



Artist-Initiated Projects

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Accompanying text to *trailblazer*

Dark, murky, sticky residue. Oil leaves a mark that seeps into an abyss of cosmic archeology. It sinks into the sand, stains the skin, leaves a dark and greasy imprint. Its extraction is produced in cyclical, rhythmical heartbeats of huge iron machines that plunge into the earth and emerge, plunge, emerge, plunge, emerge. Like the thin long rod covered in engine oil moving behind the raised open front metallic hood of the car. When oil is extracted from the earth it comes out in telluric vibrations as the earth sinks into potholes, fracked earth sinks into a magmatic abyss. Like the sonic vibrations of the motorbike engine revving behind the house, leaving traces and puffs of dark air that quickly disappear into disembodied gaseous clouds in the crisp winter air. Revving, vibrating, heating up and cooling down. The oil lubricates metallic joints and surfaces that bounce against the concrete ground, reacting to planetary force.

“Emerged under such conditions, petroleum possesses tendencies for mass intoxication on pandemic scales (different from but corresponding to capitalism’s voodoo economy and other types of global possession systems). Petroleum is able to gather the necessary geo-political undercurrents (subterranean or blobjective narrations of politics, economy, religion, etc.) required for the process of Erathication or the moving of the Earth’s body toward the Tellurian Omega – the utter degradation of the Earth as a Whole.” – Reza Negarestani¹

Reza Negarestani poetically describes the psycho-political power of materiality below the domain of humankind. A mass body of swirling energy canalized by ancient protean sunlight, ancestors metabolized by the bowels of the planet and processed through tellurian geological forces into explosive flammable pools – liquid fossils of our extraction economy. Oil is the pure immanence of the sun. Life on earth was made possible by the life-giving warmth of cosmic energy pouring down onto protean earth as waves of cosmic radiation. Petrol is the trapped energy of the sun. It is the fluid carcasses of our ancestors, vibrating, combining in the pure immanence of energy.

¹ Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Autonomous Materials*, pg. 17.



"A life thus names a restless activeness, a destructive-creative force-presence that does not coincide fully with any specific body. A life tear the fabric of the actual without ever coming fully 'out' in a person, place, or thing. A life points to ... 'matter in variation that enters assemblages and leaves them. A life is a vitality proper not to any individual but to 'pure immanence,' or that protean swarm that is not actual though it is real: 'A life contains only virtuals. It is made of virtualities.'" Jane Bennett²

Life's constant and unceasing activity makes us unable to stop leaving traces. Even leaving this place emits toxicity into the air. The vibration of the engine hits my inner ear as you leave this town and I exhale CO₂ into the dark living room. A thin latex glove snaps over a doctor's hand. Even now, leaving this place, you require more plastic, more chameleon oil to be used in this world.

In Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, he proposes a contemporary philosophical ontological comedy.

"The gross and net result of it is that people who spent most of their natural lives riding iron bicycles over the rocky roadsteads of this parish get their personalities mixed up with the personalities of their bicycle as a result of the interchanging of the atoms of each of them and you would be surprised at the number of people in these parts who are nearly half people and half bicycles...when a man lets things go so far that he is more than half a bicycle, you will not see him so much because he spends a lot of his time leaning with one elbow on walls or standing propped by one foot at kerbstones." Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*

It makes me wonder if your bones became metalloid prosthetic extensions to the engine. If your blood became thick like oil. Two twin oil bodies are portraits of our former selves. If vibration is the essence of being, the constant entanglement of togetherness, the machine became a prosthesis, or the body became one with the machine. Metallic knobs emerge like black mushrooms, a solidified mass of once-glowing molten material.

² Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2009. Duke University Press.



Toxicity is supernatural. It is often invisible, or at least imperceptible. It works through time, slow deterioration of the tissues, pollution of the organs, or mutation of the code-matter. There is something about it that we can't live without, on which we rely. The intoxicating blood of Christ, the poisons that we consume, inhale, absorb, intravenous shoot. Toxicity is culturally connected with masculinity, especially that of the working class. To be tough is to be able to breathe in coal-dust, radiation, weather all conditions, battle burning blazes, be resistant to fire, take a beating, don't cry when you're bleeding, breathing in that thick black exhaust fume and the permanent odor that sticks to the walls of the motorcycle repair garage.³

Life always resists. Even in the most toxic locations on earth life is found. Volcanic vents in the Pacific are home to extremophile white corals that breed in the acid waters that would make most marine-life pucker.⁴ Black fungus grows on the top of Mount Everest – exposed to high amounts of solar radiation unfiltered by the thin terrestrial atmosphere and feeding off of it. Spores of black fungus fly in the wind and encounter the site of the nuclear reactor of Chernobyl where it colonizes the concrete walls and flourishes, absorbing and thriving by feeding off of the ghosts of nuclear reactors.⁵ All in the name of energy. Vibrating matter, living, dying, transforming bricolage of bodies and matter.

