

Research Article

Andreas Rauh*

Material–Art–Dust. Reflections on Dust Research between Art and Theory

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Abstract: Dust is a distinctive material that, in addition to its physical properties, reveals anthropological and cultural dimensions, particularly within aesthetic contexts. In a collaborative project focused on “dust,” a theoretical-systematic approach is combined with an artistic-practical-participatory one. Philosophical reflections and artistic concepts related to the material “dust,” specific artworks involving dust, and the relationship between artwork and theory are interwoven. Thus, the text discusses various types of dust, the role of the artist, different modes of perception, cultural context, forms of dust and materiality, media-specific characteristics, and questions of mediation. Throughout this process, common practices of artistic and theoretical engagement are transformed and developed.

Keywords: material, materiality, dust, reflexions, art, aesthetics, theory, perception

1 Introduction: Dust Sample

Before you start reading this essay, please swipe a finger over the top of a cupboard or shelf, or look on the floor in the corner of the room (between pieces of furniture/behind the shelf/behind the indoor plant) and touch the existing dust. Place the dust on a white sheet of paper near you. Examine the dust closely. If you wish, you may pause your reading of the essay at any point and revisit the dust. I will refer to this dust throughout the essay.

Following this introductory instruction, you may now have various forms of dust before you: This could be compressed crumbs or morsels that need to be crumbled when wiped with a finger, or a fluffy, cloud-like form, a dust structure, pellet, or dust bunny that must be delicately handled and treated, lest it be destroyed. Dust is a ubiquitous material that constantly forms, stirs, and settles everywhere. Thus, I can be certain that you now have dust with you.

This commonplace material will henceforth be the starting point for the development of artworks and, concurrently, of theoretical contemplation. The essay attempts to draw a special benefit from the interrelation of material and art, of dust as an artistic medium, and of theoretical perspectives on dust as both art and material (and intermittently in relation to your own dust sample). Herein lies the potential to discover how art and theory reciprocally transform in relation to a material, how perceptual–theoretical thoughts become clarified in another domain of research, how theory and artistic practice evolve through increasing reference, and thus how artworks influence thought (and *vice versa*).

For reciprocal methodological and content-related influence, an intimate interdisciplinary exchange between artist and theorist is ideal. Thus, theory need not perform retrospective interpretation or description, and artistic practice does not merely illustrate theoretical considerations. It is challenging to maintain a genuine joint (and thus simultaneous) collaboration with fluid authorship. Consequently, the following is based on an extended email exchange between an artist and a theorist on the subject of dust, specific artworks,

* **Corresponding author: Andreas Rauh**, Human Dynamics Centre, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany, e-mail: andreas.rauh@uni-wuerzburg.de

and the relationship between artwork and theory. The exchanged thoughts, in keeping with the nature of the material and the artworks (and also due to the form of the email exchange), did not develop a linear-concise theory but rather stirred up conceptual dust particles and suspended them. From a theoretical perspective, the hope is that certain ideas will reach a level of significance and substance, settling and becoming apparent like a dust bunny on the floor. The unfinished process of exchange thus reveals itself as a path to theorise artworks and materialise theory. This path will be partially explored in the following sections.

2 Material to Be

Material, objects, things in their materiality, and the various constellations are not only quantitative physical realities in spatial situations but also qualitative affective co-producers of an atmospheric mood. Stemming from individual (theoretical and artistic) engagements with the atmospheric perception of emotionally charged constellations of things in space, a joint project on dust was initiated with the artist Stefan Klein. Dust is not only ubiquitous but also a special material.

Defined since antiquity by its small size and fine distribution in the air, dust is a material that is produced and occurs naturally and necessarily in nature. Isidore of Seville defined in 623 AD that “dust is called what is whirled around by the force of the wind: ‘pulvis dictus, quod vi venti pellatur.’”¹ The phenomenon of dust is determined by its behaviour. In terms of substance, most dust is stirred up by desert sandstorms, forest fires, volcanic eruptions, sea spray, flower pollen, and soil erosion.² Humans contribute carcinogenic fine dust and new materials like synthetic fibres through fire, industry, and traffic.

