



**EDITED BY TONY FRY AND ANNE-MARIE WILLIS**

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# WASTE NOT WASTE

EDITED BY

TONY FRY AND ANNE-MARIE WILLIS

**ECO** DESIGN  
FOUNDATION





Object by Samantha  
Donnelly and Helen Pynor

# MAPPING : MOTIONS

Samantha Donnelly & Helen Pynor

**“You have erased me, without memory.”**

steel, wire, casters

composted human faeces

ceramic, gold-leaf

herbal remedies in soil + compost  
aloe vera + rhubarb (for constipation)  
comfrey (for diarrhoea)

humus

of the earth  
possibilities of  
growth and a  
rethinking of waste

humans

mapping movement  
inscription, incision  
etching, scratching  
griffe (claw) griffon

humiliate

a depression of dignity  
catalyst for humour  
oblivion, a leaving open  
reducing to a base

humour

4 fluids which determine  
human temperament and  
health; blood, phlegm  
cholera, melancholy

In order that human effluent be seemingly erased at the push of a button, a vast network of hidden tunnels, cavities and processes have been created, along with a parallel network of biological and engineering problems. This effluent reappears in a distant location on a different day. You sense you are floating, when the margin between floating and sinking is minute. A certain regard, a certain malaise. The uneasiness of movement (motion sickness) which reveals all that was hidden, unspoken. Charting the presence of absence. In this attempted cover-up the life giving properties of human waste are denied, watered down, erased, all responsibility avoided.

humble

burying, veiling  
a slow disintegration

where thinking butts against  
what renders it possible  
against what makes it think

how hideous am I?

excrement  
an order of nuns & monks

moisture, dampness

an unspeakable situation,  
exhalation, laughter

## H U M U S

... the time of this incision<sup>1</sup>. A deliberate breakdown, a forcing of decay in this space where decay has been arrested. New walls, new floors, new lighting. Traffic rumbles outside, children scream, the inverter for the solar power system squeals in the hallway, people work above. A reconstructed space. The sixteen steel boxes float above the floor throwing shadows which crawl the walls. Each box sits on four small wheels, whispering movement, resisting stasis. It is a work that desires, visually: desires movement, desires growth, desires water, desires reading, desires laughter. This desire is announced, but silently. Oblivious to the noise outside. Restraint is exercised with wires, linking each small box to several others, not quite tight enough to stop a twisting motion, enough to follow the sun's trajectory through the tall windows. This scene works upon my desire. From a distance, it begs proximity, up close, it demands reading, it manipulates me so that I have to put my face close to its surface. And once my face is there, it discovers decay, the boxes which appeared so slick and seamless from a distance, reveal themselves as gently succumbing to a cloak of oxidising skin which inscribes itself in red on the surface. I want to stop the rust, save this scene from falling apart, but this is only because I am practised in thinking that breakdown must be stopped. Writing always comes too late or way too soon. This text is a further disintegration...

Humus comes from *humare* (to bury) and *humate* (to moisten). Humus is of and from the earth, it is a demonstration of breakdown, decay, a reconfiguration. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Its movement is downwards, compaction, reduction. By its own destruction, there arrives possibility for regrowth. If I speak of groundedness, it is a way of attending to

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1 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Abandoned Being', in Werner Hamacher & David Welbery (eds) *The Birth to Presence* Stanford: Stanford Uni Press, 1993, p. 47.

things, a way of reading the grain. And of course, the old adage of returning to the origin, the birth/death connection, growth and decay. Someone asked if the big box was the mother and the small boxes her offspring. I laughed and said something about travelling, something about ease of movement, yet the suggestion of maternal existence seemed more appropriate. Dealing with the minutiae of everyday rituals; eating and shitting, fucking and giving birth, dying.

The work demands reverence of a sort, leaning down, crouching down before the work in order to read the inscriptions. The action of squatting to take a crap, such a humble action. Vulnerability. Nakedness. A small gold-leafed bowl for food contains an offering. Benevolence. The gold turns litter to glitter. The bowl is unstable. It purposely teeters on its small wheels, tips over and empties shit all over the floor, forcing the guilty one to reach down and touch the contents, someone else's waste, face their overwhelming disgust and humiliation, deal with their own neurosis. Fighting off the surprise at the lack of odour and the resemblance to what we know as good soil.

