

# STATE OF CERAMICS

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## Toward Future Bodies: *Field Guide to Destabilizing Objects*

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### Topic

In this collective conversation we will generate (or begin generating) a Field Guide to Destabilizing Objects. Although a field guide is usually written from a point of encyclopedic authority, we aim to develop an alternative format in which we ask questions, suggest methodologies, and stake out positions from which we can embrace roles of uncertainty so as to best learn from the materials that surround and support us.

Many practitioners focus upon the completion of an object (and often its end point as a marketable object) but the materials and parts of the land with which we choose to work are not finite; they are part of larger systems and histories, and therefore the objects we make have the capacity to tell larger stories. By following and observing the trajectory of materials, we investigate whether the unstable and uncertain process of engaging with ceramics (in an unstable and uncertain world) can be transcribed into open-ended objects and, in turn, expand the approach of the broader ceramics field.

### Table of Contents / Processing Process

#### 1. Maps vs. Meanders

What does it mean to meander? What happens when we meander?  
Explorations of map-based research (not the body) versus going in-person

*“The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that*

walking is one way to traverse it... Walking can also be imagined as a visual activity, every walk or tour leisurely enough both to see and to think over the sights, to assimilate the new into the known. " Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*



Tar seep at Sulfur Mtn in Ventura County

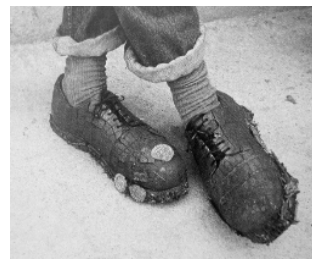
Shell Road in the Ventura Oil Field

- How do we know when we are following a trajectory in a meaningful or rigorous direction?
- How do we know which direction upstream or downstream? Which stream?
- What are the discrepancies between between online expectations and discoveries in the field?
- Cyclical process (doesn't matter where you start but back and forth is important)

## 2. Physical Body / Physical Place

"Ecological awareness is saturated with nothingness, a shimmering or flickering, a shadow play of presence and absence intertwined. What does this feel like from moment to moment?" - Timothy Morton, *Humankind Solidarity with Nonhuman People*

"We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because "we" are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming." –Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*



Spire construction site  
Chicago, IL

Francis Alys, Zapatos Mageneticos,  
Havana, Cuba

Mud Ball, Ventura River Preserve  
Ojai, CA

- How important is the physical journey? (is it necessary to visit a landfill in person?)
- What is collected in embodied knowledge when visiting a site?
- How do we field record with the body?

### 3. Collecting / Gathering / Sampling / Organizing / Relating

Act of Going and Act of Gathering as an agenda  
Intentional collecting versus unintentional collecting

"Materials in landscape architecture are physical fragments of remote quarries, factories and forests and their production is responsible for landscape transformation elsewhere. This reality is abstracted and concealed

through the commodity form and is an overlooked, yet critical consideration for the discipline of landscape architecture today. This paper argues that the study of paired landscapes of production and consumption generates a spatial framework for examining the social and ecological relations of their material exchange."

-Jane Hutton, *Reciprocal landscapes: material portraits in New York City and elsewhere*



Bricks & clay  
Chicago, IL



Vulcan Materials Landfill collection  
Sun Valley, CA



### 4. Touchstones / Archival Research / Historical Imagery

Touchstones: Iceberg under the waterline  
Offers guidance for decision making



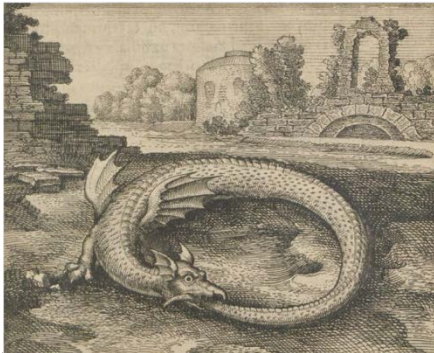
## 5. Synthesis - Offsite & Onsite

"In this way, thinking as a bricoleur puts things back in time. Buildings are neither permanent nor final, but way-stations for materials and for people, who have other histories and other potentials. One configuration does not eliminate others. The most successful projects and all of their constituent parts stand open to reinterpretation, like the spolia of Rome became building material for the city that rose among the ruins." -Gray Read, *The Eye of the Bricoleur* (Levi Strauss' idea of the bricoleur)



- *Installation/Event/Gallery/ Site as space of synthesis*
- *When/how does this research synthesize?*
- *When/how does this research produce new artifacts?*
- *Should research be presented as research or as art?*

## 6. Further Discussion



*The ouroboros appears in the classic alchemical study, Atalanta Fugiens (1617), by the physician to Emperor Rudolf II, Michael Maier (Credit: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)*

"There is no nice little dotted line or city wall or hedgerow or concept of inside and outside that will tell you. A Mobius strip is a non-orientable surface, by which topology means that it has no inside or outside, no front or back, no top or bottom. A lifeform is exactly this non-orientable entity..." - Timothy Morton, *Humankind Solidarity with Nonhuman People*

