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An Authentic Reality

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AN AUTHENTIC REALITY

GENEVIEVE DOMINIAK + HANNAH MICHAELSON

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We, as a society, have chosen to erase and neglect the problematic images and narratives of these wastelands from our, American, history. Therefore, the thesis aims to offer an authentic reality in which Human Ecology coexists with the previous erasures of Toxic Ecology. Currently, these wastelands are portrayed as foreign entities which American companies engage with, rarely do the cameras turn to our own backyard though. Rather than remediate these industrial sites and thus revive nature, the work looks to coexist with the consequences of our past and ongoing present through myth.

When challenged with the imagery of these damaged sites one is confronted with an unfamiliar and deeply disturbing ecology; a toxic blind spot in the community. This research project aims to speculate on the collision of two ecologies: the human and the toxic. Through an open and poly-temporal system, this thesis investigates how humans are forced to acknowledge their synchronicity with these toxic entities. This coexistence is defined by Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble* as "Terrapolis," an indeterminate equation which accommodates for unexpected companionship through materials, languages and histories.

Passed down to this generation is a poisoned landscape and ignorant compulsion which only perpetuates the industry's perverted, never ending carnage. A magnesium production plant adjacent to the Great Salt Lake has left the surrounding landscape scarred with evaporation ponds, smut piles and waste lagoons. This new American landscape in Utah, can no longer exist in adjacency, and society must come to terms with the consequences of mass industrialization and militarization. Sites such as these are "the materialization of our cultural heritage" and must be engaged with as such (Davis). The thesis seeks a chimeric material collisions and troublesome artifacts to enhance the dissonance of the fictitious American landscape and the authentic reality we refuse to acknowledge.

Society only engages with these realities through unprecedented looking away, refusing to "become-with" these unlikely creatures (Haraway 35). Therefore, how do we make space for an extraordinary companionship with toxic ecology?

1

PRESENCES

ABSTRACT: The contemporary built environment has been motivated by global neoliberal initiatives, while vernacular narratives have been abandoned. Although discussed today, local parables are lost behind the larger ideologies plaguing contemporary architectural surroundings and discourse. We are seeking to liberate the built environment from these global incentives, through the reintroduction of vernacular narratives. The research will speculate on a new engagement with the built environment, through the lens of old and new myths. We will generate a new narrative to re-inform the current architectural discourse, in the hopes to fabulate a parable for future generations.

To hypothesize on these new narratives, we will use the Icelandic Huldufólk myths as a precedent to revive cultural continuity in the built environment. Huldufólk, translated to “hidden folk”, is a society which resides parallel to residents of Iceland. The authority of this parallel community informs the strategies the local residents use to ethically engage with the landscape and accommodate for these unseen presences. To research this engagement, we will catalog these moments through pragmatic survey work and interviews with local residents. After composing these drawings and narratives, we will synthesize a dissertation of speculative images and 3D artifacts. Through this research and design output, we hope to answer the question: can radical societal philosophy liberate the built environment from these global stimuli?

GALGHARUN LAVA FIELDS The rock, named Ófeigskirkj, that now sits along side the newly constructed road, is seemingly unnoticeable in the vast field of lava rocks. However, if you know what you are looking for, its displacement is apparent. The rock is believed to be an elf church. Following much controversy and global news, the rock was respectfully moved during the construction of a new road out to a suburban town, Álftanes. The town, and home of the rock, sits just outside Reykjavík. The presence of the elves was brought to the government's attention by a local seer and communicator for the elves, Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir.

The movement of this particular elf rock was especially controversial because of an environmental advocacy group, Friends of Lava, who were protesting the construction of the road in order to save the historic Galgharun Lava Field. Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir became a key mediator between the three parties. Corresponding with both the advocacy group and elves who resided in the rock. Iceland's government and Road Administration respectfully cooperated with Ragnhildur to ensure the safe relocation of the elf church, while still being able to construction the road.