What might the dust you have collected consist of? The collective term “dust” refers to a multitude, a material conglomerate. As a material, it is not neutral matter. It is composed of the components of its environment, mirroring it as an entropic collection of traces. The fact that its composition can be scientifically measured and clearly described is utilised by forensics, which analyses in three steps: “sorting, microscopic and microchemical examination.”³ This breakdown transforms the singular dust into a plurality of dusts, which can indicate regions, places, and sometimes specific individuals: fibres, lint, and pollen. Dust tells concrete stories hidden within the dust objects.

However, like dirt, dust has a bad reputation.⁴ For as non-neutral matter, dust also touches upon anthropological and cultural dimensions: The dust that stands out clearly on the white paper before you can evoke feelings of disgust or at least discomfort. The world we live in is not pure. And with dust as a sign of coming into being and passing away (“ashes to ashes, dust to dust”), a metaphysical dimension is also addressed: Dust as a material is – in its various origins, forms, and consequences – a proto and post-material: from stardust all matter, dust clumps and condensations, the most solid becomes dust again, and the living disintegrates into dust. In this cosmic light, the material dust proves to be a solid signum against tendencies of immaterial telespheric world descriptions.⁵ And in this both temporally and spatially comprehensive omnipresence of everyday dust, humans stand as a primary co-cause: “We cannot escape dust because we cannot escape ourselves. As long as we walk, stand, and work, we dust.”⁶ Dust primarily forms in the presence of people (wear and tear of clothing, skin flakes, distribution of particles by shoes, etc.), but it also signifies the absence of people (people who leave traces in a constantly settling material) both as a trace and as a medium of traces.⁷

Owing to its particularly fine and sometimes malleable materiality, as well as its cosmic and anthropological dimensions, dust has occasionally become a subject for artistic engagement. However, a theoretical

¹ Soentgen, *Staub*, 28, transl. AR.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, 83ff.

³ Meyer, “Fast Nichts,” 117, transl. AR. See also Amato, *Von Goldstaub und Wollmäusen*, 146f.

⁴ Cf. Amato, *Von Goldstaub und Wollmäusen*, 31ff.

⁵ Cf. Kaeser, “Matter Matters,” 234.

⁶ Soentgen, *Staub*, 54, transl. AR.

⁷ For the mediality of dust, especially Meyer, “Fast Nichts,” 120.

counterpart is missing – a kind of dust theory that goes beyond the scientific aspect of the material to also allow for a cultural and aesthetic perspective, which already includes several works of art. Three dimensions that can help structure dust research are of particular interest here: a perceptual dimension (into which dust brings its high contemplative potential), an operational dimension (since the removal of dust also pursues the conservation claim of archives and museums), and a sculptural dimension (with the solid and fluid spatial references that the subject of “dust” provides). Dust refers to surfaces, but also transcends the specific place and time. Taken up in artistic works such as by Duchamp (“Dust Breeding”) or Koons (series “The New,” e.g. “New Hoover Convertible/New Shelton Wet/Dry 10 Gallon Doubledecker”),⁸ dust and its removal become a question of human engagement with the world. This engagement finds expression in theory as a contemplation of the world and in art as the creation of the world. At least, both stand in close complicity, as a ping-pong game of contemplation and creation begins. This “probing symptomatology of the unspoken” cares for material and materiality as a focal practice.⁹

The development of artworks on the subject of dust is already inherent in the work of the artist Stefan Klein: in 2014/2022 with “AfE” (21 g of dust, collected at the demolition of the AfE Tower, Frankfurt am Main) and in 2021 with “What is matter anyway and why aren’t you made of Jesus?” (sculpture, dust, Index/Din A5).¹⁰ Dust is the specific occasion to further develop the topic of material and materiality in the interplay of art and theory, and to test new aspects of the work as well as theory and the art object in their specific roles. An initial result of such joint aesthetic research is the book “Archiving the Universe.”¹¹ It presents a collection of Klein’s dust images, different dust from different situations, scattered and exposed on photographic paper. The essay “Deliberate and Refrained Aesthetics – Dust in a Frame” refers to these works. The project was expanded with an acoustic facet: “Recordings on Dust a collaborative soundwork” by Stefan Klein and Ben Glas was played intermittently throughout the entire Dublin Art Book Fair 2023.¹²

The following section is based on an email exchange with the artist Stefan Klein, which represented an interplay of increasing theorisation of the artworks and an alignment of theoretical considerations with the specific material of the art.