"The more we think of ecological beings— a human, a tree, an ecosystem, a cloud— the more we find ourselves obliged to think them not as alive or dead but as spectral. The more we think them, the more we discover that such beings are not solidly "real" nor completely "unreal" – in this sense, too, ecological beings are spectral. Since the difference between life and non-life is neither thing nor rigid, we discover that biology and evolution theory are actually telling us that we coexist *with* and as ghosts, specters, zombies, undead beings and other ambiguous entities, in a thick, fuzzy middle region excluded from traditional Western logic." - Timothy Morton, *Humankind Solidarity with Nonhuman People*

## Selected Quotes

### ***Settler Colonial City Project, Decolonizing the Chicago Cultural Center, 2019***

P.6

If the Chicago Cultural Center is a palace for Chicago's people, then it is also an archive of the exploitation of colonized people whose land, labor, and resources yielded this palace's constituent parts.

### ***Kiel Moe, Empire, State & Building***

P. 19

It is a fundamental premise of this book that architects do not yet fully understand building in terms of the bonds and states that are constitutive of building. They are trained to construe a building only as an isolate object-instance, rather than building as a set of linked, systematic processes of urbanization and civilization.

### ***Jane Hutton, Reciprocal landscapes: material portraits in New York City and elsewhere***

P. 40

Materials in landscape architecture are physical fragments of remote quarries, factories and forests and their production is responsible for landscape transformation elsewhere. This reality is abstracted and concealed through the commodity form and is an overlooked, yet critical consideration for the discipline of landscape architecture today. This paper argues that the study of paired landscapes of production and consumption generates a spatial framework for examining the social and ecological relations of their material exchange.

p.46

Conceptualizing the sites of material production as integral rather than external\_to design would shift theoretical concerns of the landscape project without necessarily shifting its site boundary. This has the potential to both examine the ways in which nonadjacent spaces are designed contiguously, but also to speculate about how these reciprocal relationships might be designed themselves.

### ***Timothy Morton, Humankind***

P 40

"Human" means me plus my nonhuman prostheses and symbionts, such as my bacterial microbiome and my technological gadgets, an entity that cannot be determined in advance within a thin, rigid outline or rigidly demarcated from the symbiotic real. The human is what I call a hyperobject: a bundle of entities massively distributed in time and space that forms an entity in its own right, one that is impossible for humans to see or touch directly.

P. 47

We live in a death culture, a culture of overkill- whereby soft boundaries of plant and animal cells become the rigid, smooth boundaries of plastic, having been turned into oil. We harden and harden the social cell walls quite literally: we use fossilized plant and animal cells to make our to make plastics such as Mylar and latex..

P. 55

"Specter" could mean apparition, but it could also mean "horrifying object", or it could mean "illusion", or it could mean "shadow of a thing." The word "specter" is spectral by its own definition, wavering between appearance and being. In the specter, we encounter the ghostly presence of beings not yet formatted according to Nature, including the Nature in Marx: nonhumans subjected to human metabolism...The more we think of ecological beings- a human, a tree, an ecosystem, a cloud- the

more we find ourselves obliged to think them not as alive or dead, but as spectral. The more we think them, the more we discover that such beings are not solidly "real" nor completely "unreal" – in this sense, too, ecological beings are spectral. Since the difference between life and non-life is neither thing nor rigid, we discover that biology and evolution theory are actually telling us that we coexist *with* and as ghosts, specters, zombies, undead beings and other ambiguous entities, in a thick, fuzzy middle region excluded from traditional Western logic. "

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Ecological awareness is saturated with *nothingness*, a shimmering or flickering, a shadow play of presence and absence intertwined. What does this feel like from moment to moment?

Time itself is not a line of reified atomic now-points, but a spooky shifting that haunts itself, slightly in front or behind itself, the rippling play of light and shadow in the pond water reflected on the underside of a sundial on a late summer afternoon, a vibrant stillness that is far from static. The present is haunted by the X-present. I call this manifold of present and X-present "nowness," a shifting, haunted region like evaporating mist, a region that can't be tied to a specific timescale.

P 49

There is no nice little dotted line or city wall or hedgerow or concept of inside and outside that will tell you. A Mobius strip is a non-orientable surface, by which topology means that it has no inside or outside, no front or back, no top or bottom. A lifeform is exactly this non-orientable entity...

### **Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis***

P 30

For the *rhythmanalyst*, nothing is immobile. She hears the wind, the rain, storms; but if she considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, she understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm. This object is not inert; time is not set aside for the subject. It is only slow in relation to our time, to our body, the measure of rhythms. An apparently immobile object, the forest, moves in multiple ways: the combined movements of the soil, the earth, the sun.

### **Rebecca Solnit, *Field Guide to Getting Lost***

P 22

Losing things is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing... Or you get lost, in which case the world has become larger than your knowledge of it. Either way, there is a loss of control.