GALGHARUN LAVA FIELDS
 64°05'31.2"N
 21°57'19.4"W



MERKURGATA
 64°04'13.8"N
 21°57'40.7"W





BUDARDALUR
*65°6'52.36"N,
21°45'32.52"W*



GRASTEIN
*64°07'41.4"N
21°46'31.3"W*

2

LEGACIES

ABSTRACT: In the wake of industrialization, the American landscape is ravaged as overconsumption has scarred the majestic mountains and fruited plains. Passed down to this generation is an ignorant compulsion which perpetuates the industry's perverted, never-ending carnage. Wastelands are the unanticipated leftovers of these processes and exist as unseen creatures of the terrain. *Will these wounded landscapes endure as the only legacy America leaves behind?*

Veiled by the responsible parties, these wastelands, termed Superfund sites by the EPA, are post-human remainders of American culture. The urgency of this global issue and the blindspot it resides in is most prevalent in the American landscape where society is the highest consumers of natural resources. Architects must question their role in the world where nature is "dead" at the guilty hands of human intervention. When challenged with the imagery of these damaged sites one is confronted with a deeply disturbing ecology; a post-human environment society no longer engages with. speculate on the collision of these two ecologies: the human and the post-human. Through a radical recognition and investigation of these Superfund sites, we will contemplate the ramifications of not actively participating in conversation with nonhuman entities. Building on our previous research in Iceland, we defined "nonhumans" as entities which society engages with, but doesn't grant "humanized" rights to. To speculate on this engagement between human communities and post-human ecologies, we will hypothesize *how architects could design for sites which converse with an environment beyond human?*

WENDELL BERRY: "If some of these results look abstract - unidentifiable, or unlike anything we have seen before - that is because nobody foresaw, because nobody cared, what they would look like. They are the inevitable consequence of our habit of working without imagination and without affection. They prove that our large-scale industrial projects are at once experimental, in the sense that we do not know what their consequences will be, and definitive because of the virtual permanence of these same consequences. And what we can see in these vandalized and perhaps irreparable landscapes we are obliged to understand as symbolic of what we cannot see: the steady seeping of poison into our world and our bodies."

David T. Hanson's art is here put forth-rightly to the use of showing us what most of us, in fact, have not seen before, do not wish to see now, and yet must see if we are to save ourselves and our land from such work and such results. He has given us the topography of our open wounds."



Waste Lands
California Gulch
by David T. Hanson
2018



Mining Canyon
Butte, Montana



The 4 images speculate on how the subject views a **narrative** which they have not engaged with.



The proposed object pauses on this **moment of suspension**, when the outcome is not yet clear and both sides appear in balance.



3

TOXICITY

AESTHETICS OF TOXICITY: “One among thousands of public spaces whose site histories are at the core of our social, economic, and environment legacies of development, toxicity, and labor. They are disgusting, contaminated, disused, and overrun with weeds, varmints, and other wild things.... Yet these objects persist. They resist the seemingly never-ending cycle of production-consumption-destruction... They offer traces and fragments of failed intention carved in to the fabric of a place. They are the materialization of our cultural heritage.”

“However, the place is not abandoned. It is used by new, unintended agents; hookers and homeless people, local community activists and black locust trees, nighthawks and bird enthusiasts, building contractors having a smoke before buying wall insulation at Lowe’s Home Improvement store, and Canadian goldenrod. The power of these places to repel the actors that dominate in the normative parts of the city create a space where queer agents can take root or take part in an aesthetic experience.”

“If it is excesses that give rise to new landscape types we might develop a new public architecture that can grapple with our toxic legacy, engaging the material realities of our history of labor, resource exploitation, ecological degradation, and scientific production... The experience of beauty that is found and created there will echo with the pervasive unease and insecurity citizens have about the shadow kingdom that we share, our contaminated American landscape.”

LEO MARX: "No single motive can account for these disparate phenomena. Yet each does express something of the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence 'closer to nature,' that is the psychic root of all pastoralism - genuine and spurious. That such desires are not peculiar to Americans goes without saying; but our experience as a nation unquestionably has invested them with peculiar intensity. The soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape is largely a vestige of the once dominant image of an undefiled, green republic, a quiet land of forests, villages, and farms dedicated to the pursuit of happiness."

