Plants Don’t Have Legs

An Interview with Gina Badger, 30 January 2008 & 3 June 2009

Gina Badger is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Visual Studies at MIT. She holds a degree in Art History and Studio Art from Concordia University in Montréal.

I had the pleasure to speak with Gina about her work in detail and its political implications.

Gina Badger: GB
Nasrin Himada: NH

NH: How do you think about process as either a concept and/or a practice, or how do you see these two connect, specifically using some examples from your recent work?

GB: There have been a couple of different ways that my work develops, involving different relationships to process. Most recently, I've been pretty committed to thinking about work as process that doesn't end in a product, that doesn't think about audience in any kind of traditional sense. I've been going back to Alan Kaprow's writing, and trying to get a real sense of what he meant by "experimental art," and what it would look like today. This is an art that doesn't care whether it's art or not. It draws inspiration from recent critical debates surrounding art, and is relevant to them, but cannot comfortably be called art itself. I've just royally frustrated my supervisors [at the MIT Visual Arts Program] by insisting that my final project didn't have an audience. The project is called *The Little Dig*, and I've been describing it as a temporary non-monetary economy based on the exchange of dirt. In a sense *The Little Dig* happened from May 11-16 in Boston's financial district, when I actually had this pile of dirt sitting there on the grass in front of the Fed [Federal Reserve Bank of Boston], but the real *Little Dig* started in February, and it was this long and very bureaucratic process that involved specialists at the MIT Insurance Office; the Environment, Health, and Safety Office; my program’s administrative staff; the programming coordinator at the Rose Kennedy Greenway, Kate Miller, who was so involved she basically became a collaborator; a couple of my housemates and a bunch of friends;

and people off of craigslist who provided and then took away the dirt. My supervisors, if I understand them right, basically want me to say that these people were my audience. [My supervisors] have spent their careers working on opening up really challenging questions about publics and audience - work that I am totally indebted to. But I want to get into the process of work in a radical way that actually denies the possibility of an audience. *The Little Dig* makes meaning through the social relations that it generates, which are based on exchange and the creation of value, and not on the way that an audience perceives all of it.

NH: This hasn't always been the case though, has it? There are other examples of your work that have a more clear relationship to an audience, and I wonder whether you might talk about them, which might allow you to talk about other kinds of processes too. And maybe we can backtrack a bit and talk about your first project at DARE-DARE [Centre de diffusion d'art multidisciplinaire de Montréal].

GB: The basic structure and trajectory of that project, called *Scatter*, came about from a couple of different research interests. One of which was the question of how it is that plants move, which is seemingly simple. It's about weeds, movements of winds, animals, berries, and eating, digestion, and shit. These are all of the seemingly natural ways that plants move around using their seeds. Plants don't have legs, they move in other ways. But of course, plants don't live in the world alone with just animals, they live with people. In the beginning, this project was going to be called *Leggy* because I wanted to emphasize the movement as well as the ways that humans—even though we think that we are following our own economic and political motivations—can end up acting as prosthetics for other things in the world, in this case, plants. So the question of how plants get around is tangled up with these huge movements of imperialism, colonialism, trade—across human history. This is an amazing and complicated relationship, in economic, cultural, and ecological terms. I became really interested in trying to tell those two histories together—human migrations based on economic and political motivations, specifically European settlers arriving here in Canada, and the migrations of plants that accompany and inform the human movements. I was reading Gananath Obeyesekere on Captain Cook, who traveled with a shipful of plant seeds and domestic animals, and whose project of colonization included domestication in terms of ecologies. In retrospect, after having worked a lot more with these ideas, I would describe this as an ecology of colonization that considers colonization as a holistic process, one whose violence can be complicated and subtle, messed up somewhere between cultural and environmental.

NH: Did your investigation start with one plant in particular?

GB: No. Initially, it started a little further back than *Scatter*, with another project called *Desire and Conquest* that looked at the colonial spice trade and the movements of plants involved. I was just having the surprising realization that food and spices are plants. It might seem obvious, but the food we eat is so often divorced from its production process that it can take a while to see that. Realizing that something like a powdered spice originally came from the seeds of a tropical plant was really huge for me. At the same time, I was also beginning to learn field botany. The distinctions between indigenous and non-indigenous plants set off some trips in terms of the linguistic similarities between botanical and human social descriptors. The language of "alien" or "invasive" versus "indigenous" has pretty eerie undertones when compared to xenophobic language, not to mention that it betrays a pretty impoverished way of thinking about ecosystems. This obviously brought me to the set of questions that make up *Scatter,* which was meant to engage a more dynamic sense of ecologies in which humans and nature are not separate, and where it's obvious that ecosystems are always changing over time.