This site requires attendance, demands commitment. It speaks of care and maintenance, maintaining (*maintenant* (Fr.) = now) the present. There is also a sense of letting-be, watching the plants grow, quickly, eerily, other weeds sprouting from the compost, watching the rust inscribe demonic patterns over those already etched. Re-inscription. In both, there is a breaking down, a falling apart, falling towards. In this tesseraic (broken, like a mosaic) text, there is an effort to recognise the shatter and work within it.

This work fights with the desire to annihilate waste. Waste is uneraseable, despite dual flush, despite treatment plants.

## H U M A N S

I am travel stained...

A map is written evidence of a journey. This mapping is done with wires. Wires connecting one plant to others, rhizomatic perhaps, thin tendrils of copper, cross-linked, entangled. The journey is never linear. And there is much laughter. Capable of carrying a current, showing the slenderness of the path, the complexity of the knot. The map establishes a fabric of relational connections, silent (whispered) seams. The inscription on this panel of the large box is tangled, without rigour, a self-conscious scratching ("I'm trying to work this out...") The surface of the steel – with its deep ruts and pitted text – looks devoured, abused. The acid has boiled the lines away, the virgin plate now scarred, violated.

The lid of the large box bears a compass point, a mark of orientation, directionality, creating a relation between the limits of the exhibition and the world outside. To know one's direction imparts a certain sense of security... (If only I knew which way I was facing, then I could read this map).

There is a desire to map, to trace, to inscribe what happens after the flush, to reveal the absence, uncover the labyrinth of hidden journeys from the underbelly of each bathroom. The flush somehow signifies a clearing away of concern, an erasure, a relief, abandonment. At the push of a button.

*And now you are explosive, suspended between the moment of charge and discharge. Well of life that, by wishing to race through time at least twice, engenders only that part that can be reproduced in accumulation and capitalisation. Therefore, not life. That lives all the better as she accumulates less. Burns all excess. Dissolves every-*

*thing extra in the movement of her becoming.”<sup>2</sup>*

In order that human waste be erased, a vast matrix of hidden tunnels, cavities and processes exist, along with a parallel network of biological and engineering problems. Most of this is concealed underground or in covered tanks. They speak of warfare, the constant battle to keep the sewerage system flowing smoothly, silently; to save the city from the impending doom of being overtaken by our own by-product, the slime that wants to eat the city.<sup>3</sup> This battle is waged for the hygiene-conscious society, for those who push buttons, pull chains, lather bodies, clothes and spaces incessantly, obsessively. The process of removal is not without violence and heroism.

“I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair, and send him on his way...”

This erasure requires a disembodiment, an abandonment of something that is inherently yours, something produced by your very own composting machine. Emerging from one hidden pipeline, momentarily glanced, before disappearing down another. Any relation to our own waste is destroyed from a young age, fascination for the product of our own body is smartly transformed into a peculiar mixture of shame, guilt and triumph. It is strictly a hands-off process, a non-contact action. This is where fetishes begin.

The flush sets off a series of events – the descent, the endless churning around through sedimentation tanks, sinking or floating, separating solids from liquids. It is screened, degrittied and settled in a series of pools and tunnels and all remaining fragments are incinerated (when all else fails, torch the offending matter). A giving and a taking of water.