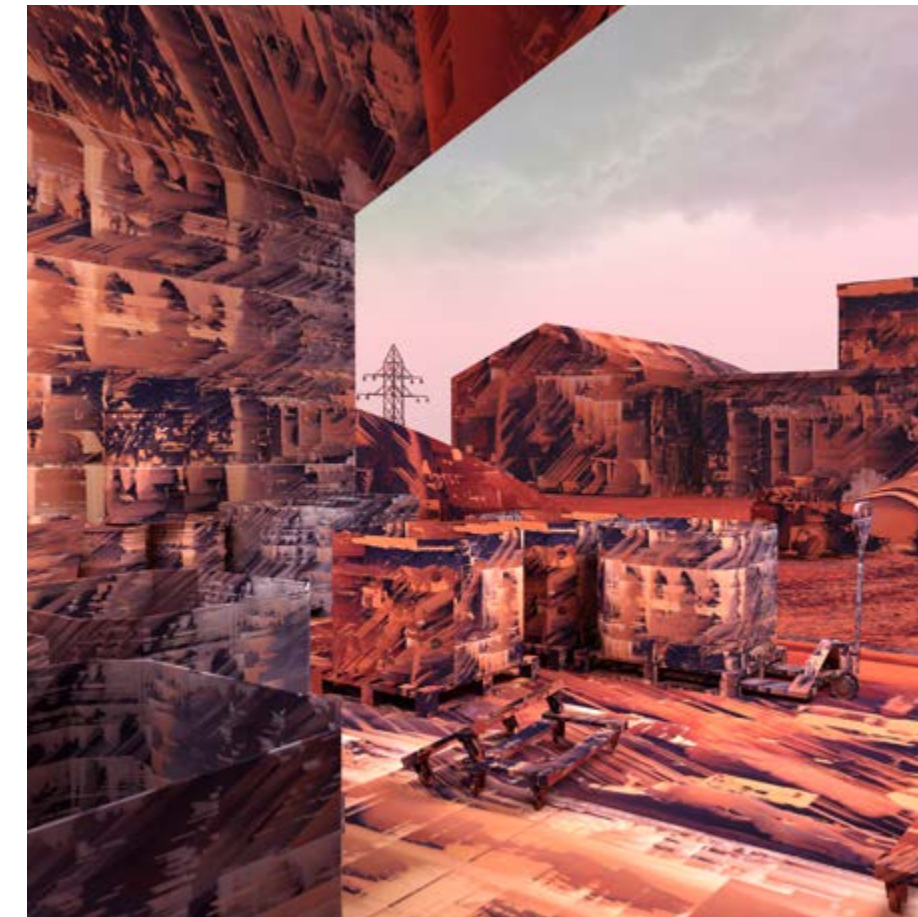
"Evidently it is generated by an urge to withdraw from civilization's growing power and complexity. What is attractive in pastoralism is the felicity represented by an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural. Movement toward such a symbolic landscape also may be understood as movement away from an 'artificial' world."