Scatter began with a series of workshops, kind of personalized, domestic workshops in peoples' homes, which reminds me that there was a subtitle to this project, something like a 'Domestic Garden'. I dropped that, which is maybe relevant because a lot of this process hasn't made it into the public presentation of *Scatter*, largely because it's complicated in a way that feels distracting, but maybe I can talk about that later on. For the workshops, I would go over to people's houses with a collection of seeds –

NH: And these were people you knew?

GB: Yes. I sent out a casual invitation to people I knew. Over a couple of weeks' time, I would go over to their houses and we would go through the process of how you start seeds: what's the growing medium, how moist do they need to be, how much light do they need, all these sorts of questions. Throughout this time I also had seedlings starting in my bedroom.

This first part of the plants moving was a kind of social map of relationships distributed throughout a neighborhood. In this case, a desire for knowledge is another part of the reason plants move—because we wanted to learn something and [the plants] get tangled up in our process. The plan was for seedlings from all of the different houses to converge in the garden at DARE-DARE about a month later. What really interested me is that the garden was to be situated in this wild field full of similar weeds, but with much less variety that was going through this process of succession. Mostly, at the time, there was mugwort [Artemesia vulgaris], goldenrod [Solidago spp.] and vetch [Vicia

cracca]. I was thinking about the field where *Scatter* would be as a site where I could intervene in and observe micro-ecological processes. I was asking questions like who are the first plants to arrive when soil is really messed up, and what are they doing to the soil when they're there? Succession is the process by which ecologies shift over time—plant communities come and go, as they die at the end of a season they decompose and actually create topsoil so that there is more humus for the next season's plants, or the plants that were there before have slowly changed nutrients that are in the soil because they have symbiotic relations with nitrogen-fixing bacteria, maybe some of them have facilitated chemical processes in the soil that prevent contaminants from remaining bioavailable. Situating this planned garden, as an embodiment of human desires in a way, was an intervention into the process of succession. In order to really see that part of the process, though, you have to be willing to wait for a couple of seasons to see if the plants I put there had started to escape the boundaries of the garden. And it did, the plant community has really changed since the garden has been there. And so –

NH: You mean it changed the actual space of where DARE-DARE was located? Under the overpass?

GB: Yes, definitely, but it would be ridiculous of me to claim responsibility for it. At one point when I had just planted this garden, I did a full survey of all the plants that were on the site, and there were many different species, but predominately the three I listed before. I was visiting this week, and now there are a bunch of plants that I didn't see in the beginning: dandelion [Taraxacum officinale], chicory [Chicorium intybus], mullein [Verbascum thapsus], lots more red clover [Trifolium practense] than before, milkweed [Asclepias syriaca], silvery cinquefoil [Potentilla anserina]. I'm pretty sure that the mullein is there because of the ones I planted in *Scatter.* It's not a controlled experiment, so it's really hard to say for sure what happened. Mullein is a bi-annual, so it's only this summer that they've turned up. One of the reasons I wanted to put mullein there was that it produces these tiny little seeds, thousands and thousands of them, so there is no way you can't infect the space when you plant a plant like that. There was a clearer cross-contamination in the other direction though—even after the first season. There were goldenrods growing inside the garden that I didn't plant there. There was a circular section at the bottom of the garden that I left totally empty, and two sumacs [Rhus typhina] self-seeded there. Now they've both grown into little shrubs.

NH: When you plant like this how do you think about ethics? How are you changing a space? You can't pre-determine this but you know that something is going to happen in the next little while or so. How do you ecologically think about ethics in that way, but also in terms of your own practice in coming into a

space like this and changing it?

GB: I will try to answer that in two ways. First, I'll address the complexity of the process and explain why it is I don't usually talk about the private workshops that preceded *Scatter*'s planting, and then I will address more directly the question of ecological ethics. It's about experimentation and control in both instances, and the ethics of this are really not clear. It's important to think about the ethics of what we're doing before we begin, but it's also really important to be ok about things happening maybe even if they seem like they're disruptive or detrimental at first –

NH: Right, because it's an ethics-in-the-making, I mean in terms of how you're going about doing it. So you don't know what's going to happen.

GB: Exactly. So, the first part, I can address that very clearly. The intention of doing these kinds of private workshops was to share a kind of learning experience.

