bodily, removing it from museum walls, floors, ceilings, those great edifices or volumes of cultural display, where memories are separated off and petrified from living. These artists of libidinal material interactions have been coupled with others who allow access to a critical and political ground plane or undercurrent. Giorgio Agamben is read for his understanding of capitalism as a sacralising process which must be profaned, a radical notion of opening matter out to use, away

from capital flow. Deleuze and Guattari inform the major thematic of matter-flow and desiring-production that act together as a founding consistency of matter-imagining for this research. To such imagining, Georges Bataille lends his corrupting ear: desiring flow, of the sacred and the base, is far in excess of human productive capacity.

These works are assayed and trawled through by processes that are porous, acting more like *filters* than actual methodologies. Each filter separates and refines contexts and ways-of-working, scrutinised and determined for their intimacy to the project: works and workings stained by contact with desire, fluidity, earthen matter, machinic phylum, abstracted inquiry, and past haunting. These settle-out from fluid suspension, to build up as alluvial deposits upon contextual fields. These sedimentations explore the couplings of desire and matter, such that matter—whether human-derived or not—is indifferntiable. Every 'thing' is *of* the earth. Human production does not draw *from* the earth. We are already *of* the earth. Hence, a radical repositioning of desiring-production *from* the human *to* the earth, as that *full body* that desires us. Positioning, within this sedimentation, draws-on methods that flow back to earthen inheritance. Desire—of this making—is historicity, rather than present: archaic, slow, dumb, or inefficient modes of processing matter. Positionality as 'time' out-of-joint is referenced by Fisher as a 'nostalgia mode', where present practices are haunted by their past. We might think of this as a luxuriant and deliquescent *lingering* over things that have ceased to be, sapping future imagining, as the future appears more capricious and uninhabitable.

The quest was, in processing this way, to expose concealed openings in profane matter to chthonic desire, to becoming-earth. Processes were explored, and in processing, tools and reagents solidified. These tools and reagents were placed upon work benches or altars, as sites of *mythos*, such that they themselves developed or gathered new processes. Tools and matter were sheathed, fixed such that their use was *elevated* from mere chance to intention. Sites were named and consecrated. These altars, tools, housings, encasements, monuments, and coverings were all worked on for the purpose of ritualising matter of the earth. This ritual processing was nothing other than an apprentice's searching. Searching for what? Searching for a *liturgy* of earthen-working that, in delineating the contours of a set of taboos limiting the use of matter, forms a tradition of rites, and of passage into the earth.

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APPENDIX

The exhibition of chthonic artifacts discovered during this research finally took place in the new year of 2022 in the Barrel Store at Corban Estate Art Centre. The space measures 25 x 5 x 5m in volume, originally constructed out of brick with steel strapping and a wooden truss roof, it has been reinforced with concrete and steel I-beams. Deposited in the space are the created works outlined in this exegesis, accompanied by a collection of encountered detritus, collected from various metalworking processes such as: casting, milling, turning, forging, and smithing, over the period of the preceding 2 years. All this grit and matter is shrouded underneath *Ethereal Partition*, a suspended and draped white viscose sheet that runs the length of the space. At the entrance one encounters this shrouding veil well-lit and lying close to the ground, holding works hidden from view. As one moves deeper into the space, the light from the entrance illuminates less and less, the veil rises and falls, counterbalanced by 100 brass weights, showing less or more of the contents below and forming cavernous and architectonic vaults. Among the veiled works are the *Solstice Altar* and *Altar for the Gifts* setting up the essential religious elements of this assemblage. Around these pieces muster congregations of by-products, demarcating consecrated ground for earthen desire. A key element that has not been described above was the addition of a set of 20 sheep jaw bones, cast in bronze. One of these sits alone a flawless example, the remainder are heaped in a pile joined by the casting hardware (sprues, air vents, feeders) removed in the chasing process.

Rob Marks' notion echoes here, "perhaps, in fact, no sculpture that is protected by museum stanchions or guards or convention is ever truly experienced."¹ That is, sculpture that is not inhabited bodily, but rather viewed at a distance or pictorially can never be known. By looking at the following montage of photos it is impossible to get any real sense of what the exhibition looked like in total. No 'overall' image is really attainable, due in part to the environmental aspects of the long, thin space and light condition, but more importantly the arrangement of objects and their veiling. What one gets instead are disparate fragments, disembodied shards of an earthen workshop. A pictorial representation of things is made an impossibility by the disjunctive aspect of the veil, as it plays its required part in hiding some truth from those that are not lodged within the space. As such this momentary apparition of sacred workshop requires the body to operate, to delve into the depths of matter and ritually work upon it, unearthing the sacred desire of the earth.

1 Rob Marks, 'Site Unseen, Time Unbound: The Double Life of Richard Serra's "Gutter Corner Splash"', *X-Tra Contemporary Art Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Summer 2016): 51.

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Libidinal Earth

Barrel Store, Corban Estate Art Centre, Auckland
January 26, 2022 - January 31, 2022

Barrel Store, 24 x 5 x 5m

Ethereal Partition

White Viscoes Veil, 23 x 4m
Braided Stainless Steel Wire Rope, 300m
Stainless Steel Swage Fittings
100 Brass Weights

A Single Silicone Bronze Casting of the Left Jawbone of a Sheep

Solstice Altar

Burnt Jarrah Frame
Ash and Charcoal of Western Red Cedar Shingles
Schist
Lead droplets
Ash of Song Thrush Carcass
Clay Bowl
Steel Wire Tray

Copper sheet, 2400 x 1000 x 0.7mm

Stack of Microcrystalline Wax Air Vent Patterns

Pile of 18 Cast Silicon Bronze Sheep Jawbones and Silicon Bronze Sprues

Altar for the Gifts

American Black Walnut
Round Brass Bar
Mild Steel Plate
Inlaid Phosphor Bronze Sheet
Mild Steel Hammered Bowl
Brass Lather Swarf
Jarrah and Brass Club
Black Maire and Leather Shrinking Stump
Nickle Plated Copper Oxy-Acetylene Rosebud Torch Head
Lead Skin, Black Waxed Thread, and Aluminium Bar Cube
Three HSS Lathe Tools and Tool Holders
Silicon Bronze Crucible Skin
Mild Steel Nibbler Clippings
Steel Oxide Grinding Dust

Nest of Aluminium Crucible Skins on Bed of Steel Oxide Grinding Dust

Line of Mild Steel Nibbler Clippings

Phosphor Bronze Sheet

Pile of Silicon Bronze Offcasts on Bed of Brass Swarf

Scattering of Hammerscale on an Upturned Galvanised Steel Bucket

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