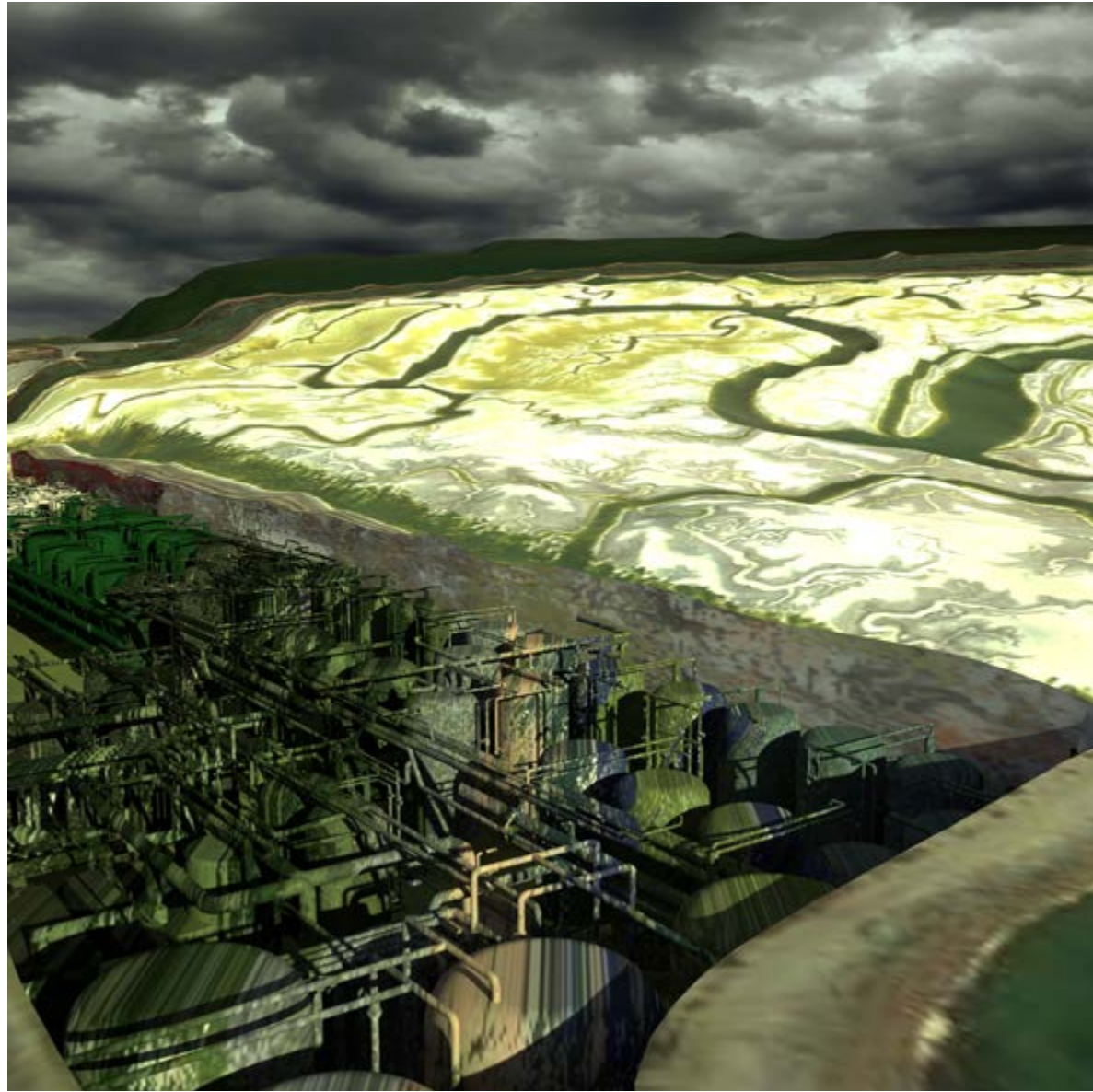


US MAGNESIUM
Salt Lake City, Utah



"Pixel-drifted" image textures of on-site toxic waste applied to warehouse buildings.





Camouflaging the industrial against the pastoral landscape with textures of toxic waste.

