

# CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE. DUST AS A STRUCTURE, SYMBOLIC FORM AND ENVIRONMENT FOR NEW RELATIONSHIPS IN A LIVABLE WORLD

CAMBIO DE PERSPECTIVA. EL POLVO COMO ESTRUCTURA, FORMA SIMBÓLICA Y AMBIENTE PARA NUEVAS RELACIONES EN UN MUNDO VIVIBLE

ALICE MESTRINER, AHAD MOSLEMI  
Museo Nacional de Berlín, Alemania

Recepción: 7 de agosto de 2024  
Aprobación: 7 de octubre de 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36677/eot.voi18.24925>

## RESUMEN

El siguiente ensayo tiene como objetivo analizar la genealogía cultural del polvo. Proponemos el polvo como una nueva forma simbólica ya que es la memoria plástica del mundo y la estética de la inmortalidad. El polvo es un material vivo y de larga duración; es un entorno arqueológico heterogéneo a partir del cual se puede realizar un planteamiento posthumanista, postficción, postmuerte y postlingüístico en pos de una nueva sociedad y una nueva forma de vivir el mundo. El arte podría marcar la diferencia en términos de reflexión, generando conciencia, creando nuevos conocimientos, pistas y claves.

*Palabras clave:* posthumanismo, postficción, investigación visual, estética de la inmortalidad, memoria plástica

## ABSTRACT

The following essay aims to analyze the cultural genealogy within dust. We propose dust as a new symbolic form because it is the plastic memory of the world and the aesthetic of immortality. Dust is a long-lived living material; it is a heterogeneous archaeological environment, a new start can be made with a posthumanism, post-fiction, post-death and post-linguistic re-framing for a new society and a new way of living the world. Art could make a difference in terms of reflection, giving awareness, creating new knowledge, hints and clues.

*Keywords:* dust, post-colonial, posthumanism, post-fiction, visual research, language, aesthetics of immortality, plastic memory, art, garden of eden

ALICE MESTRINER, AHAD MOSLEMI

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*



**Figure 1.** *Archivio di ritratti.* Alice Ahad in collaboration with Giulio Favotto. METAFORTE, 2021.

#### INTRODUCTION. OUR RESEARCH APPROACH AND ENCOUNTER WITH THE MEDIUM

The focus of our research is on the study and formation of meanings that are transformed or modified, lost or redefined by the flow of time. Meaning is a language game. A relative, abstract and conventional association decided a posteriori, which at precise intervals of time has the capacity to create and define the identity of reality, simultaneously leading to its unattainability, extending into an infinite archaeology where fragments are necessary but insufficient clues. Dust is a structure, an environment and a form in which these things manifest and surface. This material is a Microcosm of traces, living and tangible absent presences. In this place called Dust, fragments are not just memories of what they were, they own and acquire a specific identity. Dust is an active plastic memory: a seat of identity, of history, of life and of transformation. It is a material that has fallen into a negative atmosphere because of the limits of human perception.

ALICE MESTRINER, AHAD MOSLEMI

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*



**Figure 2.** *Portraits.* Alice Mestriner & Ahad Moslemi, 2020.

This is a research path that moves from the substance outwards, observing the narratives contained within this material. We undertake reading paths suggested by the material itself, in which contemporary problems are reflected. The very structure and formation of *Dust* has led us to describe it as a New Symbolic Form of Contemporaneity. The encounter with this multi-material required a comprehensive and transdisciplinary approach, as it deals with History, Memory, Humans, Non-Humans and/or the World.

As *Humus* of elements and relationships, it is a heterogeneous material that needs *the eye of the fly* to be observed in all its many aspects. The composition of *Dust* ranges from biology, science, technology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, archaeology and linguistics. It is the silent seat of the *Aesthetics of Immortality* (Mestriner & Moslemi, 2022), a material of synthesis and representation of contemporary themes. Why are some phenomena so easily misunderstood? What is the meaning of culture, if cultures are the result of human imagination? What happens when human beings meet and interact with the World? It is a long history of encounters and exchanges, of cultural clashes and categorisations. Everything meets, clashes, changes, hybridises and modifies, inevitably showing these narratives, dealing with transformation and stratification. The encounter is not a clash, but rather a point of arrival, a convergence that creates a space, a common place to stop and discuss. We want to go back to the place where meanings and perceptions have been exchanged and created. In 2018, the Municipality of Quinto di Treviso has challenged us to bring out the identity and history of a particular place. It is the Villa Memo Giordani Valeri, which dates back to the seventeenth century.

The desire of the municipality to delve into the history of the villa stems from the fact that the origins of the villa are not entirely clear. From the 17th century to the present day, there have been several changes in the use of the building.

Built in 1687 by the noble Memo family, it has been used as a family home, a war shelter, a field hospital, a spa, etc., until today, when it is one of the municipal offices.

After a period of research and observation, we focused on all the traces of absent, living and tangible presences, which were not just traces of what once was, but archaeology, genealogy of its past, present, even if transformed, as dust is. In fact, dust is the seat of identity, history, life and transformation.