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Vacant lots like missing teeth gave a rough grin to the streets we haunted.... What is a ruin after all? It is human construction abandoned to nature, one of the allures of ruins in the city is that of wilderness: a place full of the promise of the unknown with all its epiphanies and dangers. Cities are built by men ( and to a lesser extent, women), but they decay by nature, from earthquakes and hurricanes to the incremental process of rot, erosion, rust, the microbial breakdown of concrete, stone, wood, and brick, the return of plants and animals making their own complex order that nature dismantles the simple order of men. This nature is allowed to take over, when, for economic and political reasons, maintenance is withdrawn.... They were landscapes of abandon, the abandon of neglect and violence that came first and the abandon of passion that moved into ruins.... Ruins biome the unconscious of a city, its memory, unknown, darkness, lost lands, and in this truly bring it to life. With ruins a city springs free of its plans into something as intricate as life, something that can be explored but perhaps not mapped. This is the same transmutation spoken of in fairy tales when statues and toys and animals become human, though they come to life and with ruin a city comes to death, but a generative death like the corpse that feeds flowers. An urban ruin is like a place that has fallen outside the economic life of the city.."

**Rebecca Solnit , *Wanderlust: A History of Walking***

P.5

The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggest the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it... Walking can also be imagined as a visual activity, every walk or tour leisurely enough both to see and to think over the sights, to assimilate the new into the known

**Martha Elizabeth Fourie, *Redrawing ecology: dark ecological thought in art-design practice***

If the very question of inside and outside is what ecology undermines or makes thick and weird, surely this is a matter of seeing how ecosystems are made not only of trees, rock formations, and pigs (seemingly "external" to the human) but also of thoughts, wishes, fantasies (seemingly "inside" our human heads)" (Morton 2016:67)

This text incorporates a synergy between knowledge and visuality, text and design objects as a means of practicing ecological literacy. In order to aid the ecology in crisis this text argues for a renewed, modest, prophetic kinship with our environment, that extends a hand towards non-human agents including the earth within a practice based research process in the realm of visual arts.

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Timothy Morton's idea of dark ecology supports the notion that nature is not green, but dark. Morton (2016:9) compares ecological awareness to the loop-like coordination of film noir, where humanity as narrators of their own destiny find out that they are also the criminals and perpetrators of their own demise and misery. Darkness hence can refer to the uncertainty and disorder within the Anthropocene. Interestingly, for Morton, darkness starts as a depression but evolves into an ontological mystery between things (2016:160). It is this mystery between things in my immediate environment and dream world that I explore in this study. I experience a mysterious synchronicity at work between objects I create, and words that jump forward out of text that I read and write. The boundary line between the realms of knowledge, between text and object and experience start to merge and become unclear. Within this study, a certain mystery and uncertainty also surfaces between theory and practice.

**Gray Read, *The Eye of the Bricoleur***

Strauss' idea of the bricoleur

Robert Venturi advocated 'messy vitality' in which no building was complete in itself, rather each was a part of the city, inflecting toward its neighbors as row houses lean on each other for support. Their ideas found a parallel in literary theorist Jacques Derrida, who wrote that words and ideas are meaningful only because they have a dense history of use, therefore all utterances are bricolage that put together bits and pieces of language toward the intentions of the speaker. Words always have their history still attached and are already open to interpretation.

P.4

Levi-Strauss described the bricoleur as one who starts a project by studying the materials at hand.

## Suggested Readings (select PDFs available at [www.a-bprojects.com](http://www.a-bprojects.com))

Hutton Jane. 2019. Reciprocal Landscapes. Stories of Material Movements. Andover: Routledge.

Moe Kiel. 2017. Empire State & Building. New York: Actar.

Moe Kiel. 2021. Unless : The Seagram Building Construction Ecology. Actar.

Christien Meindertsma, *PIG 05049*, 2007 <https://christienmeindertsma.com/PIG-05049>

Martha Elizabeth Fourie, "Redrawing ecology: dark ecological thought in art-design practice"

Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 2013

Timothy Morton, *Humankind Solidarity with Nonhuman People*

Cooking Sections, Salmon: A Red Herring

Forma Fantasma

Bruno LaTour, Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime

Rebecca Solnit, A Field Guide to Getting Lost

Jane Rendell, Critical Spatial Practice <https://www.societyandspace.org/forums/critical-spatial-practice>

<https://criticalspatialpractice.co.uk/>

Strauss' idea of the bricoleur -Gray Read, The Eye of the Bricoleur <https://www.acsa-arch.org/proceedings/Annual%20Meeting%20Proceedings/ASA.AM.106/ACSA.AM.106.36.pdf>

Donna Haraway, Story Telling for Earthly Survival

KQED special on Monomania

Jennifer Scappettone, "Smelting Pot"

<https://thisismold.com/apocalyptic-creatures/animism-a-love-story-for-longevity>

Milton Friedman, "Power of the Market" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5Gppi-O3a8>  
(this is a dangerous one as he is kind of the father of all freemarket evil, but maybe still worth it if it's possible to critique)

Based on "I, Pencil" by Leonard E. Read: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/I,\\_Pencil](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/I,_Pencil)

Thich Nhat Hahn " No coming, No going - The Universe in a Sheet of Paper"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyAOzp\\_aJqc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyAOzp_aJqc)

<https://chaplaincy.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Priya-Sraman-Interbeing-Exercise-Thich-Nhat-Hanh.pdf>