

6 Beneath the Paving, _____!

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Wong

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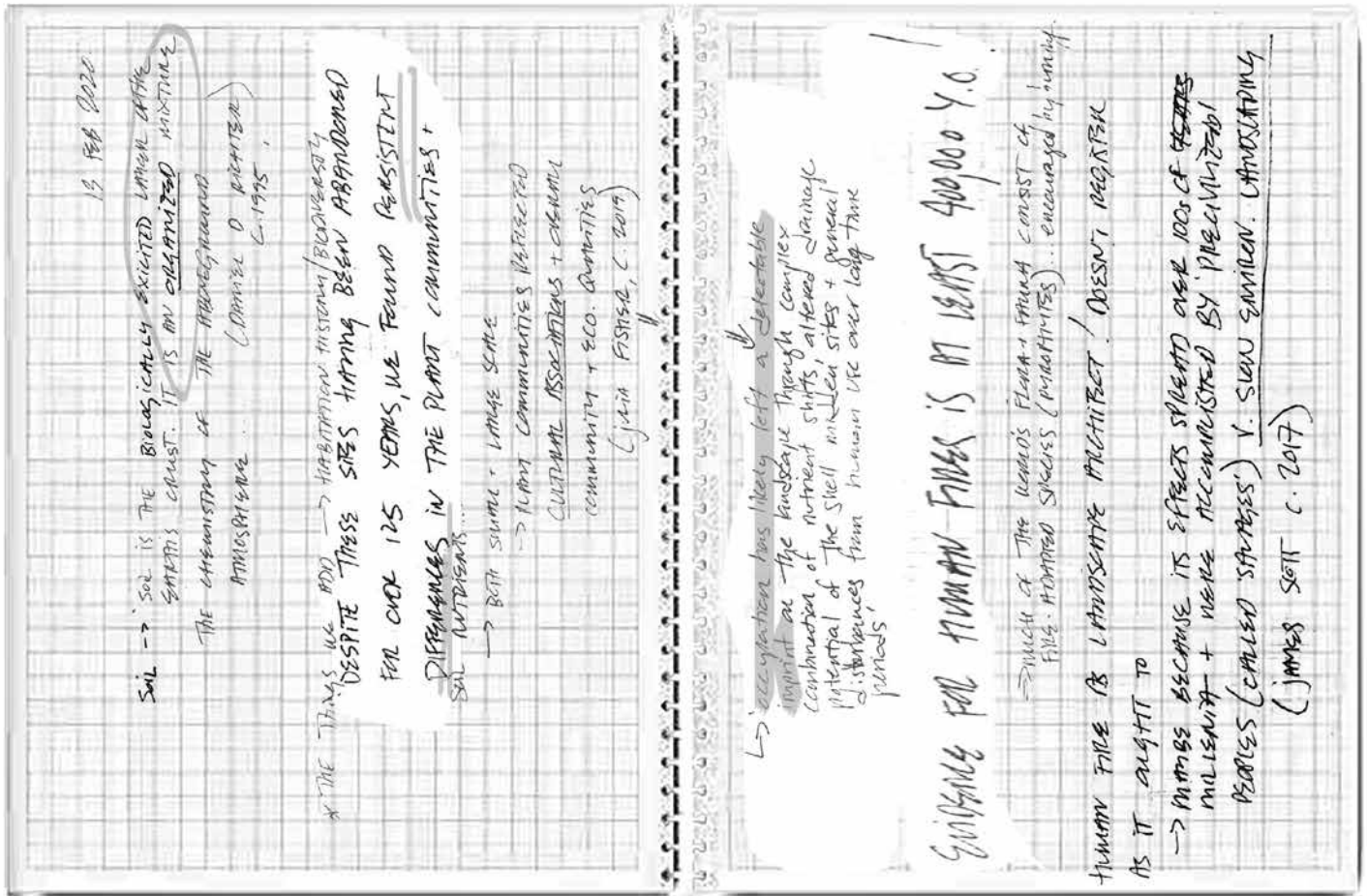
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Prologue

In the demonstrations of May 1968, students and workers in Paris exhumed the city, arming themselves and building barricades out of the paving stones that lined the street. Underneath the twenty centimeters of pavement they found sand, and the slogan for the forthcoming events: *BENEATH THE PAVING, THE BEACH!* The beach! The most luxurious and so often liberating of loci. But the ground beneath is writhing, thick, and animate, before and withstanding its commodification as program.