3 Art Development

Artworks necessitate a material (both content-wise and/or formally), and the materiality of the artwork points to the underlying material. Since materials possess sensually perceptible expressive qualities that contribute to physically palpable atmospheres, it is worthwhile to engage with the material of art and its materiality.

In the first image from Stefan Klein’s photo series “Archiving the Universe” (Figures 1 and 2), we see dust from the floor of the studio. How are these dust images created? This material must be deliberately collected, or one must devise ways to capture it, such as laying out traps – black image carriers placed at specific locations, then waiting and collecting. Klein’s dust samples range from

very everyday moments to rather complex events: pollen I collected in a meadow, atomised Tilidine, remnants of a campfire, to Sahara dust that made its way to Berlin, dust from the demolition of the AFE Tower in Frankfurt am Main or a bomb explosion in Kiev. I actually received samples as gifts from friends, for example, dust from the streets of Dar es Salaam, or from Vesuvius in Italy. The images themselves were all created in the darkroom, simply by sprinkling the dust on photographic paper and then exposing it. Even in the first attempts, I found the effect very exciting that all images resemble photos of galaxies.¹³

⁸ Cf. Wagner, “Staub und Glanz,” 22ff.

⁹ Kaeser, “Matter matters,” 235, transl. AR, and 255.

¹⁰ <https://www.stefanklein.org/what-is-matter-anyway-and-why-arent-you-made-of-jesus/> (accessed: 25.03.2024).

¹¹ <https://www.ccadld.org/shop/archiving-the-universe-guest-publication-stefan-klein> (accessed: 25.03.2024).

¹² <https://www.templebargallery.com/whats-on/events/dabf23-stefan-klein-and-ben-glas-recordings-on-dust> (accessed: 25.03.2024).

¹³ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 5 December 2023, transl. AR.

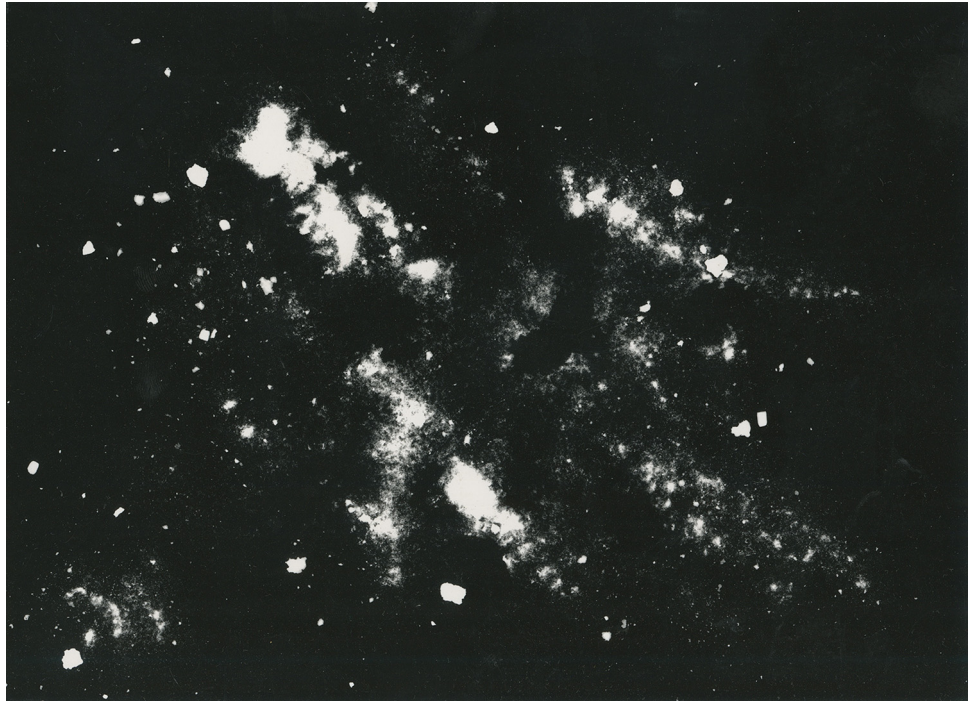


Figure 1: Stefan Klein, *Dust settled on the studio floor* (*Archiving the Universe*), 2023.