NH: And the private workshops were about how to get going, get the seeds growing?

GB: Yes, and they turned up a totally unexpected result that seemed at first like a total bust. But in the end, I *loved* the way that it turned out. I think that's because it offset one of the things I am consistently insecure about when it comes to working with plants, or working with an ecological thematic. It seems to people that this has some kind of do-gooder type of ethics— a feel good, optimistic idea about nature, about the environment, about our relationship as people with the environment. One of the ways I can separate myself from some banal assertion of 'nature as good,' is through more nuanced, maybe amoral ethics, through the clear possibility of failure, and disappointment and death. And this risk that I describe was definitely present with the workshops, because it was spring and here I was going over to my friends' houses to plant seeds, and also sharing this learning process with them, you know it's kind of loving and intimate, as I said before. These things seem to suggest that there is something wholesome and enriching about our encounters with plants and nature. But what ended up happening, partially because I didn't know what I was talking about, and partially—

NH: Because you're learning this too as you go along, right?

GB: That's right. And partially, because it's actually complicated and difficult, and having a tiny little seedling living in your house was kind of like having a baby *anything*, you can't just not come home one night because it will die. So,

what ended up happening in the weeks after these little workshops was that everyone's seedlings died. It was really opposite to my original intention; it became an exercise in failure and disappointment. Initially, I was horrified that I had caused that to happen but in retrospect I am really happy to say that that was a totally fine outcome, and the ethics of it are complicated, because instead of people having a nice learning experience, what I gave them was this awful feeling of trauma and guilt. When you kill something, even if it is a tiny seedling, there's real disappointment and a sense of having done something wrong. The failure of the workshops almost becomes a separate project, and maybe that's why I don't talk about it so much when I talk about *Scatter*, which is really the garden. Scatter, which is like *le jardin en movement*, to steal the term from Gilles Clément, has really become about creating an intervention into a living system and then just observing the long-term effects of that intervention. Which brings us to the second part of the question about ethics, concerning the health of ecosystems and ideas about how they do or should change, and the whole alien/indigenous distinction comes up again. There are definitely clear examples of introduced species causing a bunch of ecosystem damage. Plants like purple loosestrife [Lythrum salicaria], Japanese knotweed [Polygonum cuspidatum], or garlic mustard [Alliaria petiolata], which have adaptations that give them a serious competitive edge in a given microclimate, and they are able to establish themselves so well that they choke out other species.

At the time of *Scatter*, I was only just being exposed to ecologists for the first time—talking with people who work in nature reserves, real conservationists, whose goal is to preserve nature at a certain point in historical time—and to these people invasive weeds are definitely the worst enemy. While I am not going to argue that wiping out species diversity is a good thing, the conservationist idea that nature should more or less stay the same has always been very problematic for me. A big part of the reason I don't want to associate with the mainstream discourse of sustainability is because arguing that the way to have a good relationship with the earth is to do as little as possible to it, is to make reductionist and teleological claims about what nature is and how it's supposed to work. And to me that's not a satisfying way to be a human in the world. I have been trying somehow, over the past couple of years starting with *Scatter*, to develop a more nuanced sense of what it means to be in the world, to be part of the natural world, to know that it's impossible to not leave a trace, so instead the traces that are left have to be deliberate and loving, which is not to say that we might not classify them as harmful. There's no way that I'm advocating a new purple loosestrife; I am absolutely not talking about that scale of disruption. But once these plants are here, it might be better to try thinking about them in a different way. For example, for the most part Japanese knotweed is considered an invasive that needs to be wiped out, and in a way it's kind of true because it messes with the diversity of urban plant life. It

reproduces rhizomatically and grows in these massive, dense thickets that block out the sun and prevent other plants from growing in its understory. In another way, ecologists who are more into something like "disturbance ecology"—that's Peter del Tredici's term for an ecology that takes the urban context and human presence into account and doesn't try to make equations about what an ecosystem should look like based on the absence of human intervention—will argue that knotweed is great because you can eat it like asparagus in the spring, and it tastes like rhubarb in pies, and even if it's a difficult plant to eradicate it still performs ecological functions—it's still absorbing carbon dioxide and exhaling oxygen, and it's still providing a habitat for bugs. In an urban context, where we're still struggling to find a roster of green inhabitants that are going to help the city become a healthier place, knotweed is not so bad, and maybe we can figure out a way to live with it. Anyway, the plants that I work with, as much as they are really aggressive and have pretty impressive capacity to reproduce and move around and sort of colonize areas, already exist in this city, they're pretty common. They've been here for hundreds of years for the most part.