**Figure 3.** *Microscopic photographs.* Alice Ahad, 2021.

This was our encounter with the material, and we were fascinated by its richness and structure. Dust is a material that, due to the limits of perception, falls into a negative vision, becoming an image of negativity, of death.

By observing the narratives contained in it, different readings were taken, suggested by the material itself, in which some contemporary problems are reflected.

The structure and formation of this material led us to describe it in the guise of a new symbolic form of contemporaneity. It is a rich container of information and reflection on current problems.

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

## BEYOND THE COMMON SENSE OF DUST

Dust is a collective and common place of fragments, which gathers in an extensive place what cannot be held together. Dust is an oxymoron that requires a non-humanistic view to understand, it requires language to be washed up. Dust is that horizontal place where human and non-human merge peacefully. Our research tries to go beyond the imaginary and fictional reality created by humans. In fact, “In the beginning was not the word, and the word was not to God. In the beginning was matter and matter was towards itself” (Mestriner & Moslemi, 2022). The world of language appears when the human world begins to influence the world of matter. The latter has been silently and actively developing since time immemorial and will continue to do so.



**Figure 4.** *Studio and analysis on Dust.* Alice Ahad, 2017.

We have placed our research within the posthuman theories, in particular we have adopted the arguments of R. Braidotti, that is, the critical posthumanities as a supra-disciplinary, rhizomic field of contemporary knowledge (Braidotti, 2018), and analysis of how the human imagination (Harari, 2017) creates the vision of reality. At the beginning, we focused our attention on a specific layer of reality, namely the *negative*<sup>1</sup> perception of negativity (Agamben, 2008), of death, and why dust became a metaphor for death.

Due to the impossibility of conceptualising this human moment, or rather this stage of matter, human has gradually escaped from the physical process of transformation. In this atmosphere, the human cultural system has deformed the concept and the way of perceiving life. Life has become sacred, and this has led to a psychotic creature constantly overcoming its limits, designing hybrid species capable of self-generation and

<sup>1</sup> We generated this concept in 2022 with the aim to enlighten how human reality, after the sacralization of life, has generated mostly in western cultures, a negative atmosphere of Death. Infact, in G. Agamben thought the negativity is the Death.

self-creation. As Harari said, a Homo Deus, immortal but victim of the illusion that he is the founder. Among these values, Dust is a loud symptom of what has ceased to be living matter, but a negatively inert material linked to a soaked human linguistic world. Humanity has been creating perceptual errors for generations, starting with this poorly coded and later denied story.

The structure of Dust combines the theme of material transformation with the theme of language and human perception. This combination has created a negative and dualistic conception of reality, which, based on the death-life dichotomy, has founded value systems that are anxious about material transformation.

Human visual limitations have led to an error of perception that has made dust a symptom of the finiteness of the whole, and it has become an imaginary of death. From modern society, human has tried to escape death and become immortal through various mediums. Looking at dust, it is possible to say that the real immortality is on and in matter, because immortality is the transformation of matter beyond the realm of human language.

In fact, matter does not die but persists in its evolutionary state through which the naming process cannot follow, and human perception finds a limit. We already live in a plastic immortality beyond the human and beyond language.

Here we encounter the observation of the archaeologist Taylor, who affirms that there is a profound relationship between language and death (Taylor, 2006). He claims that humans have created and conceptualised death in parallel with the invention of language. We have interwoven this direction with the new critical posthumanities theory and neo-materialism theorised by Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway.

We propose an inclusive, coexistent solution that demolishes any dualism. Finally, a return to the acceptance of matter, transformation, death and the formless. The subject dissolves into the whole, subsequently dissolving life and death. The formless, the Dust, is thus the place in which the subjects are inserted, the phenomena that manage to escape the nominal identification of language and continue to live in the extension and eternal life, a plastic immortality already present and existing in nature. From the coining of the concept of negativity, human begins his journey towards a vain attempt to destroy or remedy the same meaning, seeking different methods to compensate for the material transformation and to continue to live, even after the death of the ego, through manifestations, traces and memories of himself. To the point —today— of developing a new illusion, a technical virtuosity that is the "immortality of the body".

ALICE MESTRINER, AHAD MOSLEMI

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*



**Figure 5.** *Tavole dell'Impossibilità*, Dust's fragments. Alice Ahad, 2020.

A paradoxical solution that involves the transposition of life and reality into electronic chips and virtual worlds in which the definitive disappearance of matter takes place.

But matter is process, it is always life and energy that identifies itself in the seat of negativity: transformation. This is a demonstration of life, of its natural immortality. In fact, each fragment is not a negative trace of the memory of a body, it is a positive transformation, a memory and archaeology of the vital subject that is violently drowned in a linguistic life. It is a new identity, a testimony of life that appears in the present through a noun that, paradoxically, fixes an identity and thus causes the negative vision of transformation. Fragments are therefore not a memory of the traumatic event, but a new subjectivity, or the same one amplified. We propose a new vision, a new symbolic form, a translation of a coexistent present, simultaneous and vital, embracing the tangible vitalism of matter. The old perspective vision is abandoned to embrace a cohabiting, relational and transformative form such as dust. A structure, a place and a concept.