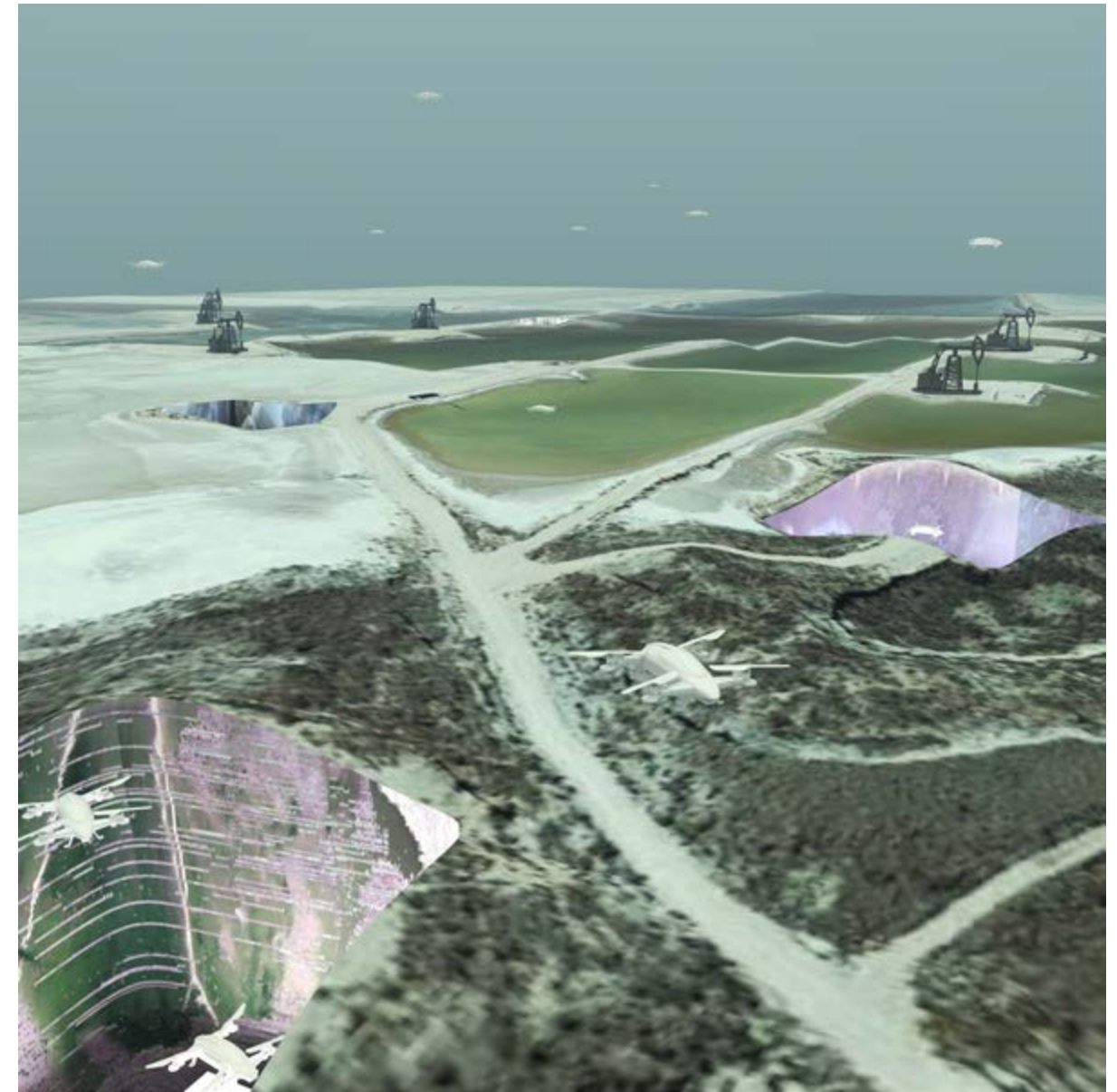
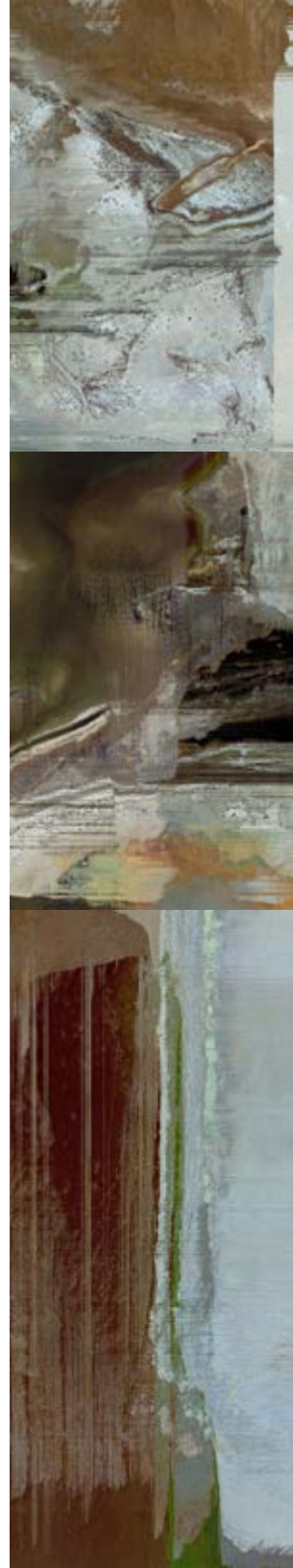


Juxtaposition of a leisure program on the banks of a toxic waste pool.