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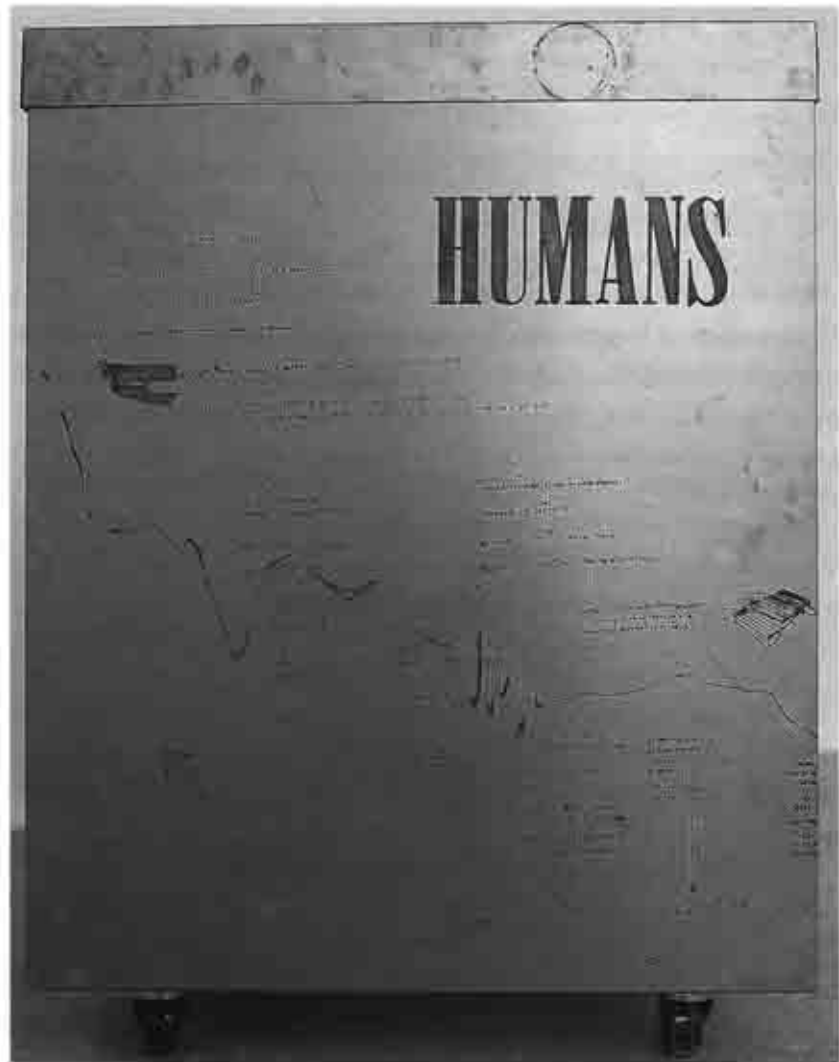
2 Luce Irigaray ‘Speaking of Immemorial Waters’ in *Marine Lover (of Friedrich Nietzsche)* trans. Gillian Gill, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 70.

3 Paul Mann, ‘After the Flush’ *Australian Geographic* [supplement] 1995, p. 1.



Our waste reappears in a distant location, on a different day. Disembodied, dislocated, dispersed and in fragments. You sense you are floating, when the margin between floating and sinking is minute. A certain regard, a certain malaise. The uneasiness of movement (motion sickness) which reveals all that was hidden, unspoken. Charting the presence of absence. There is no termination, no destination except oblivion.

How is it possible to re-map the invisible, integrate these erased fragments in some kind of matrix which begins to rethink mainstream urban practices? The length and the complexity of the journey might be discarded for acknowledgment and acceptance of the possibilities that pooh offers. The absurdly long, sinuous and water-excessive journey could become a simple on-site exercise in our own back yards. An erasure of a different kind. The nutrient-rich qualities of our own waste are no longer denied, diluted or ignored. Responsibility for our own shit is no longer avoided.



Object by Samantha  
Donnelly and Helen Pynor

## H U M I L I A T E

Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?  
(You have erased me, without memory)<sup>4</sup>

This work is a study in scatology, an interest in things filthy and obscene, the study of excrement. And a possibility of remembering.

Humiliation is a difficult emotion to observe. A group of gregarious children came to see the exhibition. A boy accidentally knocked over the gold-leafed bowl, spilling humus all over the floor. His classmates howled with laughter and abuse. The look of horror and anguish on his face was mirrored by the wave of disgust and hilarity which flooded the room.

*When etching, if the line is not seen to be biting for some reason (it will remain bright) such as the ground not being completely cleared, then, while the plate is still in the bath, gently pour fresh neat acid over the offending area.*<sup>5</sup>

It takes more than one to humiliate, it requires the impact of another's gaze, an impact which exposes, strips back all facades, forcing a disintegration. A depression of dignity, a reducing to one's base, a wish to be swallowed by the earth. Ashes to ashes...

*Your world will unravel. It will flood out to other places. To that outside you have not wanted... Yes, I am coming back from far, far away. And my crime at present is*

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4 Nancy, p. 40.

