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> EDITORIAL

> *"The Accident is not an exception or a sickness of our apolitical regimes; nor is it a correctable defect of our civilization: it is the natural consequence of our science, our politics, and our morality."*
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> — Octavio Paz, *Conjunctions and Disjunctions*.

Our lives are filled with accidents, from the mundanity of spilled milk and a slip of the tongue, to large-scale, mediated and mediatized accidents; here we sit, glued to the screens, as increasing numbers of unruly cyclones smash into tropical coasts, as Black-Hawk helicopters fall out of Iraqi and Afghani skies, as friendly-fire death reports issue from the war-zones of the Middle-East, as narcotized teenagers suicide on the side-effects of their over-prescribed anti-depressants. Representations of the accident span the highs and lows of culture; there is a popular culture of the accident and the disaster – remember when The Coast was Toast!? – and an avant-garde culture of chance and aleatoric production. There is a discourse and an aesthetic of the accident, a mode of concerned and shocked reportage and a standard plot-line by which to invite the accident in, to excite, abreact and entertain. Accidents *are* events, and they *produce* events, they are constituted within spectacular milieux.

Accidents are generally understood to happen by chance. They are seen as the mark of a failure to maintain control of an environment, or as the unexpected outcome of "natural" environmental occurrences. But perhaps accidents can be seen in another way, as productive, in the sense that seemingly incongruous things and events coincide or collide and together create possibilities and release potentials. Or maybe, as Octavio Paz suggests, they're not accidents at all! In a world that is increasingly reliant on technological means of knowing and doing, accidents come thick and fast, and the accidentality of the accident is brought soundly into question.

An environment is a fluid milieu of intermingling forces that condition the many contexts of life. Environments are forms of immanence that make life livable, but within certain constraints, liberties and conditions. Environments are permeable – they always exceed the dictates of science, capital and politics that try to control and contain them. An accidental environment, then, is an environment that is constituted on the possibility of accidents happening. There are control environments in which the accident is reduced to a particular instance of a more general problem, but there are also creative environments which feed off the chance incident or encounter, and the singularity of the event. This issue of *Transformations* is dedicated to the exploration and enumeration of accidental environments, in all their absurdity, surreality and techno-logic.

Today, both the body and the biosphere are accidental environments; as two of the poles of the bio-techno nexus, both formations exceed their discursive boundaries, breaking the banks of phenomenological and ontological constraints. In "Cruel Weather: Natural Disasters and Structural Violence," Dennis Soron argues that the so-called natural disasters and climate-induced disturbances that occur today with increasing regularity, must be seen not as accidents of a natural environment, but as forms of "structural violence," the quotidian workings of unscrutinized power structures. For Soron, it is the very accidentality of the environment that must be interrogated, bringing into relief the political, economic and technological workings of decisions that are all too often obscured by either the scale of the effects or the "natural" status of the events.

Likewise, if the environment has become the site of an ongoing techno-social experiment, the body, also, is touched by the same logic. As Bjorn Nansen argues in "Machine Breaths: Assembling the Mechanical Ventilator Body," prosthetic and other medical technologies such as the Mechanical Ventilator (MV) call into question the relation between the human body and "assistive" technologies. While many contemporary accounts of the relation between the human body and technological prostheses revolve around notions of "the cyborg" and "the posthuman," Nansen argues the need for an understanding of "situated relations," wherein it is no longer possible to understand either the human body or the technological apparatus as

ontologically bounded and separate. Nansen counters the approach taken by writers such as Paul Virilio, who see technology as an accident *of* the human, by arguing that the human body is always-already accidental, always-already imbricated in heterogeneous domains and relations.

Continuing this concern for the status of the accidental body in post-industrial society, and linking it to concerns over environmental disasters, in "Toxic shock: gendered environments and embodied knowledge in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Todd Haynes's *[Safe]*," Rachel Carroll calls for an examination of the structured relations between female bodies and environmental toxicity. Carroll traces the processes by which feminine embodiment is problematised through association with cycles of consumption and invasive environmental influences. In this schema, the female body is permeable and open to environmental toxins and illicit pharmaceutical panaceas, not to mention the suggestive powers of a media apparatus dedicated to products and processes of body management.

In "Calculated Uncertainty: Computers, Chance Encounters, and "Community" in the Work of Cedric Price," Rowan Wilken presents quite a different accidental environment: the mobile and recombinant architecture of British architect Cedric Price. As Wilken argues, the projects of Cedric Price, many of which were never built, represent a concerted effort to build factors of chance and spontaneous creation into the built environment; a built environment that is, ironically, dedicated to its own un-building. Wilken further argues that the works of Cedric Price, with their concern for communities of affinity and the chance encounter, can be understood as prototypes for the "social media" of Web 2.0 and virtual communities of contemporary network culture.

For Tony Sampson, however, the flip-side of social media's chance encounter and happy accident is the virally-infested, spam-slammed, unstable and accident-prone digital network. Countering the time-worn history of the Internet as a robust military network of Cold-War origin, in "The Accidental Topology of Digital Culture: How the Network Becomes Viral," Sampson paints a picture of a fundamentally unstable Internet, a fractal network built not on perfectly orchestrated packet-switching and egalitarian data-routing, but on accidental connections that spawn accidental connections, producing spam and virus-ware as a vital off-shoot of this process. Rather than understanding the network through our firewalls and our proprietary software giants, then, Sampson advises us to "look to the lost plans, the emergent nodal clustering, the viruses, the worms, spam pollution, net porn and digital junk – these have all, in various ways, turned out to be significant to our understanding of the becoming of the network."

Finally, where for Sampson the accident is the trojan-horse to centralized network power, for Don Winiecki, it emerges as a convenient mode of control in contemporary society. In "Accidental Participation in Control, in the Small of Society," Winiecki draws on ethnographic research in U.S. call-centres to argue that the systems of surveillance, time-management and employee-reward that large organisations such as call-centres institute, both liberate *and* entrain the "subjects" of such systems. For Winiecki, this is a question of the decentralized and piecemeal constitution of a "control society" that produces *accidental* freedoms by exerting power over subjects.

The papers in this issue of *Transformations* make forays into a wide variety of accidental environments, teasing out the complications of accidents that aren't accidental at all, and environmental disasters that are anything but accidental. In many ways, what emerges is the very (im)possibility of an accidental environment as such. And this is only to be expected, given the complex interweavings of biological, technological, cultural and environmental systems we observe today.

The Editors
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