NH: And those plants are mullein –

GB: Mullein, burdock [Arctium lappa], goldenrod, yarrow [Achillea millefolium], stinging nettle [Urtica dioica], bee balm [Monarda fistulosa], dandelion, red clover, raspberry [Rubus idaeus], plantain [Plantago major], violet [Viola spp.]...

NH: Workshops have been part of your practice, either indirectly or directly. I know you're interested in practices of pedagogy, and I know you had mentioned this once before, that the workshop format for you is very important in terms of how you learn, and how you can also extend yourself to others who want to learn with you. I don't know if you have any more thoughts on this, but if you do I want to talk about some of the techniques you have experimented with, or just general thoughts on how you connect pedagogy to your artistic practice. Are they connected? And in some cases if they are, what was the experience of that? Was it a productive outcome?

GB: The format of the workshop, which I understand to more or less explicitly acknowledge the phenomenon of collective knowledge production, is something that I've only just begun to see as an important part of how I present work. That's been the case, I would say, basically ever since I started studying plants. I think that's largely because the system of learning plant medicine is significantly less formal here [in the US and Canada], as compared to institutionalized university education. Not to say that the people I've studied with weren't incredibly experienced; for the most part they've been practicing herbalists for years, and have a huge body of knowledge that combines

traditional smarts and centuries of practice with modern scientific data. At first, I studied with Valérie Lanctot Bédard, from an herb school in Montréal, Flora Medicina. They run this amazing week-long field botany course that combines taxonomy and identification skills with a basic introduction to plant medicine. It's really special because you are outside in the forest. That's when I learned about a really important teaching form for herbalists: the plant walk. I started learning about plants in these kinds of informal outdoor situations, and I think that this process of hands-on learning acted as a kind of initial enabling force to start doing a similar kind of thing. Plant walks are personalized and improvisational, you combine the knowledge you've gained over time with things that come up as you go, mixing in anecdotes and so on, and it's assumed that the people who are attending also have something to contribute. It ends up being conversational a lot of the time. It made sense to use *Scatter* and the Parc sans nom as a teaching tool for this kind of group learning exercise.

Another project, called *Plants in Your Pants*, which started off as a guerrilla poster installation, eventually turned into a workshop series by the same name, which was an introduction to DIY herbal gynecology. This project was pretty close to my heart, because this area of plant medicine was really what got me interested in botany in the first place. It was pretty clear to me at the time that it could be a sketchy thing to be teaching people something that I was only just learning myself, and so there was a real impetus to try and re-define the question of learning and teaching. Rather than framing myself as an expert, I would explicitly acknowledge that I was learning too, and that rather than give rigid instructions, I was trying to essentially infect people with a kind of curiosity and drive to learn and teach themselves through this extended process of research and experimentation. In herbal medicine, it's clear from the start, even or especially with experienced practitioners, that even if you know your plants inside out you are always going to have to experiment when it comes to individuals and their particular conditions. More than rules, this system of knowledge is about observation, attention to detail, and experimentation. So with something like herbal gynecology, the point is not to give people a final solution to their yeast infection, but to offer an alternative to allopathic medicine, which doesn't have a whole lot to say about chronic conditions.

The best outcome with these workshops would be to initiate a different way of thinking about health and bodies, and about our own ability to be engaged in and responsible to that in a really personal and hands-on way. Besides *Plants in Your Pants*, there have been other projects that utilized written instructions as way to illicit participation, like *In the Fall We Plant Bulbs*, where the actual material of the project was a little seed envelope with a clove of garlic inside that comes with instructions on how to plant the bulb. I wanted to take up the form of instruction, not necessarily as a way to create a relation of power, but as

an invitation to engage in a learning process. I see this, along with the workshop format, as constituting elaborate invitations to engage. One of the things about an invitation is that it's quite polite; it's quite formal and easy to say no to. Recently, I've started to think about that critically, in terms of whether it actually works in the way I want. In fact, I am interested in being a little more forceful, in trying to figure out different strategies to get people involved. The form of the invitation is limited because people can chose to take it up or not, and maybe it's too polite or too complete in itself to be as compelling as I want. By complete I mean that the invitation is received as an idea or a concept that is enough on its own. It doesn't need to be taken up because it seems like you already get the point. I am interested in trying to find more forceful methods to illicit participation or engagement, because since this work is about process and not just ideas, I really want people to engage with me in following through.