We are embarrassed to say that we believed in the promise of making place, the promise that uses euphemisms of landscape architecture to describe the colonization of Turtle Island: place-making, revitalization, urban activation on ground that bears the imprint of evolutionary human practices. In the European picturesque tradition, in the name of creating place, landscape architects suffocate planetary life forces, and with them, the ancestral work that makes them possible; impervious surfaces sit on a wealth of Indigenous history that harbours the creative forces of time and reciprocity. As students of landscape we bow to decomposition as life and progress, for all that has come before and from below is alive. We must reach deep, and deeper still if we hit the pavement.

In our notebooks of revolution we find scribbled slogans:



We have wrangled the words by which the living landscape is described and prescribed, and we have hit the pavement. We ache every time the depth of the living is taken for granted, treated negligently and suffocated by delineations set about by design. Delineation after delineation, programming skates on the slim idea of surface to elaborate upon and sell popularized notions of space: program.

The language of the programmer puts limits on what is possible. Unintended circumstances, while occasionally serendipitous, are glitches or miscalculations: dogs run in Dog Run Areas, children play in Play Areas, and flowers bloom in Areas of Floral Interest. While the etymology of program takes us farther back than its application in computational design, the role that it plays in software has taken precedence and co-creates the language by which we understand the social. To program is not an innocent choice.

delineating nation state capitalism

Figure 1. Notes on soil. Sources cited are various in origin1; key-words "biological excitation"; "habitation history"; "cultural associations"; "evidence of imprint"; "human fire/landscape architect"; notably, "HOW DEEP IS SOIL?"; Letter loose leaf ink-jet paper, stapled to drawing (see Figure 4); TOTAL SHEETS: 2

∞ When something happens in the program that was not supposed to, skeptics and speculators forewarn of a future that deprives the human condition of spontaneity, sovereignty, and all that feels so naturally meaningful in the unpredictability of life. Investors and actuaries are in the business of counting chickens in ejaculate; real estate sells unbuilt futures having successfully snuffed the idea of the unpredictable. For anthropologists of globalization, elegies of friction; for economists of the digital age, cautionary tales of surveillance; for novelists, numbers and codes replace characters and given names. All of these are expressions of a common sentiment in trying to work out the fate and value of possibility.