Dust is a noun and a concept that translates and manifests the perceptual error of humanistic descent, which in this place is revealed as a collective name, a common place and an expression in which life and transformation emerge to show themselves and reactivate themselves in other paths, all vital, preserving and transporting the memory of what was.

In this sense, the fragments are perceived as a vital extension that manifests itself like an immortal vitality. Our research attempts to analyse and question what the direction of aesthetics will be in a world in which humanity deceives itself into being immortal. How will memory be preserved? The answer lies in dust.

Baudrillard clearly explains the relationship between the real and the immaterial linguistic plane of the world by recalling that

the symbolic is neither a concept, nor an instance, nor a category, nor a 'structure', but an act of exchange and 'a social relation that puts an end to the real', that resolves the real and at the same time the opposition between the real and the imaginary. [...] The symbolic is what puts an end to this code of disjunction and its separate terms. It is utopia that puts an end to the themes of soul and body, of man and nature, of the real and the unreal, of birth and death. In the symbolic operation, the two concepts lose their principle of reality. (Baudrillard, 2015, pp. 145-146)

Today it is necessary to propose an alternative view through a disenchanted approach, in a perspective in which matter reappears —because matter has resurfaced— and it is no longer possible or realistic to consider this moment of being as negative, since the association with the term "negativity" is symptomatic. What is meant by negativity is the manifestation of movement, and movement in this formulation is an active and vital matter that is independent of any dualism and category. It can only be released from being and at the same time heal from self-induced blindness and return to seeing that human beings are the continuum among the matter of the world.

Similarly, Donna Haraway emphasises that we are humus, neither homo nor anthropos, we are compost, not "post-human", the Chtulucene foresees new perspectives. In this new atmosphere, there is no place for the verb to be. Being is not one, it is, as Donna Haraway says, tentacled and multispecies, it lives as a unicum, that is, matter and its various conformations. It is necessary to embrace the formless and see it as the seat of possibility. Dust is the power of vagueness, the Hopi term *Arupa*,<sup>2</sup> an inner strength within an a-linguistic matter.

This material has to be adopted as a symbolic form, a narrative of new values to build a new decolonised reality. In *Dust*, it's portrayed as a material system made up of relationships, whose "fragments" interact with each other, giving rise to new forms and creatures. Dust is the silence of the verb *to be*. It is strength, action, transformation and therefore life. Dust is the compost into which dualism falls because human language, categories and perception fall into it. Dust is the matter that shows how humanity created life and the world. It is the re-emergence of trauma. Beyond Anthropos there is only animated matter, in transformation, eternal. In this sense, dust is a post-human meeting place of life and for life, where death actually disappears.

The concept of death, once created, became negative because of the negative impact that material transformations have on human emotions. The transformative power is linked to the loss of form, to the deformation and therefore to the disappearance of a

2 opi's term referred to Infome. Arupa is the power of vagueness in Whorf, B. (1956). *Language, Thought and Reality*. MIT Technology Press



phenomenon that used to belong to the plane of the tangible reality and now belongs to a plane that is intangible and virtual: memory. Memory activates the memory of form and becomes the presentification of the past of a form, a mnemonic image, now absent, whose body has become a trace of the dead previous body.

But is it possible to define an object perceived for the first time in the present only as a trace, a piece of something else, and not as a body itself? Why is it not perceived as a subject, instead of being classified as archaeology or mere memory?

Immortality, or its opposite, converge on a point. This convergence results in the degree of zoom of observation, from macro-structures to fragments, from particles to the imperceptible. Immortality and death are two states of matter that form and deform according to the observer and the possibilities or impossibilities of perception.

There is a place within which the vision of negative negativity (Mestriner & Moslemi, 2022), is naturally cancelled, revealing the life of matter, energy and vitality. This place comes from the concept of dust. A collective name for where fragments accumulate.

#### A NEW PERCEPTION AND LANGUAGE IS NEEDED

Reprogramming humanity means formatting human language and perception.

If the present relational system has brought humanity here to the point of reprogramming itself, here it has been decided to take hints from Dust, a cross-cultural, beyond cultural and trans-historical hybrid knowledge of the matter

The homocentric based world is (means) an ego-centric world, changing paradigm, adopting a collective born one, we could change dimension. Dust is structured by heterogeneous elements, human and non-human, terrestrial and non-terrestrial, by plurality; these characteristics have to be the basement towards a new social structure, a-hierarchical and extensive, no more based on subject/individual, conversely, di-vidual, as Y.N. Harari (2015) states humans are.

One of the major changes that humans need to format is the way they conceptualise time. Time is not a matter of time, it's a matter of developing matter and matter of naming. In fact, archiving and collecting objects are tricky actions, we never archive the same, we archive living materiality. We preserve things from life in order to make them live forever, killing them and modifying the development itself. Preservation petrifies objects, turns them into illusory, fixed and abstract symbols. It is not possible to defeat the material transformation of life, beyond man it will continue in its transformation and in the aesthetics of immortality. In fact, "Tavole dell'Impossibilità" is not an act of archiving time, it's an archive of transformative living matter. Contrary to the rules of any archive, it shows the gap. The matter is constantly evolving, showing the limits of human language. This work is a magnetic and attractive point for any human fictional