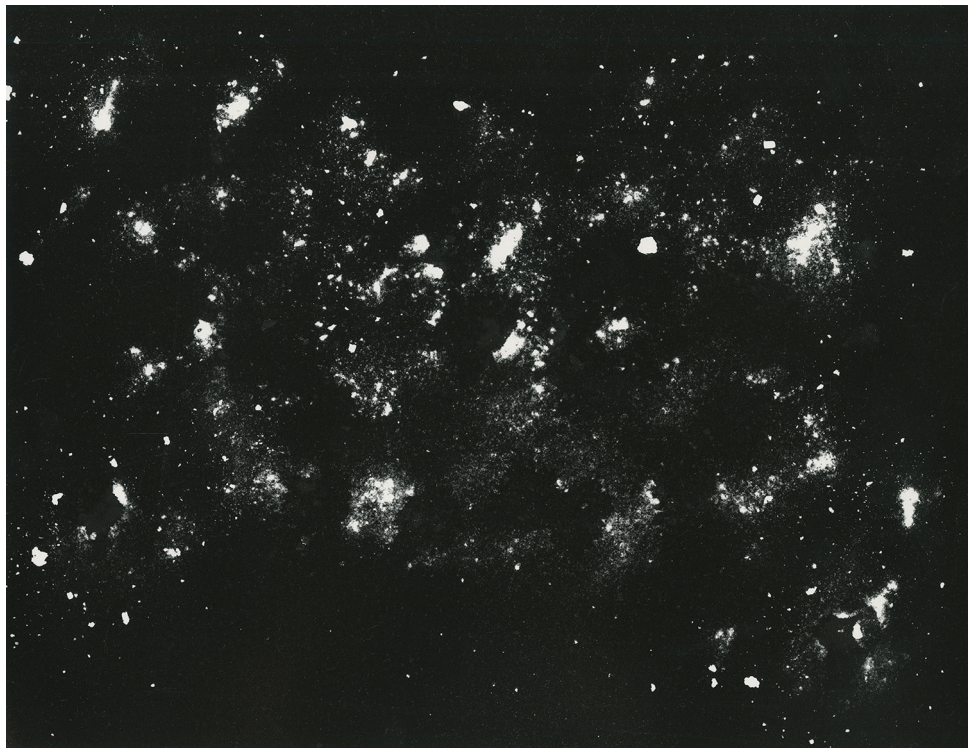


Figure 2: Stefan Klein, *Evaporated snowball* (*Archiving the Universe*), 2023.

The impression of the dust images is reflected in the title: here, the universe is being archived. It is noteworthy that between the dust as the smallest and the universe as the largest, the human/artist does not appear. This type of dust image creation is intentionally chosen without the artist's signature. Stefan Klein sees himself here as a small part of something larger. The in-between in the dimensions of size (smallest–largest) as well as in the discipline (art–theory) interests him in terms of a contemplative approach that dust allows: like dust, we find ourselves in a floating state, which can have a rhythm and connects everything. In a reflection on the art world, collective approaches become possible, which also helps to intertwine the practical and theoretical levels more closely.¹⁴ The randomness of distribution plays a certain role in the creation of dust images through the scattering on photographic paper. It is not precisely predictable what clumps or compositions will result.¹⁵ This would again fit with the disappearance of the artist: like a repetition of the original situation on-site, from where the dust comes. There, it trickles, falls, and sinks to the ground randomly due to a fortuitous event. The intentional collection and transportation to the darkroom are then randomised again by scattering – a target perspective that stems from the everyday understanding of dust as something that falls in, falls down, is always there.