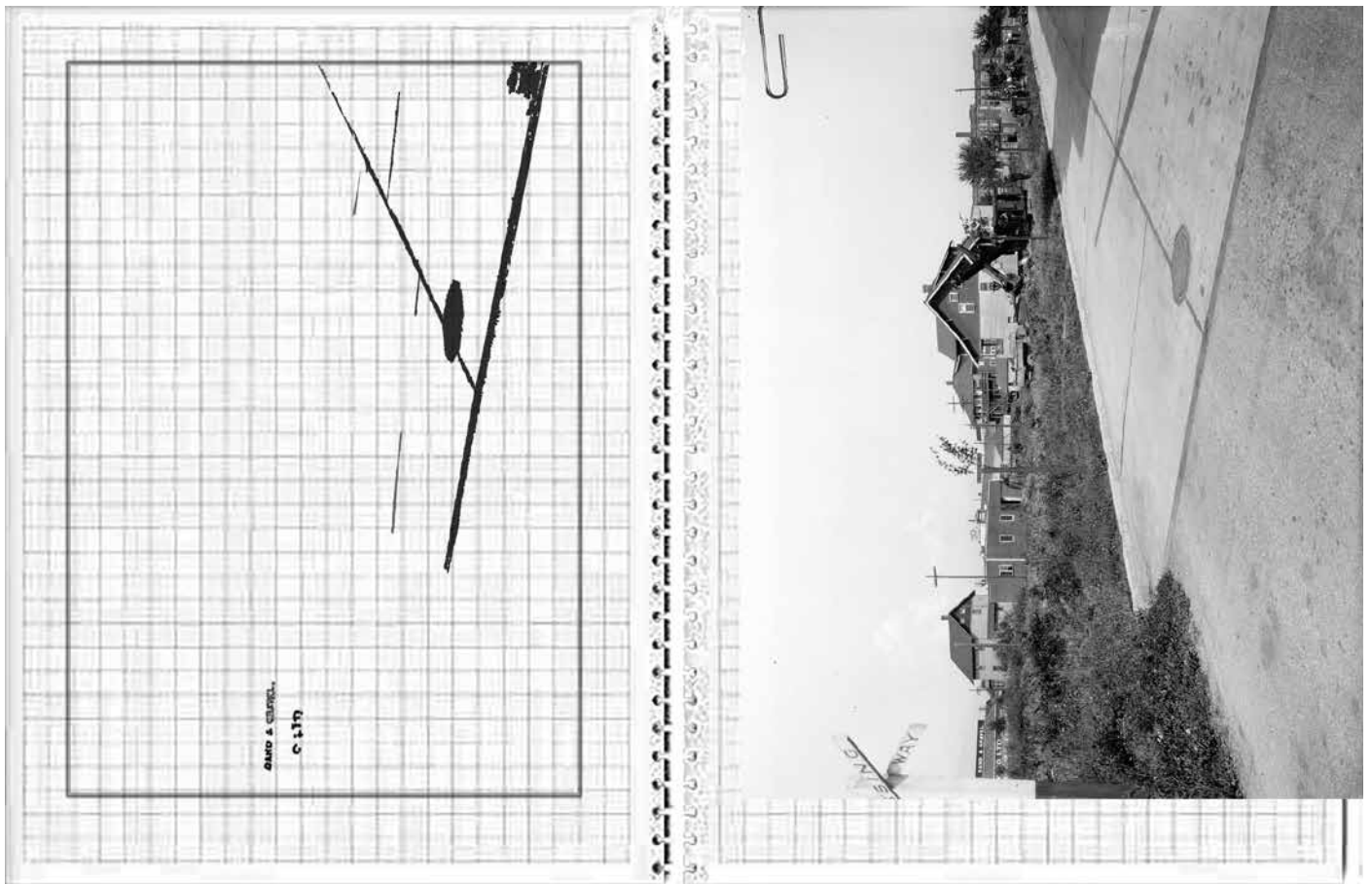
The definition of programming in the landscape is not simply a delineation of space but a reduction of possibility. With regards to all vital forces, programming is a devaluation and attrition of cultural and familial relationships between people and with the land. Something is happening to the conception and delivery of the commons that is sinister in origin and stupid at its most innocent. The ubiquitous “program diagram” delineates where and what actions can and will occur, prescribing the movement of bodies through a place. Working relationships between person and place, family and territory are ignored, and instead questions like *How will people use this place?* or *What is this place useful for?* are asked. What follows are designs for conduits of passivity and follies for consumption.

To use is a linear operation; moving forward on a one-way street, toward a desired end by some means of consumption, whether exhaustive or habitual. Once the desired outcome is achieved, that which is used is dismissed.

In what kind of a world is it acceptable to refer to fellow human beings as users? This language trivializes the ingenuity of friction and ignores the plural capacities of the landscape in submission to program. What is suppressed, discarded, or rendered immaterial in the process is the depth of life that is the land. Ironically, “users” is a proxy for the living so that consultation can be said to have been done and thereby agency restored. Engaging the “user group” or imagining who, when, why users might appear and how they do so is essential to the delivery of programs, landscape becomes “entry,” “forecourt,” “sport court,” “tot lot,” “collaboration area,” “informal lawn,” and—lest they think our language is non-inclusive—“teenzone.”