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

creation that clashes with the materiality of the world, showing a perspective that is not human-mediated. This is where the misleading concept of dust comes in. A blurred, dirty place filled with fragments of a dead body, the real presence of the phantoms of the past. The work looks like a visual paradox where fragments seem to follow a temporal-logical narrative, it's instead the place where human perception and language have been hacked by the emersion of matter. A fossilization process affects human perception. Linguistic human perception avoids perceiving any fragments as a new subjectivity, as it should be. On the contrary, in this way people continue to see death as a tragic event, when in any process matter is transformed beyond the human ego. A new concept of "being" is needed. Beings should be *transformative-mutant-multiliving and plurispecies*. It's in the fragments that are present and —unpreserved— where it's possible to see the archaeology of fragments and life. Here the fragments embody and continue the archaeological concept of origin, argued by G. Agamben, following M. Foucault, who says that "archaeology is the only way to access the present", *since* "the study of the past is only the shadow of an interrogation addressed to the present" (Agamben, 2017, p.9).

#### DUST AS STRUCTURE.

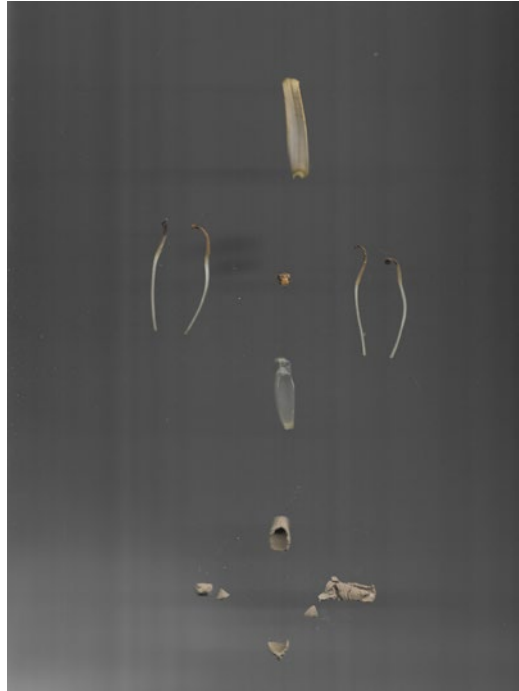
#### THE CLASH OF PERCEPTIONS AND THE EMERGENCE OF VITALISM

Following Greimas' study on the existence of a figurative and a plastic layer (1984), we began to analyse *Dust* with this methodology. At first glance, the material appears as a heap of dirt, tiny fragments gathered together after having lived attached to a main body, now somewhere else. Seen from a distance, these heaps of dust have the same greyish colour. The common perception and meaning associated with this matter, it's all about dirtiness and deadness —it is— due to a matter of form, losing shape and becoming *informe*, so indecipherable to human sight, providing uneasy feelings acquiring the common thought of dust we have to this day.

Quoting Robert Smith in *The Religion of Semites*, Mary Douglas, speaking of habits, rituals and human culture, repeats these words: "Some of what we still do and believe is fossilized; a meaningless, fossilized appendage to the daily business of living" (1984, p.14). In fact, inheritance is mostly a passive acquisition of knowledge and habits from our ancestors and a naturally embodying of them as fixed milestones of life. The following attitude also leads to an already sharpened and provided sense of reality that avoids perceiving what is really tangible and present beyond human perception, the transformative state of matter, and this is what happened to dust. In fact, if we refer to Greimas' plastic semiotics, we go beyond the figurative sense of the material itself, mediated by the anthropomorphic image of dust, and we have instead discovered the complementary side of what is commonly perceived as dust.

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

Our approach to art and creation is a matter of dusting the Dust, of digging, of trying to arrive not at the pure sense of the origin of things, but at the hybrid origin of things. We focus on the study and formation of meanings that are often transformed or modified, lost or redefined by the flow of time. By closely observing the plastic layer of dust, we have extracted the opposite of what dust is.



**Figure 6.** *New Narratives, Dust's fragments.* Alice Ahad, 2019.

Our approach to art and creation is a matter of dusting the Dust, of digging, of trying to arrive not at the pure sense of the origin of things, but at the hybrid origin of things. We focus on the study and formation of meanings that are often transformed or modified, lost or redefined by the flow of time. By closely observing the plastic layer of dust, we have extracted the opposite of what dust is. Dust is life, entropy and narratives.

From now on we are going to talk about dust as a place —a milieu— in which various things happen and accumulate. Dust is both the micro and the macro, as it is the line of temporal development, or rather the perception of the human world. To make it clear, Dust is not a timeline, but this common place that appears as a synesthesia of time levels and between time levels. These relations are visible because the temporal category has disappeared. In other words, because language has disappeared. In this materiality, all human categories and ways of categorising collide, manifesting the silent background movement beyond human reality, which emerges and tickles the human-based reality. The result is the emergence of an unstoppable movement of matter showing its *transformative vitalism*. In the human world there is no place where it is possible to

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

perceive this "illogical" situation, because we create time in this way, based on events that exist in a relationship of cause and effect. But this is only one way of focusing our attention among many possibilities, ways of seeing and perceiving the events of reality. It is the humanistic order given to the world.