5 John Brunson *Techniques of Etching and Engraving* New York: Reinhold Publishing Corp., 1967, p. 47.

*my candour... You had fashioned me into a mirror but I have dipped that mirror into the waters of oblivion – that you call life... I have even to scrape my woman's flesh clean of the insignia and marks you had etched upon it.*<sup>6</sup>

This work will not survive abandonment. It demands care. But not without reciprocation. The work as art is not capable of being discarded in a store room, the links between existence and oblivion are tenuous, temperamental. The very work itself is an exercising of care. To be abandoned is to be utterly (speechlessly) forsaken. *Oblivion is inscribed, promised in abandonment, this oblivion safeguards no reserve of recoverable curable memory.*<sup>7</sup> To be cast thus is to be erased, renounced, ditched, annulled. Any value instantly cancelled. Flushed away. (You see the limit of my interest).

The movement between humiliation and humility is an opening, an abandoning of affectation. It is the ability to deal with the effects of one's existence in the world, in a non-confrontational and responsible way. The ability to soil one's hands without cringing.

*There was a certain look of horror and a silent intake of breath, the shamelessness of it all, the reckless abandon, the look of ecstasy, triumph, relief (...How hideous am I?)*

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6 Irigaray, p. 4.

7 Nancy, p. 38.



## H U M O U R

The obscene incites laughter. It discovers the dark humour, the moist underbelly of the human psyche. It's funny until someone gets hurt, then it's hilarious. A way of dealing with the unthinkable, the unspeakable, a reaction without words. A solitary activity, someone said, thinking, designing, defecating and so on...

In ancient medicine, four bodily humours or fluids determined human temperament and health: blood, phlegm, cholera and melancholy (black cholera). These fluids ascribed certain characteristics to their owner. The need for remedy. The plants which grow here (aloe vera, comfrey and rhubarb) are for consumption, their medicinal properties treat the digestive tract, restoring balance. Here is sustainability in its most base form. (If you don't eat, you don't shit, if you don't shit... you waste away.) Humour comes from *humere* (L.) to be moist, juicy, succulent... One speaks of good or bad humour as though it had nothing to do with wetness, fluidity. No such thing as a dry sense of humour.

The humour which comes from excrement is ubiquitous. People find shit funny (embarrassing), especially other people's shit, toilet humour, bum jokes and scenarios involving human waste and being caught in the act. Our language is heavily laden with phrases pertaining to defecation (shit happens, this gives me the shits, I almost shat myself...). But the person caught in the act, the person delivering the shit never finds it amusing, can never partake in the humour of being discovered. Each sentence is somehow loaded, somehow connected to shit. Perhaps we harbour a secret desire to stop denying our waste, an unspoken fascination with what our bodies produce.

*The body is a noise, often failing to be the noise it imagines.* Laughter emerges as a violence, an outburst. Strictly speaking someone should feel pain. Perhaps pain defines laugh.

*Laughter as efficacy, in light of past hope, and as a sighing of love, too. Personal disasters recognised. Not fleshed (though who can tell) but temporal ones.* <sup>8</sup>