A curtain gives way. A honey-yellow latex curtain hangs suspended on a hospital rail. Behind there are lives that are sinking into bubbling matter of pus and blood and amniotic liquids that give way to chemicals that prefer numbness to pain. We prefer to feel nothing than to feel waves of physical distress to the brain. Numbness is what oil feels when it is burned, when the earth becomes hotter. Numbness is what the wave feels as it leaps over homes and drags them back into the ocean. Numbness is what lava feels when it engulfs villages at the foot of trembling volcanos. Neither pain nor joy but the deep nothingness of material being without conscious subjectivity.

³ In an essay approaching the topic of material and identity, Croatian scholar Andrea Matosevic points to hard labour as entrance to “manhood.” The ability to withstand not only hard labour conditions but also unregulated levels of toxicity become a social marker of acceptance and respect. Andrea Matosevic, “Industry Forging Masculinity: Tough Men, Hard Labour and Identity,” Department of Italian Language Studies, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Pula. February 9 2010.

⁴ Extremophiles, defined as creatures that thrive in extreme conditions such as the toxic waters around underground volcanic vents, have often saved life on earth. In fireball earth and iceball earth these were the only creatures who survived, and thus the ancestors of all living matter today. Extremophiles such as the Pacific white coral are still around today (<https://www.hakaimagazine.com/news/australias-extremophile-coral-could-be-key-saving-worlds-reefs/>) Artist and biologist Paul Rosero Contreras has been filming and documenting these corals around the Galapagos islands for the past couple of years. (<http://paulrosero.com/>)

⁵ Black fungus has been found thriving in the radioactive core of the Chernobyl disaster. Doctor Ekaterina Dadachova speaks of their evolutionary path pointing back to a time of “magnetic zero” in which the earth’s natural shield against cosmic radiation disappeared. (<https://nypost.com/2020/02/07/fungi-that-eats-radiation-found-living-inside-chernobyl-nuclear-reactor/>)



Plastic tubes stick out of the body. A bronze prosthetic is inserted and glides into position. It is lubricated with a sticky liquid that combines with mine. Tubes transport fluids to supple limbs. An amniotic ocean from which we once emerged in which neither bodies, nor vibrations, nor velocity existed. The inside and the outside of the body no longer exist. Fluid and metal operate in the fleshy corners of bleeding sacs. Like our ancestral single-cell organisms that roamed the primordial earth in which petrol had never yet been formed. When all matter, energy, and life convened in a single ocean, a singularity of vibrating matter – animal, vegetal, mineral – a planetary and cosmic body that we all still contain.

We felt all this through the layers of our former surface dilated to maintain the most extended possible contact with that nourishing sea, because at every up and down of the waves there was stuff that passed from outside of us to our inside, all sustenance of every sort, even iron, healthful stuff, in short, and in fact I've never been so well as I was then. Or, to be more precise: I was well since in dilating my surface I increased the possibilities of contact between me and this outside of me that was so precious, but as the zones of my body soaked in marine solution were extended, my volume also increased at the same time, and a more and more voluminous zone within me became unreachable by the element outside, it became arid, dull, and the weight of this dry and torpid thickness I carried within me was the only shadow of my happiness, our happiness, Zylphia's and mine, because the more she splendidly took up space in the sea, the more the inert and opaque thickness grew in her too, unlaved and unlavable, lost to the vital flux, not reached by the messages I transmitted to her through the vibration of the waves. – Italo Calvino, Blood, Sea

Àngels Miralda is a writer and curator who lives in Amsterdam and Catalonia. She is a curator at airWG artist residency in Amsterdam as well as independently with recent exhibitions taking place at Tallinn Art Hall (Estonia), MGLC - International Centre for Graphic Arts (Ljubljana), De Appel (Amsterdam), Museu de Angra do Heroísmo (Azores), the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (Riga), and Curated By Festival (Vienna). She regularly writes Critics' Picks for Artforum as well as catalogue and exhibition texts such as those recently presented at Grimm Gallery (New York), National Gallery of Kosovo (Pristina), Gallery of Modern Art (Mumbai), Casa Velázquez (Madrid), Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), and the Fundació Suñol (Barcelona).