∞ “Of course, the old forms of command have never gone away.”²

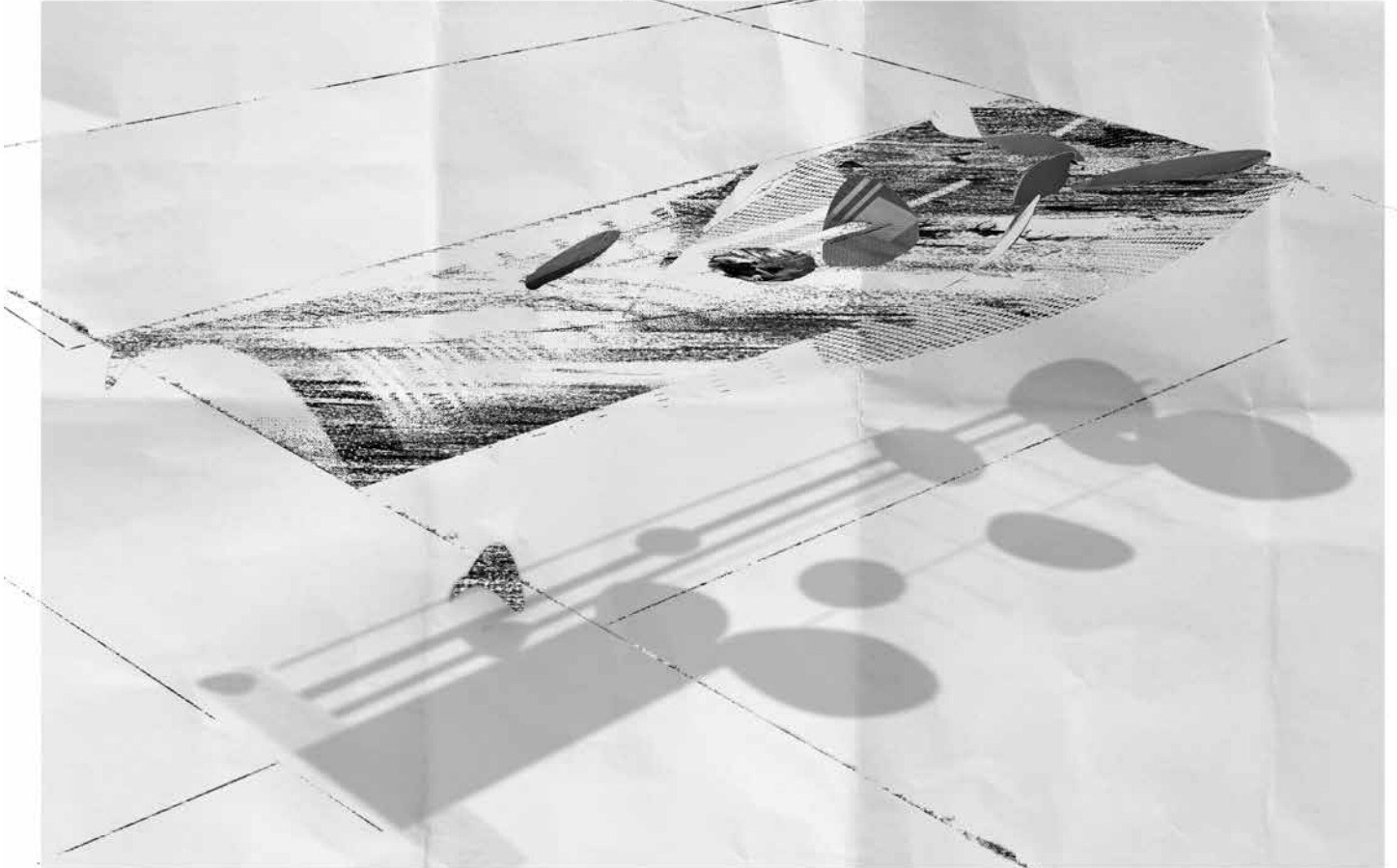
Figure 2. When we started organizing our notes to put together some semblance of a collective order, we found echoes across items, schedules, and indeed, authors. Of course, we often traveled together showing each other the ways towards what we saw; but some of the resonance remains uncanny.



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So in the field we begin to dig; encounters undergone cast a doubtful shadow.