NH: How would you re-think the invitation in relation to something that would initiate a more forceful engagement? How forceful do you think you would want to be in that kind of situation? Because when you were talking about the invitation being a kind of polite formality you leave space there or room to say no, to have the choice to say no, or to not provoke too much a certain type of pre-determined direction, but really take it up in terms of how you want to go about experimenting with what you give. Again, I think that's really important to think about in terms of ethics, and it's something I've been struggling with in terms of pedagogical practice, how do I foster an environment where participation is necessary for something to take place but being careful about how I am also creating a relation of power.

GB: Now I'm trying to go back over my earlier comment about leading workshops when I described trying to initiate a process of co-production of knowledge, trying in that instance to create a situation where there is not a clear pre-determined relation of power between myself as the facilitator of the workshop and the people who are participating. And that is a really valuable thing to try and figure out—how to create and foster a situation where we can acknowledge that someone has special skills or special knowledge that we want to learn, but to have that not necessarily determine a relation of power that's going to then limit what each party can get from the interaction. I don't want to undermine the importance of that because the larger goal is to disturb habitual power relation between teacher and learner. It is profoundly challenging to authority in institutions of learning to pursue that type of knowledge production, and it is really essential as a kind of ethics. I'm not alone in its pursuit, obviously, that's the goal of student-led education in free-schools, and of anarchist-initiated skillshares, or Rancière's *Maître ignorant*. But that's a different kind of experiment than this thing I was just talking about with the formal invitation. I want to draw out why I think the invitation can fail. I will just

talk quickly about an aspect of the *In the Fall We Plant Bulbs* project, the garlic project. In a way, it shares the same problems with another project, which is called W*hat Kinds of Questions Do Seeds Ask?,* which is a more recent project. In both instances, with both *Seeds* and *Bulbs*, there is a pretty tidy little invitation that I present my potential audience with. *Bulbs* asks people to think about what it is about the city that they love, and to go there, and to be there in a kind of messy, dirt-under-the-fingernails kind of a way. When I hand you the package that's what I'm asking you to do—to go get dirty, not just think about it!

In the case of *Seeds*, it's a similar format, using the invitation, made up of a set of instructions, as well as an object, and that's the starting point. But in this case, I am asking people to consider how this seed bomb, this little caked up ball of clay-powder and compost and seeds, how it is a technology, and how does an engagement with technology change, in a pretty fundamental way, our own spatialized movements and desires. Having a technology like a seed bomb in your hand enables you to do something different in the city. It not only provides the trajectory of throwing the seed bomb, but it makes you think like a plant, maybe even affecting in a basic way how is it you're seeing the city you're engaged with. In both instances, I would say, those invitations have been far less successful than I would have wanted them to be and it's partially because the invitation was too polite, and it seems that as an idea it does enough. If people are going to jump in further, the invitation needs to be really sexy, or you need to be trickier. The fact that it's an invitation can make it too easy to say no.

In these two specific instances, I think that is also directly connected to the fact that I presented both *Seeds* and *Bulbs* in an art context, where there is this tradition of object creation, and fetishization, artist's multiples and free art. And so I am handing out these little packages with bulbs of garlic in them, and they're nice little objects, you know I put time and effort into them, into the way that they look, and in the seed bombs are pleasurable objects that have a good weight, and color, and texture. In both instances people were in love with the ideas to some extent, and they're also attracted to the object, so it becomes something to hang on to – it passes for an art object in its own right. So, in a way it doesn't offer enough and in a way it offers too much of the wrong thing. I would say those failures seemed more serious than failure of the dead seedlings in *Scatter*; with the failed invitation the problem is that *nothing* happens. And so in trying to sort through how to move forward with these projects I've got a few thoughts, and two of them are still in their infantile stages and I am not sure how they're going to work themselves out. One of which is the question of how to make these invitations appear as objects that people don't want to hold on to; how do I make an object that people don't want to keep, that's kind of a repulsive object. In a way, with the seed bomb the answer to that is to go with an earlier prototype that has really stinky pelletized chicken

manure in it, so you don't want that sitting on your desk or anywhere around you, it smells terrible. And so, those kinds of offensive strategies are a sort of possible way to go. The second of which is an entirely different strategy toward eliciting participation which I have started to fool around with a little bit, and just as a concept, not as a methodology, sort of around the same time as the invitation, which is the idea of contagion. I had the pleasure of working with a woman named Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen, she was also pursuing a research project about the question of contagion and specifically as a sort of participatory and group social phenomenon –

NH: Are you talking about contagion as affect or what kind of a contagion are you talking about?