With a scientific inclination (meteorology, geology, and even forensics [with traces at a crime scene]), the artist is nevertheless assigned a specific role. For concrete microscopic and chemical analyses of dust make almost every dust globally quite distinctly assignable to its place of origin. The dust you have collected nearby contains particles from you and your environment. And while under the microscope, Sahara dust can be precisely attributed to the desert, the specific dusts in the dust images are no longer identifiable. They have become uniformly white spots against the same background, thus part of a cosmic series of images. The artist has caused an erasure of individuality – transferring the material from its natural (scientifically accessible) order into a human one (visible in images that also work well in a dust-free environment like a museum).¹⁶ This refusal of analytical categorisation and the explanation of segments of the world allows Klein the possibility to “remove the matter from its mere composition and place it into a larger (cosmic) context.”¹⁷ The specificity of the material should thus be kept in abeyance and bring the material into an open context of reflection between art and theory.

Instead of individualising dust as matter, the perception of and the experience with dust should be individual. To this end, Klein supplements the image series with the sound work “Recordings on Dust (Archiving the Universe),” which “although conceptually quite clearly defined, is also physically perceptible. The sound (physically navigable pure tone standing waves) floats in space, challenging the listener to connect with it, to move through the space. This combination of background noises (the direct recording of dust) and standing waves creates an immersive layer that settles in the background of the space and connects everything.”¹⁸ The collaborative work presented in Dublin with the composer Ben Glas is to be continued in the neo-Gothic St. Paul's Church in Munich. There, the original tones of the organ will be recorded and calculated with certain frequency waves of the instrument. The composition will then be played in a loop in the background of the nave and temporarily accompanied live by the organ.¹⁹ With the seeing and hearing of dust, the classical distant senses are now addressed. The disgust that can arise in direct contact of the close senses – touching, smelling, and tasting – with dusty objects could then serve as an element of grounding the cosmic dimension of dust: Dust as waste then becomes an infestation of the world as material.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Similarly, the “artificial structures and modulations” of the flying sand in Heinz Mack's Sahara Project are only projectable but not plannable, which he aims to capture with serially arranged glass panes embedded in the desert sand, Mack, “Das Sahara-Projekt (1961),” 333, transl. AR.

¹⁶ The individuality of the specific dust can also be seen as a subject in the artistic works of Wolfgang Laib (Pollen Dust) and Maximilian Prüfer (Pear Blossom Dust), Soentgen, *Staub*, 105.

¹⁷ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 7 December 2023, transl. AR.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 18 December 2023. For the musical symbolic character of the organ, whose even soft tones facilitate the staging of a church space, Böhme, *Anmutungen*, 85ff, especially 103.

Even though dust is always and everywhere present, it only imposes itself when consciously perceived. In this perception, it often emerges as a disturbance of the usual and familiar – just as in (classical) exhibition spaces, an oppressive silence is tangibly present, which is then atmospherically broken by a cough or a whispering conversation. Human perception and action are embedded in a world of materiality, and it is not surprising that this world and its atmospheres become quasi-actors in their own right, but in any case, materiality influences the perception and actions of the individual. Depending on one's attitude towards the world, dust can be seen as dirt that damages the bright surfaces in the light. It can also be considered a natural element of shadows that resist the Western pursuit of brightness and pure white, forming their own category of beauty. In "In Praise of Shadows," Tanizaki Jun'ichirō notes "that Westerners attempt to expose every speck of grime and eradicate it, while we Orientals carefully preserve and even idealise it. Yet for better or for worse we do love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colours and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them."²⁰ The beauty of a place then consists of "a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadow,"²¹ so that "we will immerse ourselves in the darkness and there discover its own particular beauty."²² Even the materiality of Japanese paper sliding doors is seen in a different light when it is revealed that "the shadows ... seem strangely immobile, as if dust collected in the corners had become a part of the paper itself."²³

How much cultural perspectives can tint the perception of materiality is shown in an episode by Klein. In a conversation about dust as matter with a Korean studio neighbour, the very question of naming things or substances was understood as "too Western." Klein reports:

She was concerned – as far as I understood – precisely with the moment that can be experienced, to reach the true core, the essence of the moment. So she placed a cup in front of me and asked what it was. When I answered 'a cup', she just shook her head and fell silent. Shortly after, when she had poured me tea and asked again what it was, I hesitated briefly and answered 'tea' (already thinking that this probably wasn't a satisfactory answer), which was again met with a shake of the head. So we sat in silence for a while, and when the tea had cooled down a bit and I had taken a sip, she said to me, 'That's exactly it'.²⁴

This shows a different way of looking at and possibly using the cup in connection with tea. The seemingly obvious is exchanged for an inconspicuously obvious. Because materially, there is a cup, which in a store would have to be more precisely described as a porcelain cup or plastic cup to avoid receiving a glass or jug or mug. With the "cup," a material in a certain form is addressed, and the tea can certainly be enjoyed from other vessels. Likewise, the drinkable can taste different depending on the vessel – also because the drinking pleasure is not only about the holding and jug-like nature of the vessel, but its shape also addresses the haptics and not least the sense of smell (when the scent molecules behave differently due to bulbous shapes). The appearance of an object such as a cup is also discussed in the theory of atmospheres: The presence of the blue cup, through the ecstasies of its blueness, serves as a central example of the ephemeral atmospheric emanation of things and thus the articulation of their presence in space.²⁵

Stefan Klein has engaged with meditation and somatic practices to influence attitudes within himself and others for his series of dust images. With dust as a signum of becoming and passing away, the significance of objects and the possibility of being able to linger in the moment despite this omnipresent emergence and disappearance are reflected. Dust is "in its floating state somewhat representative ... of the transience of the present composition, as individual dust particles can dissipate at any time, only to drift on moments later in a different constellation."²⁶ The specific composition of the dust you have collected is also random, representing an unplanned moment of collection, a consideration of something materially and apparently inconspicuous in

²⁰ Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 11f.

²¹ Ibid., 18. The "calm of the shadows" also becomes significant in Heinz Mack's Project: Mack, "Das Sahara-Projekt (1961)," 334, transl. AR.

²² Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 31.

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 18 December 2023, transl. AR.

²⁵ Cf. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 18f.

²⁶ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 3 January 2024, transl. AR.

the current in-between of arising and vanishing. This characteristic is shared by dust with the atmospheres that surround us. They are present, even if one does not pay attention. And if one pays attention to it, then it is always and everywhere, can become a guide to action, and can be influential. Reflection during dustscaewing recognises the material as a starting point for leaving you in abeyance both physically and psychologically. The Universe Archive is then a photographic fixation, an elaborate chemical process that tames the ephemeral in the truest sense of the word, allowing a shift in dimensions in the atmospheric sensing of the smallest and largest: If one is exposed to too much household dust, one must sneeze. Due to the unwantedness and suddenness, this is an unpleasant state, an experience of constriction that wants to close the body (from the external stimulus). In contrast, gazing at the starry sky is free from sneezing, pleasant, and almost dreamy, allowing an oceanic feeling, a sense of expansiveness that extends one's own body. Klein's dust meditation is "an active reflection on the fact that all matter is interconnected, that we are in a flowing, transient state that was, that is, and that will come into being."²⁷

Raising awareness of dust as both a nuisance to be eliminated and a subject of institutional critique is the goal of another dust work planned by Klein for classical museums: For one year, dust in an exhibition space should not be removed, and the cleaning staff should receive paid leave. The activity and effectiveness of cleaning are thus to be revealed in a dual sense: "the often precarious work situation of people who clean buildings and are usually at the bottom of an institutionalised hierarchy, as well as an activity that still occupies a marginal position in our working world, despite decades of feminist demands for the opposite."²⁸ This space-performative approach could be expanded through conversations with the cleaning staff *in situ*, to jointly address the specific relation to and handling of dust for the viewers. What accumulates as a grey mass can unfold artistic potential (also in microscopic analysis).²⁹ The mere exposure to dust, a material that has become impossible to ignore, can evoke a different kind of beauty that lies not primarily in the object's properties, but in the circumstances of its discovery, which are tantamount to a special encounter.³⁰ While the dust near you consists of your hair, skin flakes, textiles, and materials from your environment, the dust in the museum is "a hybrid of decaying art, the art institution, the art audience, artists themselves, and art administrators."³¹