Exploration of image textures against the landscape which the texture is derived from.



Programmatic hybrid of drone facility embedded within an abandoned oil mining field.

4

ECOLOGIES

HUMAN ECOLOGY + TOXIC ECOLOGY:

To engage with this dichotomy:

We are not designing a building.
We are not designing normative infrastructure.

We are not problem-solving.
We are not entertaining sustainability.
We are not creating a closed system.
We are not operating for the practical.
We are not designing in the singular.

We are designing foreboding encounters.
We are designing troublesome artifacts.
We are embracing the friction between human ecology and toxic ecology.
We are fabricating an unbounded system.

Unbounded in time and place, as well as physical limitlessness.
We are operating in the fictitious.
We are asserting a critique of the consequential American Landscape.
We are designing in coalescence.

DONNA HARAWAY:

Terrapolis is a **fictional** integral equation, a speculative fabulation.

Terrapolis is n-dimensional niche space for multi-species becoming-with.

Terrapolis is **open, worldly, indeterminate, and polytemporal.**

Terrapolis is a **chimera of materials, languages, histories.**

Terrapolis is for **companion species**, cum panis, with bread, at table together - not "posthuman" but "**com-post.**"

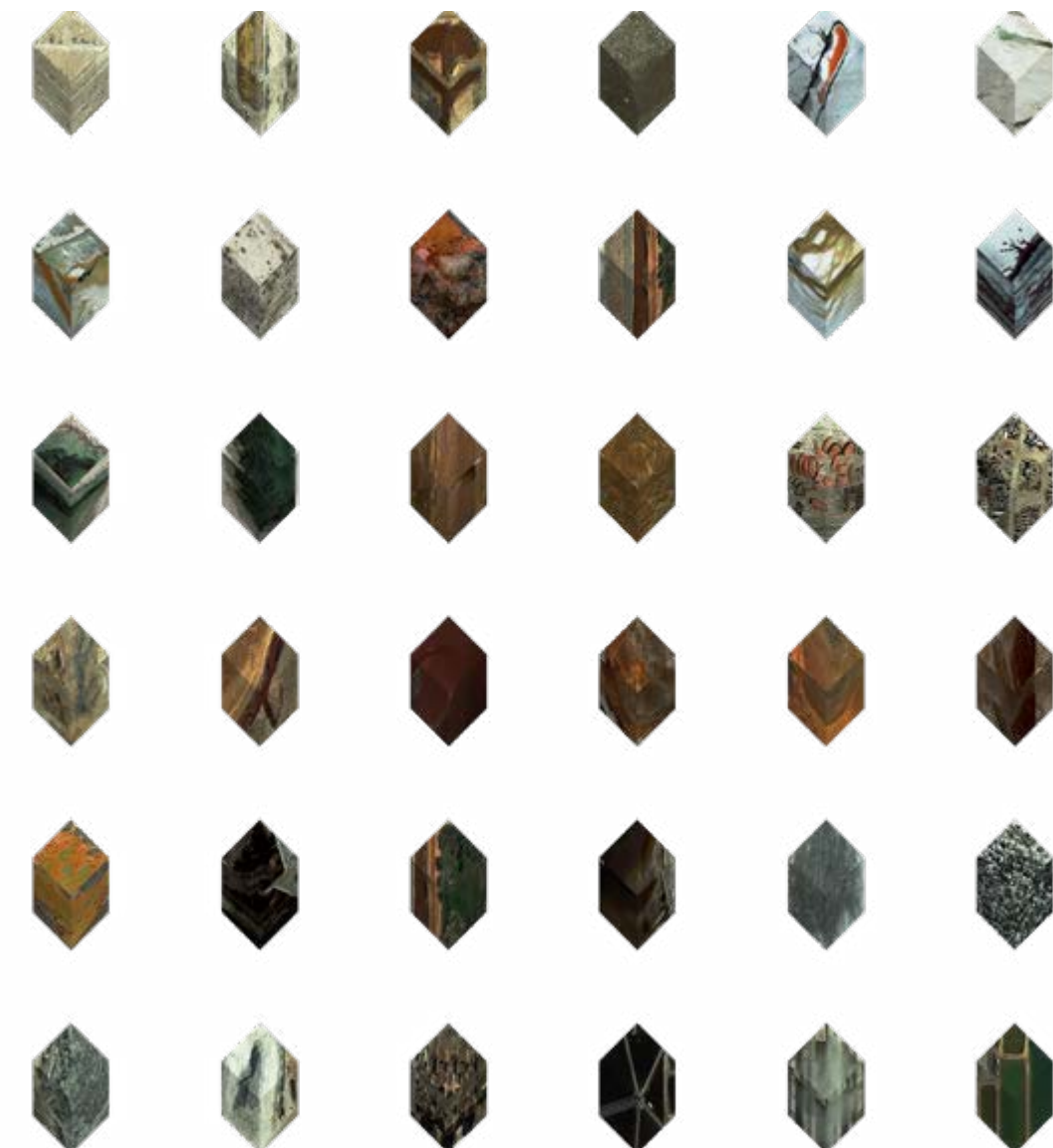
Terrapolis is in place; Terrapolis makes space for **unexpected companions.**