Users are not expected to give anything back to the landscape; putting trash in a receptacle is perhaps the most that is expected of them. This is fundamentally different from laws which dictate tenets of territory in relation to those who provide for the wealth of the land. The First Nations of the territory now known as the Province of British Columbia speak of “giving back to nature”³ in stories of discernment, discretion, and connection in space—describing the relation to the land as a cyclic, reciprocal relationship. Inscribed in living practices such as timing, spreading, tending, burning, picking, feeding, thinning, propagating, this landscape is impossi-



ble in the language of use. “Rather than exchange and reciprocity being thought of as closing a loop, conceptually, the driver of reciprocity is to extend the relationship beyond a two-dimensional circle to that of an eternal spiral of reciprocity. The parties collectively push the boundaries of reciprocity together, forever.”⁴

Dara Kelly explains that relationship-based economies of First Nations people take root in a redefinition of wealth. She tells of wealth not based on ownership and capital but rather on connection with and between people and land; an investment in people and all sorts of beings rather than in systems of evaluation which constitute wealth in terms of risk, reward, and speculation.⁵ Herein lies a profound implication: we are only as wealthy as our relationships are healthy and reciprocating.

A reciprocal relationship with the ground requires that we acknowledge its importance, power, and cultural relevance; only from here we can begin to build a new language of practice. The earth is as alive as we are.

The disregard for reciprocity that has characterized the contemporary relationship of landscape architects with the earth clocks into a time-scale vaster than the history of this discipline, but we are beginning to see the connections. The practice was born out of the suffocation of Indigenous practices and concedes settlers to the impoverished language of space as an amenity. Relationships that are “nonauthoritarian, nondominating, and nonexploitative”⁶ bear radically different vocabulary. The idea of giving back as a principle of working with the land depends on an alignment to cyclical processes—and on a fundamental belief that what we do has consequences. Anchored in the return of phenomena rather than in the passing of

Figure 3. Synthesis. To demonstrate the depth of what we yet don't know (but wish to explore you to also desire to find out) we thought to describe the contours of tangibility that result from our digging. The shadow cast is false: there is no point of light unmoving upon the marks and masses we made; but they serve us a reminder—absurd as it seems—absurd as it certainly looks: this is not the depth: the depth = missing.

years, a cyclical sense of time recognizes that what is happening now is familiar and perhaps even familial, something our ancestors gifted in perpetuity by a process of care and cultivation. In this way, history is both personal and immortal, experienced in the return of the wind, the wintered cockle, and the speed of tide.

Students of landscape are lucky to have learned something about materiality—let us not stop at the setting sand, because we know where it comes from. Seek to reinstate depth, insist that relation to the land is a creative force.