Having images of the Universe Archive printed on a transporter that travels across Europe is another contribution to Klein's artistic dust research. Not only does this address another precarious professional group, the long-haul truckers. The moving image presentation resembles everyday dust perception: "The image appears only briefly and then immediately eludes the viewer. It is always in motion, just as dust is."³² Also, because the transporter's route does not correlate with the routes or origins of the dust, it abstracts from the specific dust and discusses dust itself in its already debated dimensions. The extent to which artistic mediation work can be realised in the everyday outdoors (with or without recourse to the long-haul trucker as a mediator), or whether the museum interior is necessary as a context, must be sensitively conceptualised, especially in the case of everyday dust, but in any case, it is a tribute to the need for theory in art and art mediation. Considerations of the randomness of the transporter's movement and the restless floating of dust are to be included in a collaborative work with choreographer Deva Schubert. This involves, on the one hand, "how the movement of dust can be documented. I quickly came to the form of dance notations, which offer a beautiful graphic abstraction level of movement patterns. These can then, on the other hand, be translated into physical movements by performers."³³

The structure of the essay has now brought the fragments of theory and references to art, which were stirred up like dust in the exchange of thoughts and emails and kept in abeyance, into a form of their own – a

²⁷ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 14 January 2024, transl. AR.

²⁸ Ibid., transl. AR. See also Macdonald, "Sighting the Dust," 15, especially the note on the "cleaning wars."

²⁹ Also, the works of Miller, Katchadourian, and Winkler in Ibid., 19, and 21.

³⁰ Higgin, "Eine andere Art von Schönheit," 117.

³¹ Cobb and Miller, "Art Museum Dust Collection," 290.

³² Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 14 January 2024, transl. AR. Encountering the dust images on the street can be beautiful as an "unexpected irruption into the structure of the everyday," Higgin, "Eine andere Art der Schönheit," 121, transl. AR.

³³ Email exchange, email from Stefan Klein dated 23 January 2024, transl. AR.

special form of materialising theory. The methodological twist initially consisted of always linking the theorising thoughts on the subject of dust back to the artistic projects in close temporal proximity, to see what can develop in joint exchange and at least in close reflective access. The exchange process connects (in this case) material, art, and dust, contemplating and theorising them together. Precisely in the everyday material of dust, the artistic concern can be materialised based on one's own experience. Insights into the artworks do not solely emerge from the observing individuals but arise in association with the material of the artwork and the theoretical references and perception patterns thus discovered. Human beings and material are intimately connected in atmospheric perception. Tuning into the spatial atmosphere is achieved through the resonant body, which is among the resonating things and materials. This art is of matter and is a matter of (atmospheric) facts.

4 Dust May Be

Like atmospheres, dust is always and everywhere present. And the advancing exploration of its relation to humans with the possible dimensions of origin, becoming, and passing away “turned the prevailing hierarchy of being on its head ... and declared the microcosm the origin of the macrocosm.”³⁴ The change in perspective harbours many new discoveries or many discoveries in a new way. The element of the randomly non-randomly acting is so regularly present in everyday dust agglomerations that there is even a specific name for the random (rule-based) accumulation of dust: the dust bunny. It is sometimes even encountered as a herd, for example, in fashion stores, which are architecturally and in terms of lighting designed for the sterile presentation of goods. In a Frankfurt fashion store, dust bunnies, or polyester mice, curled up on the grey concrete floor and especially in the corners of the concrete staircase (Figure 3). The imposing effect of the size of the dust bunnies was promoted by the otherwise smooth and bright store furnishings, creating the impression of a prairie with tumbleweed or chamaechorie – while industrial cleaning actually resists dust in at least five categories: “new goods, new materials, dirt- and water-repellent surfaces, water control, and lighting.”³⁵