The dust manifests at a glance what it has been refused to see, what has been cut out of the girdle of reading created by humans. The act of sweeping dust is evocative. It is a matter of cleaning, covering, forgetting and ordering. More than a material impurity, there is a tendency to erase what is not humanly comprehensible. In fact, more than a material impurity, we can see a conceptual impurity that rejects the natural *dis-order* that is present in the non-human world, but that comes to the surface when and where the human world does not arrive to cover it. A grid on which reality is ordered and separated has been created by the tool of language. Here it's interesting to note M. Douglas's position that grid

just such an expressive oversystematising is necessary for interpreting the beliefs in question. For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. [...] Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death. Wherever ideas of dirt are highly structured their analysis discloses a play upon such profound themes. (Douglas, 1984, pp.4-5)

Where to exaggerate means to emphasise and separate, through the act of naming, that which is linguistic from that which is simply another form or an aggregation of particles in the natural *dis-order* of matter, which is always a-linguistic and in the process of rearranging its form.

This matter shows what has already made its way through human linguistic perception. And another aspect makes it possible to see what is entering, in the very present, into the creative process of language.

#### DUST IS A LIVING BEING WITH AN OPEN BODY

Dust is an inclusive place where everything is caught up in an evolutionary movement that defeats the human concept of death and oblivion. Each fragment continues to model its nature over time. It's the eternal relationship between circulating fragments, particles no matter how microscopic, that reveals the phenomenological structure of the Earth and from which humanity must replan its intentions. Each tiny element is a sediment of history that constitutes the planetary memory and future directions. This

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

kind of immortal-transformative-fossil plasticity denies the concept of death. Dust is in fact a living being with an open, inclusive and evolutionary body. Dust is in expansion and metamorphosis.

We have walked through dust, analysing its concept and its plastic structures, that is, the kinship of materials and fragmentary elements that make up this common place called dust. This is why Dust is a collective name, because it is—in fact—a collection of materiality. It's a heterogeneous community because it's only through the collection of distinctive fragments that it becomes a part. It's curious to see that a fragment of a leaf found on the ground is nominatable as a fragment of a leaf, but the same one, if found in a heap of dust, has become mere and fuzzy dust.



**Figure 7.** *Humus*, Dust swen on fabric. Alice Ahad, 2023.

Dust is a magnetic field in which synthesis takes place. Therefore, it shows us how restrictive and limited human language is when it comes to material transformation, or rather, dust shows the failure of the human linguistic system—the tool that has created the layer of man-made structure and illusions—, but dust defeats it precisely by manifesting its extensive and transformative structure. The failure of language also means that language comes closer and closer to the phenomena, realising itself to be precisely speechless. Human can only name what is visible to the human eye. In dust, these worlds are invisible. This is because it is a permanent state of transformation of matter, which cannot be told.

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

The fragment, the strength of matter is *a-linguistic*, it doesn't really belong to humans. It is pre and post-human, beyond human and post-colonial in its heterogeneity and a-hierarchical structure.



**Figure 8.** *Microscope Photography.* Alice Ahad, 2020

This material leads us to consider the plastic relations that are intertwined within themselves: how different fragments and materials coexist and co-inhabit, making the emerging history and the narratives of their localised presence a heap of fragments.

We call Dust the *Plastic Memory and Aesthetic of the Immortality* (Mestriner & Moslemi, 2022). of the World, because it is possible to read the traces, the emergences of the past, which affect and interact with and in the present, giving hints for the future. Dust *gathering-Time-place*, where in fact times live together. Dust records the various memories of the Earth system, it is a place of testimony —organic, inorganic, terrestrial and extraterrestrial, local and global—. Not "all is dust and all will be dust", absolutely not, precisely because dust is not a matter of mere materiality, dust is a concept and a form. It's a stratification of traces that testify to a stage, a relational state of things and events. To live in our time, humanity needs and demands to change the visions, the perspective and the position about its living world. This means abandoning the perspective structure that has modelled the modern world, the way of seeing and modelling life until today, and adopting. Dust's conceptual structure and relational system to reshape humanity's approach to living the world.

The only way out to regenerate the future of this planet and to reformulate humanity is to adopt dust as a new symbolic form. A place where the solution is already revealed, manifesting a heterogeneous community of elements living together within and

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

between species, where there is no hierarchy. Dust is a political space for learning. A rich structure that shows how to live. In mythological cultures, the telluric material principle was precisely "matter", capable of continuous regeneration and subject to an incessant return to the world. At the center of the term "matter", as I. Testoni (2021), analyses, is in fact *mater* "mother" in Latin. An interspecies mother that provides knowledge, interconnected and coming from different backgrounds.

Dust completely erases the concept of border, dust is a pervasive, immersive landscape and environment that goes beyond time. What is entropic about borders is the hybridisation between things that appear to be interpenetrated. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. [...] The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins (Douglas, 1984).



Figure 9. *Cinto*, Dust swen on paper. Alice Ahad, 2019.