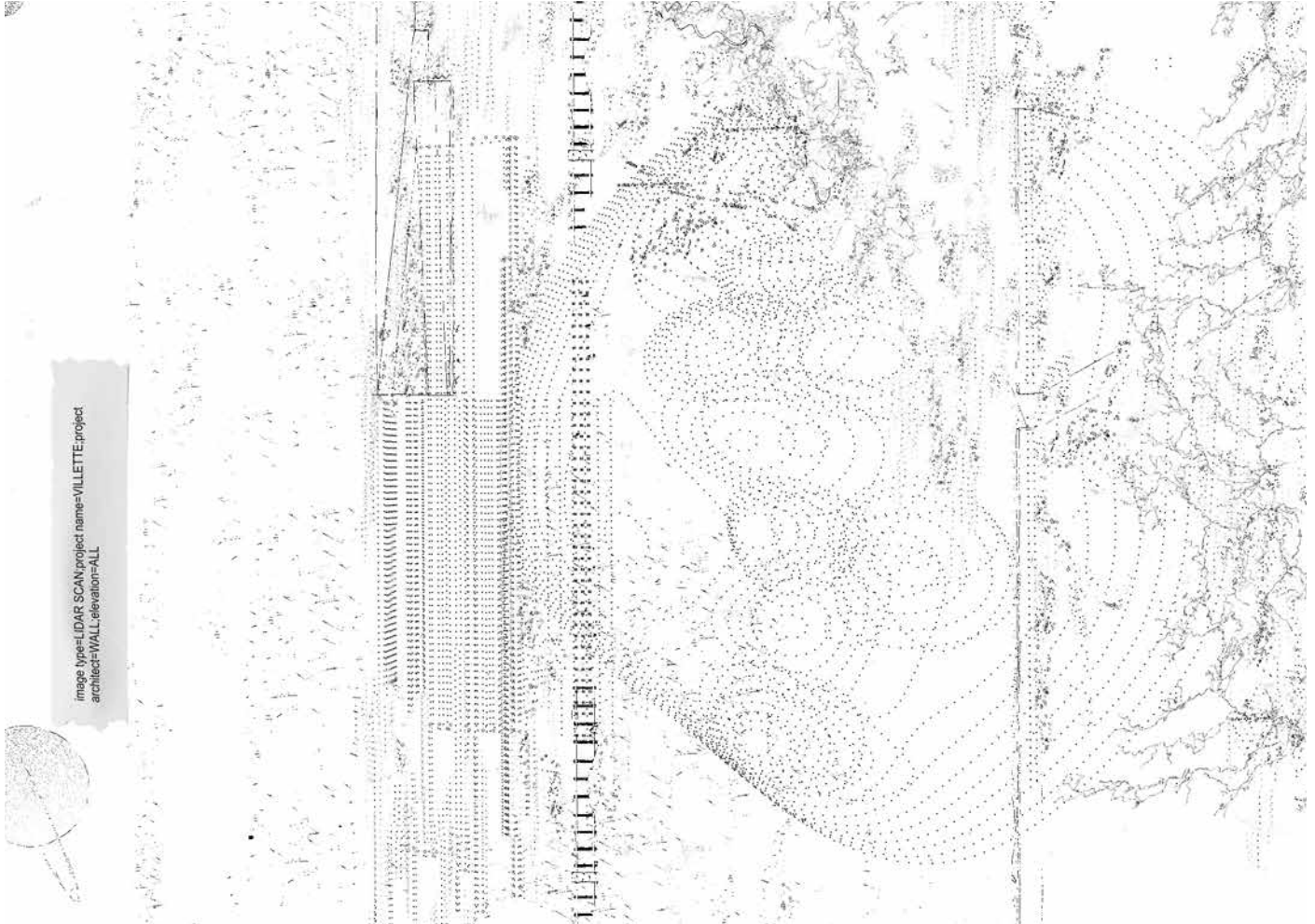


Figure 4. Erupting the urban surface (juxtapose: Alex Wall, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, "The Pleasure of Architecture" 1983). Reciprocity with the ground is to practice architecture with a cosmological sense of consequence. Look beneath the surface and beyond enclosure to the remembrance of soil: nothing is lost, all is well travelled.

CH 1. Making Time

In the time before the great unearthing, find us by the cracks in the pavement: in our notebooks we have scribbled: the blanket of the earth is a thin layer of soil, two metres deep where we are; two kilometres deep by the mouth of the river time immemorial. The surface erodes, giving way to a process of learning. Kinship is active. Belonging is a practice of giving back. What was once a contiguous surface becomes a point of view that dissipates, dissolves, and redistributes back into the Indigenous foundations for which we'll have to work to belong to. When we rip up the pavers will we know what to do with what is underneath? Let us invoke the spirit of engagement as stated by David M. Schaepe and T'xwelatse: "Are you family or are you not family? And if you're not... I suggest you're not doing the work"⁷—to ask what family we work to belong to.