Beyond the mere fascination with the obtrusively inconspicuous nature of dust bunnies, their microscopic, scientific analysis would hold even more discoveries. In this context, the purely fact-based observation of dust can also metaphorically appear as dry as dust, and thus weightless. Art offers an affective proposition that can highlight the atmospheric value of dust, along with the associated emotions and perspectives. Even though “sad layers of dust continuously infiltrate earthly dwellings,” causing predictable pollution, no one imagines in fairy tales that “Sleeping Beauty would awaken covered in a thick layer of dust.”³⁶ Every human is “surrounded by a cloud of dust, known in research as a *Personal Cloud*.”³⁷ Dust thus proves once again to be a constant in human life. It is therefore a material to be taken seriously, one that sensitises us to the special connection between physical dimensions and intellectual, between material and metaphysical ones.³⁸ It is somewhat justified to speak of the “dustiness” of the human being, a term that may refer to an original and/or final state that seems to exclude the phase of the living, vibrant human. It would be better to speak of the “dust-likeness” of the human being, thereby not only hinting at the basic disposition (to be dust/to become dust), but also implying the aesthetic reference to the material – analogous to the concept of vulnerability, which refers to the possibility of injury while one is not yet injured.

In the exploration of “dust-likeness,” the theorist is committed to the scientific method, employing source studies, references, and citations to clarify the context of statements and make hypotheses verifiable. Thus, the theorist develops a habit of moving away from the material and accumulating and contemplating their own

³⁴ Amato, *Von Goldstaub und Wollmäusen*, 178, transl. AR.

³⁵ Ibid., 96, transl. AR.

³⁶ Bataille, “Staub,” 29, transl. AR. This serves also as an example of dust imagination *ex negativo*.

³⁷ Soentgen, *Staub*, 116, transl. AR. See also Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” 7: “human beings do not exist on the ‘other side’ of materiality but swim in an ocean of materials.”

³⁸ Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” and Didi-Huberman, “Abdruck und Staub,” 65f.



Figure 3: Andreas Rauh, *Dust bunnies FfM*, 2023.

theoretical material. In this way, materiality is peeled away from the material,³⁹ and the artwork, which consists of the material, is not treated adequately in terms of phenomena. In the interplay of theorising the artwork and materialising the theory, a dust-related art theory can pay close attention to and promote a material that is otherwise strongly opposed and treated with a broom rather than with terms. To achieve this, one should proceed inter-disciplinarily (in the overview of different disciplines), but also interestingly (in the between of different beings, inter-esse), and not merely sort art historical facts on the topic of dust and develop a cultural history of specific materiality.

The goal of dust-related art research would be research at the boundary of material and materiality as foundational research into the action dimension of objects as their own entities made of material, with interfaces and in human usage at least behavioural contexts. This leads to a deeper understanding of human interaction with dust, the actions to generate and remove dust, and thus of the emergence and distribution of dust beyond the purely scientific dimension. Artworks do not only react to dust but also act with dust. In this process, the theorisation of art objects becomes possible while simultaneously materialising the theory fluff, which coalesces and condenses.

Dust is highly accessible and omnipresent. When art appropriates it, examining an inconspicuous material closely, it provides a reason to let observation grow into theory, and on the other hand, gives theory an unusual material basis for an art-theoretical bridge of understanding. The essay has now enriched and brought to the ground what is otherwise undiscovered or floating around inconspicuously. You took a similar approach at the beginning of the article when you captured a little dust, removed it from its natural, inconspicuous habitat and highlighted it on a piece of white paper. You have randomly placed the dust, creating your own small cosmos that disregards the origins of the dust. You have now discovered places (like shady room corners) where dust can be a hygienic nuisance. Yet, with the right attitude, dust becomes a natural and cultural phenomenon, a unique perceptual experience with a meditative (or at least reflective) character. You are your own cleaning crew, experiencing firsthand the oscillation between removal and observation. Dust takes routes through your rooms, so you must dance after it with cleaning equipment. A slight gust of wind might be enough to blow the dust off your paper. This could be a reason to abandon this focused theory or to continue seeking dust, properly appreciating the everyday in perception. The art-related dust research will continue to follow the development of artworks and, in the same stride, theoretical contemplation, thereby theorising artworks and materialising theories.

³⁹ A critique succinctly expressed by Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” 2f.

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