#### PARADEISOS. STRATIFICATION OF MEMORIES AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

It is a research project for the National Museums of Berlin, the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art at the Humboldt Forum, PARADEISOS is a meeting place, a garden-carpet made of dust. Gardens and carpets have always been meeting places. We have taken their form and concept to create an open space –access– for humans and non-humans, made of the world, for the world. Considering dust as an open body and its inclusivity, it is necessary to rethink the relationship between "human and the world" with the eye of dust, following its relational structure, which is a necessary clue to the solution of the world's ecology and the relations between species.

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

PARADEISOS is the result of encounters. It's the heterogeneity that unites in one point, creating a mental space, a structure that explores the transformation of entities. PARADEISOS is the emergence of the inner structures of the world and its material relations. It's the invisible, the micro that reflects the macro. PARADEISOS is the generation of a place through multiple units, fragmentary, hybrid, mixed, intraspecific, visible and invisible, which achieve the vitalistic interaction of the multitude and, this last, unify elements, contrasting poles that are the power of interactions.

During the Fellowship programme, we studied the silent traces preserved and layered on the objects exhibited. They told of the interweaving, the fusions and the exchanges between civilisations, where each encounter is preserved. In our research perspective, we wanted to deepen, or rather remember, the theme of the encounter between what we, as human beings, define as the East and the West of the world. In this case, "Middle Eastern culture" with "Western culture". We went backwards, through the objects on display in the museum, in search of a hypothetical path that would lead us to what human beings circumscribe and briefly resolve under the concept of *origin*. The result is a mere lexical approximation, an identifying term, an abstract and fictional concept that deals with a negative synthesis —and relations of domination—. The origin is a temporary result of a given event, considered as a temporal bracket. The concept of origin does not exist in itself, it does not exist in nature and it is never a precise moment.



**Figure 10.** Wooden pills-box, Iran. Ethnological Museum of Berlin.

It is rather the transformation and mutual influence of entities, elements, species, peoples and cultures in dialogue with each other. They leave traces of exchange in the soil and on things. Through sedimentation and layering, they become new forms and new interactions. The origin is therefore always hybrid and heterogeneous.



During the programme we noticed two objects that embodied the forgotten reappearance of these subsequent interactions. The first was a wooden box from the Qajar period, in which it is possible to read a composition and a structure that refer to Western sacred art. The second object was a carpet depicting a pomegranate tree, a motif that originated in ancient Persia and was considered the fruit of immortality. This symbolism was later adopted by European religious art, which presented the same narrative.



**Figure 11.** Pomegranate Carpet, Middle East. Ethnological Museum of Berlin.

This is where PARADEISOS was born, from the encounter, the layering of memories and the mixture that gives rise to new narratives and relationships. It creates a place where the relationships between the world and within the world can be rethought, re-discussed, regenerated to provide new decolonised approaches to living the world. This redefinition manifests itself in a place that takes up the structure of a carpet, a place where people gathered in ancient times to protect themselves, to discuss, to make decisions, to dialogue and to be together.

ALICE MESTRINER, AHAD MOSLEMI

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*



**Figure 12.** Pomegranate Carpet, Middle East. Ethnological Museum of Berlin.

Observing the composition of the internal element present in the surfaces of the carpets, we understood that the embroidered figures had defined structures that followed a compositional rule based on the number four. Four is an evocative number that refers to the four seasons, the four moods, the four elements and the four directions. The trunk is a physical presence manifested in the present, while its branches are elsewhere, in the *future*. The water basin where the four rivers meet is also an opening for a spatial and temporal passage. This particular type of carpet is called *chahar bagh* in Persian, which translates as *four gardens*. They represent a garden surrounded by a fence that encloses four other places –*a place within a place*–. We were interested in refocusing on

the motif of this particular carpet, and in realising that the 'decorations' embroidered on it are not merely decorative, but precise descriptions and narratives of specific gardens. The research follows an analysis of the Avestan term —Pairidaeza— which translates as 'land surrounded by a wall'. Thus, a long line and philology of nominal transformations of this word appear, each of them carrying the history of an encounter between cultures. We have arrived at the world of PARADEISOS (Agamben, 2019), an ancient neologism created by Xenophon of Athens, who combined an ancient Persian word with a Greek term to refer to a "garden protected by a fence". The concept of a protected garden has given rise to another utopian place, the Garden of Eden, as well as the earthly paradise. A heterogeneous place where several species coexist and live together peacefully, as happens in dust. Our work PARADEISOS is a living sculpture. At the same time a carpet of dust and a garden. The choice of this material identifies and combines the work done at the National Museums in Berlin with our artistic research, which aims to study the structure and the concept of dust, which links the history that is collected, witnessed, transformed by its fragments, sedimented, returned to the surface through an archaeological operation of reading and interpreting the fragments reassembled.

The carpet-garden, like Dust, is a place where several temporal realities coexist. In the first, temporal co-presence is manifested through materiality itself and through the linguistic collision between matter —elements of the present, fragment of the past and future development is once— and the linguistic world. In the second, co-temporality is shown by the tree of life, which connects three temporal levels. It is rooted in the underground, the past, its trunk appears in the present and its branches connect the present with the future. We say that Dust is like *Dasein* (Agamben, 2008) and that *Dasein* is embodied in Dust. Here Dust is the humus for the Garden of Eden, a place where species coexist and don't die. In the garden we have built, immortality and coexistence are inscribed in the material used. Evolution continues in the dust through the new chemical and "random" reaction between the fragments.