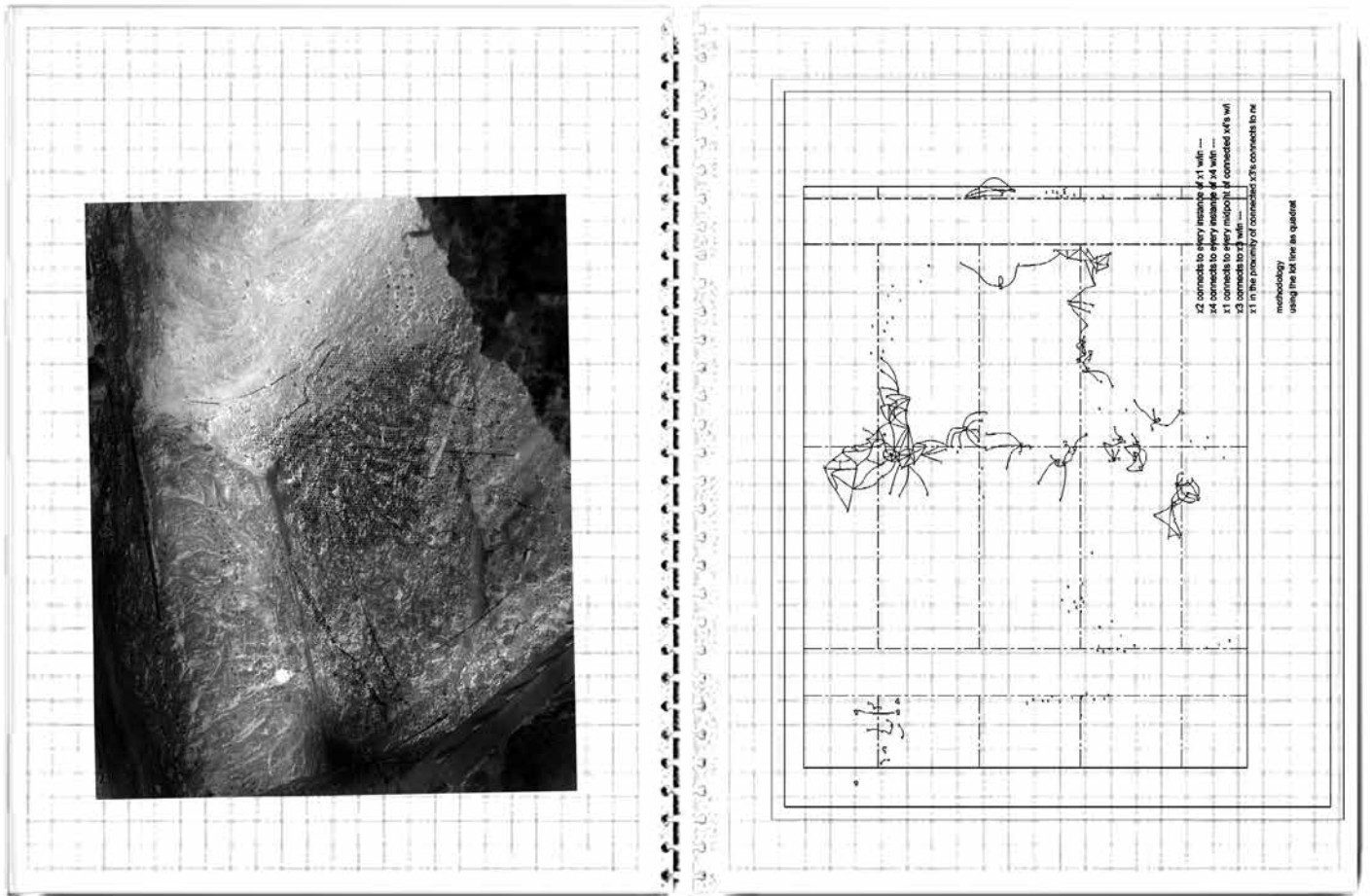


Figure 5.

Endnotes

- 1 Daniel D. Richter and Daniel Markewitz, "How Deep is Soil?" *BioScience* 45, no. 9 (1995): 600; Julia A. Fisher et al., "Indigenous Peoples' Habitation History Drives Present-day Forest Biodiversity in British Columbia's Coastal Temperate Rainforest," *People and Nature* 1, no.1 (2019): 109, 112; James C. Scott, *Against the Grain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2017), 38.
- 2 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013), 75.
- 3 Nancy Turner, *The Earth's Blanket* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2005).
- 4 Dara Kelly, "Feed the People and You Will Never Go Hungry" (PhD diss., The University of Auckland, 2017).
- 5 Dara Kelly, "Sustainable First Nations' Futures," *To Catch a Falling Sky* lecture series presented by Simon Fraser University, 7 March 2019, Science World, Vancouver.
- 6 Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 254.
- 7 David M. Schaepe and T'xwelatse, "It's a Family Affair: Stó:lō Experiences in Repatriation," *BC Studies* 199 (2018): 27.