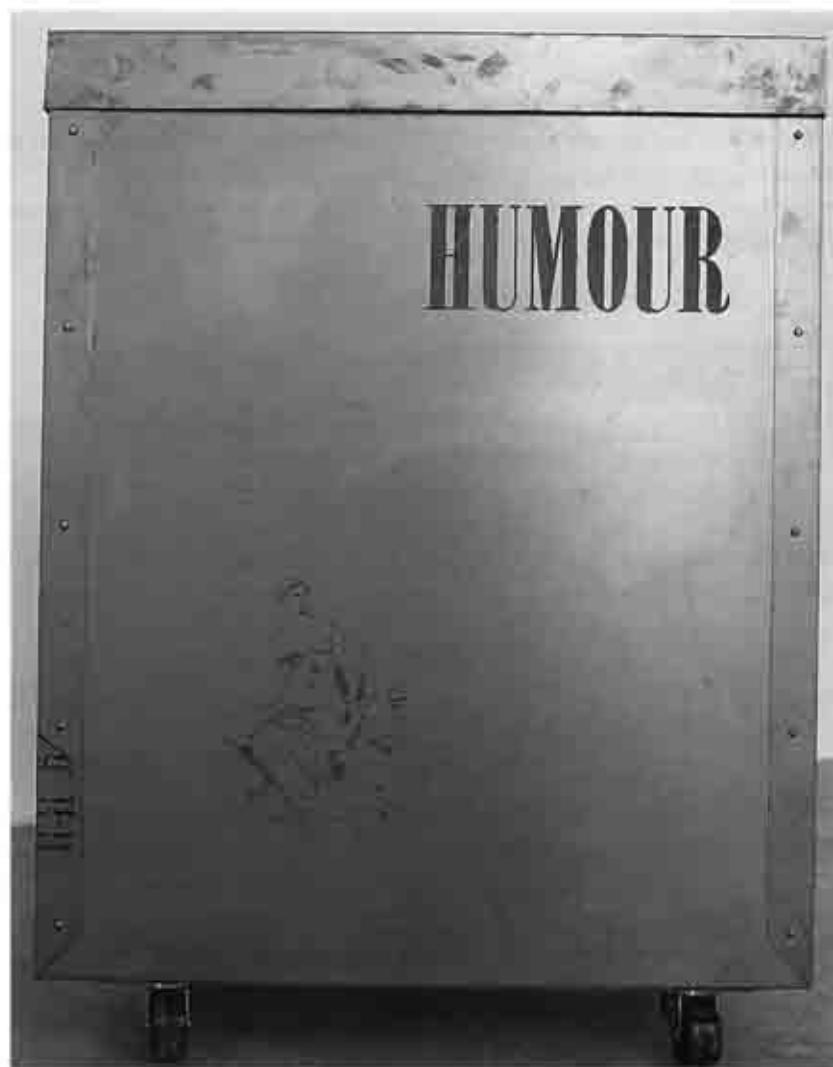
Laughter inscribes an audible trace, caused by a provocation of some sort, some thought. Pro-voke, pro-vox (voice) to sound the voice, the making of sound, resonance. Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb...

Sewage is largely thought of as a dense quagmire of muck, when in fact it is 95 per cent water, a veritable ocean which travels the pipes in order to erase such a meagre load. This is no laughing matter in a water-starved country. And who really uses the half-flush button? And if you push both at once do you get one-and-a-half flushes, because that would be preferable.

The task of rethinking human waste is a task of rethinking body, rethinking obscenity and rethinking humour. It is the established order, manner, desire, intent which requests re-reading here.

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<sup>8</sup> Linda-Marie Walker, 'Eluding the Tomb' in *Real Time* 8, Aug-Sept 1995, p.15.



Object by Samantha  
Donnelly and Helen Pynor



### **Aloe**

(*Aloe vera*, Lily family)

*Medicinal part:* fresh and dehydrated juice

*Description:* Plant forms a cluster of leaf blades radiating from the base. The thick blades contain a greenish translucent salve-like juice ... easily grown as a house plant.

*Properties and uses:* dehydrated juice used as a purgative. Fresh juice used for minor burns, sunburn, insect bites and other emollient uses.

### **Comfrey**

(*Symphytum officinale*, Borage family)

*Medicinal part:* the root

*Description:* Comfrey has an oblong, fleshy, perennial root, black on the outside and whitish within, containing a glutinous, tasteless juice, with diverse, very large, very hairy green leaves lying on the ground, so hairy or so prickly that if they touch any tender parts of the hands, face or body, they will cause itching ... it grows on low grounds and moist places.

*Properties and uses:* The plant is demulcent and slightly astringent. It may be boiled in water, wine or made into a syrup and taken in doses of a wineglassful to a teacup three times a day. For bruises and fresh wounds. Also a cathartic.

### **Rhubarb**

(*Rheum palmatum*)

*Medicinal part:* the root.

*Description:* Rhubarb is a large, compact, perennial herb ... [with] a thick, dark brown coat from withered areas and leaf bases, inside fleshy, semi pulpy, juice yellow ... fruit is crimson red ... The root, or rhizome, is sub-cylindrical, irregular. It has a peculiar aromatic odour, bitter, slightly astringent taste, and when chewed tinges the saliva yellow.

*Properties and uses:* Rhubarb is cathartic, astringent and tonic. It is much used as a laxative for infants.<sup>9</sup>

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9 C. Burns *The Herbalist* London: Oxford University Press, 1967.



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