PARADEISOS shows the heterogeneity that is necessary today as a cellar for a new plan. This work is a metaphorical structure that suggests how to consider and generate new gardens and places for the future. Our project tries to say aloud that there is no purity on earth and that everything that exists and does not exist is the result of elements that meet and are inevitably hybridised. The concepts of *origin* and *life* are based on hybrid concepts. Paradeisos and Dust are the destruction of perspective to adopt the fly's eye. It's from dust that memories, narratives and new relational possibilities for rethinking emerge. Dust is a place of mixing, hybridisation, cohabitation, an a-hierarchical place and form. PARADEISOS groups the multitude. This garden-carpet fuses the main characteristics of the common use of carpet with its own embroidered meaning of drowning, it means the Garden of Eden that emerges from its pattern, with our concept

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

of dust with the aim of creating a new approach to adopt, a new performative way to live the planet as humans.

PARADEISOS, as Dust is memory, an organic hyper-memory. It's a reflection of the macro-world, a place of otherness, a place of coexistence and an open endless space. Dust is therefore a result, a place to which all human and non-human species contribute. It is therefore a collective action for a collective and co-inhabited place. Dust is peaceful complexity without categories of hierarchical distinction.

#### TOWARDS A POST-FICTIONAL AND POST-HUMAN PERCEPTION

The common meaning of dust does not arise from the fear or phobia of death/shapeless body, but from perception and the lack of nouns that identify the evolutionary stages of matter. Language and naming stop at the human capacity for perception. In order to continue the human fictional atmosphere and to establish a post-fictional society, two operations are necessary. Firstly, it's necessary to rethink the concept of time, and secondly, the structure of grammar, in particular tenses and pronouns. The latter must be transformed into collective "individual pronouns".



**Figure 13.** *Futuro Anteriore*, Sculptures out of Dust. Alice Ahad, 2019-2020.

In this *milieu*, the notion of time tends to be absent in relation to matter, which manifests itself in the obscuring of temporal levels, which here appear as co-temporal, contemporary and co-present. The evolutionary stages of matter are consequences related to the vitalism within and not the result of the flow of time.

The *futuro anteriore* is an Italian verbal tense that indicates events, experiences and facts that are considered to have been accomplished, but which are in the context of the future or uncertainty. The focus on the *Futuro Anteriore* shows the interconnections of contrasting directions, knowledge and ways of perceiving, between and within present and absent traces, between the present and possible futures, between tangible forms in any of their possible manifestations and their projection in the present with a given linguistic noun. At the same time, it is perceived as a contrast between the expressive level and the content level, between figurativeness and plasticity.



**Figure 14.** *Futuro Anteriore*, Sculptures out of Dust. Alice Ahad, 2019-2020.

The flow of time is a perception that articulates and subdivides the level of sensations and developments into linguistic categories. These forms are a temporal synaesthesia, a short-circuit between phenomenism and its substance.

The elements of the sculpture have no fixed form, neither definition nor noun. Vision, perception and naming are problems related to the scale of observation, here they are

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

amplified and extended. Dust lives silently in the subsoil of the world, nourishing everything and everyone.

The second thing required is a new structure of language, new definitions of pronouns and tenses. What would the world be like if we didn't have the concept of "I" in language? If it hadn't, would people have lived in the amorphous extension? Would it have been easier to accept human individuality and coexistence with other species?

In this regard, we have proposed a new grammar. Referential images of words are mutant beings. Language kills the *becoming* because it is a code that names and determines the material world, which instead is always in mutant transformation beyond the vagueness and fixity of language. Language kills the *becoming* by giving time and material fictionality, stability and immutability.

Language thus defines living and changing elements. It is a paradox that defines what is living and thus loses meaning, creating illusory and already lost definitions and images. To live is to become, but if we are, we will not be.

We have proposed this first example/attempt of a language that seeks not to kill:

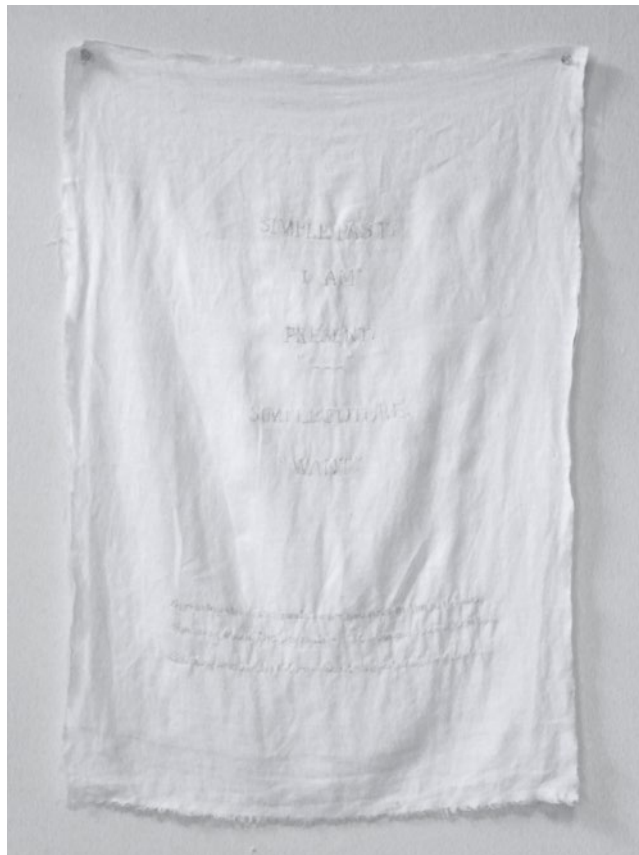


Figure 15. *New grammar*, Writing sewn on linen fabric. Alice Ahad, 2019.