Terrapolis is an equation for human, for humus, for soil, for ongoing risky infection, for **epidemics of promising trouble**, for permaculture.

Terrapolis is the SF **game of response-ability.**



An unknown toxic presence **looming** over Salt Lake City to identify the tone of the thesis.



Catalogue of the **textures** found around the US Magnesium site adjacent to Salt Lake City,

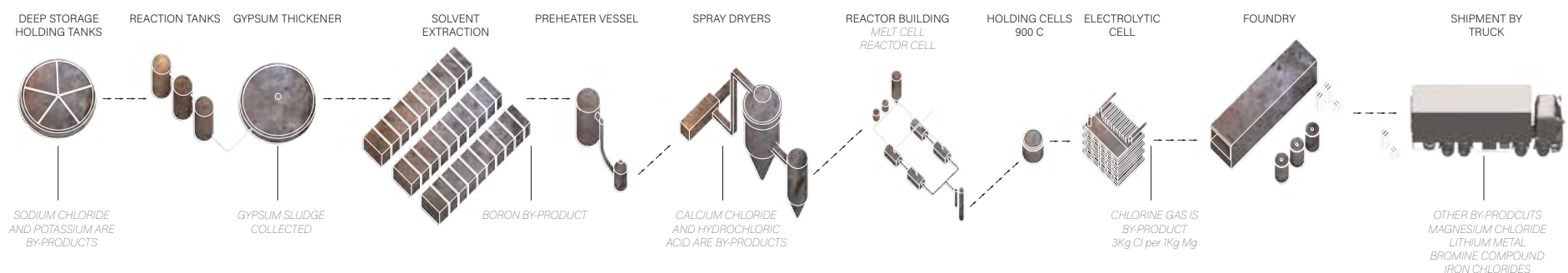
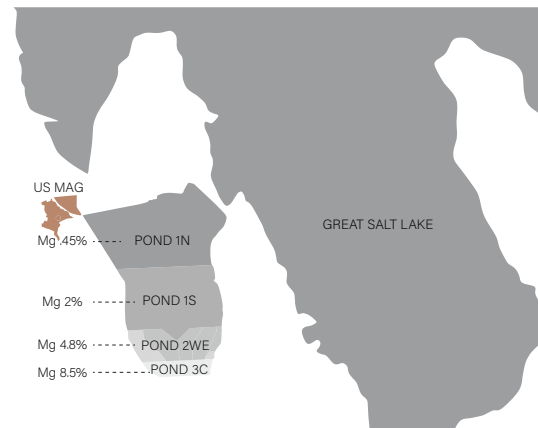


Diagram of **Magnesium Processing** at the US Magnesium plant in Utah.



Visualizing how toxic waste could be collected in the city if it were to be actively present in the city.





Hybridization collage of program (processing plant) and location (in the Salt lake).



New materiality of lithium portable charger, using toxic leftovers from the US Mag plant.



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