GB: I will just keep talking about Jacqueline's project and hopefully that will clarify it a little bit, if not let me know. She was thinking about group experiences—the example she uses is contagious laughter—where you can't refuse. You're swept up in this experience, which you experience subjectively as yourself, but it is a different kind of subjective experience because your capacity to choose has been removed. Our capacity to make choices for ourselves is what defines us as individuals in a liberal sense. So this messes up that idea of individuality and subjectivity and creates a kind of exploded sense of subjectivity where you're at once experiencing something as a group but always through your own sensual experience as an individual. Jacqueline was using the physical phenomenon of laughter as a way to talk about that kind of subjectivity, an infectious hybrid of collective individual-collective subjectivity. I was really taken by the project, and it helped along my own ideas around contagion, which are still incubating. Conceptually, it's always been important in terms of seeds and weeds and uncontrolled growth and all that, but I'm still not sure how to incorporate it as a methodology. In a way, pretending that my projects are just polite invitations is just pretending anyway. Because in fact I *do* want to people to at least begin engaging in a specific way. The point about being more forceful is just more honest, because pretending to be polite is maybe just obscuring the fact that I am asking that we begin on my terms. In this case, there *is* a power relation and paradoxically the ethics of it make more sense when it's more extreme. That seems like an important strategy, but not *instead of* the more open participation of workshops and group knowledge production. They both seem really important to me as ways to move out of the failure of the invitations.

NH: Just to continue from that and to go back to the first comment that I made about your practice being about process, I also think that your art practice in itself too is about experimentation. You're really investing a lot in experimenting in these creative acts that also involve the public in some way, you really take

risks in terms of what you're trying to make happen in a certain context. And so I was just wondering what you thought about, or how would you describe your work as an artist in terms of how these two concepts, experimentation and process play out.

GB: I mean I have been using the word experimentation a lot, and maybe there is something slightly irresponsible about that, I am not really sure. But at least the way we normally think about an experiment—embedded in the disciplines of science—you usually try to control it a lot more than I do, and usually try and quantify the results, and it's a little difficult to do that with this type of work. Being at MIT, this different understanding of the meaning of an experiment has become clear to me. In the art world experiments are allowed, or even expected to be open-ended. There's a different type of knowledge being produced that isn't quantifiable. It can be quite uncomfortable, but it's necessary to accept provocation and the opening of questions and desires as the actual work that we're doing as artists, and to not instrumentalize that process in the service of more conclusive knowledge. And this points to a question that comes up a lot actually, when I am talking to people about these projects, both *Seeds* and *Bulbs*, people always ask questions like, 'oh do you ask people to report back to you where they planted them?' or 'do you ask them to take pictures?', or 'if you could, would you want to put a GPS inside the seed bombs so you can map everything out?', and the answer to all of those questions is absolutely no. The key question of *Seeds* – how does technology change our desires? – is mapped out by the tossing of the bombs, if and when that happens. And one of the things that I love about it is that the map is invisible. The map is something that does exist but it's not something that anyone can see, and it's absolutely not something that can be quantified. So it requires a certain act of faith. I have been calling these projects failures because I suspect that it's too easy to ignore the invitation, but in truth I have no idea, each one of them could have been tossed. Maybe your question about experimentation is also really crucially linked to invitation and failure, and figuring out how to balance these things a bit. Without needing to know everything, or make final conclusions. I think this work will go further not just by adopting contagion as a methodology or developing more workshops, but also learning more about how to observe the long-term of the process, as was possible with *Scatter*. I still don't know precisely what happened there, or what I was responsible for, but I can continue to have a relationship with it as the process unfolds, and this keeps creating opportunities for engagement and learning.

NH: This will be our last question. Do you think your work is political and how would you define politics in the context of your work? How do you think about your work as political work?

GB: Every negotiation of ethics is totally political, and most of what we've talked about today touches on that in one way or another. With ethics, as with ecology, I've consistently tried to make work that denies fundamental separations between humans and nonhumans. There are probably two consistent political projects through all of the work we've been discussing. The first is the development and articulation of a radical ecology that incorporates a much more nuanced, much more honest way of thinking about human engagement in the world. The second project is summed up by the moment of being explicit about not totally knowing, in which it's possible to recognize the power of being a learner, and to find ways to share the process of learning in such a way as to create more positions of power.