Speaking in the past tense: I AM, because I am passed, and people were someone who is not now.

To speak in the present tense: ( - - - ) not existing. Moment of creation.

Instead, speak in the future tense: Want —will—. Because it is an aspiration towards something.

We are still working in this language and we are already wondering how to replace or delete the pronouns in this new linguistic structure and way of perceiving. It urges to reformulate the way humans refer to and describe the world.

*Humus* and *New Narratives* are complementary works. In the first we tried to conceptualise a portrait that shows a new *relation-ability*<sup>3</sup> between humans and species. It is no coincidence that this portrait is inscribed in a garden-carpet. New narratives are scanned fragments found on Dust and it's a direct explanation of what we discussed above. Dust is a microcosm and a gathering place, a seat of identity. It is an a-hierarchical environment where species coexist and cohabit, hybridising themselves and showing new histories and tenses. New narratives are human portraits and new creative narratives, interpretive and archaeological. Dust is like Pascal's metaphor: "A city, a country, from afar are a city or a countryside; but, the closer we get, they are houses, trees, tiles, leaves, grasses, ants, ants' legs, ad infinitum. All this is included under the name of "countryside".

## CONCLUSION

For us, dust is, grammatically and humanly speaking, a collective noun and a cliché to be debunked, an expression that has fallen into a negative vision due to the limits of human perception. It is a place where several temporal realities coexist, it is the being-there (Dasein) and at the same time it carries with it and within it the future transformations, the transformative possibility. It is the emergence of matter in which the human being is only a temporal parenthesis that emerges and evolves incessantly. For us, dust is not a symptom of death —death is a human concept— and does not belong to matter, which instead persists in its transformative vitalism. It is an a-linguistic place because within it language visibly and clearly falls, fails.

Dust is a structure to be adopted as a new symbolic form, a complete destruction of perspective to adopt the "fly's eye".

It is from dust that memory, narrative and new relational possibilities for rethinking emerge. Dust is a place of mixing, hybridisation, cohabitation. A place and a non-hierarchical form.

3 This is a neologist we coniated in order to express new concepts and new formulations for living the world. Our vocabulary will be shared soon. This world means the ability to relate to the world.

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

As PARADEISOS shows, it's necessary to create gardens, gardens of Eden, interspecies environments based on material development, where immortality occurs and the diversity of mattes cohabit.

We would like to leave some food for thought about what it means to be alive and what it means to be dead. If to be alive is to have an impact on the world and to be dead is to have no impact and no interaction with the world, can we consider the shadows of Hiroshima —and the nuclear dust and the dust from incinerated bodies that entered the atmosphere/biosphere— to be dead, i.e. no longer having an impact on the world? —Moving away from mere physicality and form— are they dumb, dead beings with no impact on the world? Are they not rather screaming subjects, actively participating in the world? Active plastic memories belonging to an immortal aesthetic? Aren't they plastic memories of the world and the aesthetics of immortality?



**Figure 16.** *La tela di Polvere*, Detail, Canvas out of Dust. Alice Ahad, 2020



ALICE MESTRINER, AHAD MOSLEMI

*Change of perspective. Dust as a structure, a new symbolic form and environment for new relationships and living the world*

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (2008). *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*. Einaudi.
- Agamben, G. (2017). *Creazione e Anarchia. L'opera nell'età della religione capitalista*. Neri Pozza Editore.
- Agamben, G. (2019). *Il Regno e il Giardino*. Neri Pozza Editore.
- Baudrillard, J. (2015). *Lo scambio simbolico e la morte*. Feltrinelli.
- Braidotti, R. (2018). *A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities*. Utrecht University.
- Douglas, M. (1984). *Purity and Danger. Analysis on concepts of pollution and taboo*. ARK Edition.
- Greimas, A. J. (1984). Figurative Semiotics and The Semiotic of the Plastic Arts. *Actes sémiotiques-Documents*, (60).
- Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Homo Deus. A brief History of Tomorrow*. VINTAGE.
- Harari, Y. N. (2017). *Sapiens. A brief history of humankind*. VINTAGE.
- Mestriner, A., & Moslemi A. (2022). *Memoria Plastica ed Estetica dell'Immortalità* [MA Thesis]. University luav di Venice.
- Taylor, T. (2006). *Come l'uomo inventò la morte*. Newton Compton.
- Testoni, I. (2021). *Il grande libro della morte. Miti e riti dalla preistoria ai cyborg*. Il Saggiatore.
- Whorf, B. (1956). *Language, Thought and Reality*. MIT Technology Press.