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Sighting the Dust: Attending to the Museum through its Residues

What does it mean to sight the dust and think the museum through its residues? And are museum residues necessarily *its*? (Questions of possession always lurk, at least residually, in museums.) In this article, I consider the implications of attending to residues, such as dust, especially, but not only, for museums. What does such attention bring to light? How might it prompt seeing the museum differently or otherwise?

My concern here is with what might constitute residues in and of the museum, substantively and metaphorically (two categories that, like residues themselves, may be not so clearly only one or the other). My interest is in the analytical traction of residual attention to the museum, looking at it from the possibly grimy and dusty edges and through its by-products – what we might call museum heterology or scatology, to invoke Bataille.[1] What are the effects and implications of subjecting the museum to a scatological or residual gaze? Here, I should note that in psychology, *residual attention* refers to something different from the main object of focus – it is the background or partial attention that we expend, probably without our being aware of it. Some psychologists regard residual attention as distracting, preventing us from being able to concentrate on the task at hand. My own use of the term, however, is intended to signal a focus on what is not usually noticed in academic understandings, in this case, of museums. But rather than attend to this in only partial awareness, I aim to bring this to the fore – to give full attention to the residual and the conditions of residuality.

Below, I reflect on the notion of residue, teasing out its sometimes subtle differences from related terms, such as waste and trace. This reflection leads to a phenomenology of residues, together with a consideration of their ontological implications, especially for that key museum entity, the object. The article then explores two sets of examples in which residues and the residual are variously brought to awareness in museums. The first set presents examples drawn primarily from ethnographic research on cleaning in museums. Responding to museums' anxieties over residues, especially dust, these cases variously reveal particular ontologies of materials and objects and also show how

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1 Georges Bataille: Definition of Heterology. In: Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 35, 2018, no. 4–5, pp. 29–40.

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residues are entangled in – and afford particular perspectives on – specific hierarchies of labor and conceptions of time and moralities, including those of possession. The second set presents cases of installation works, mostly self-categorized as artistic, that have been shown in museums. In their bringing of the residual to attention, they, too, probe particular understandings of materiality and objectness, as well as the nature and potential of the museum itself.

A phenomenology of residues

Residues are by-products of whatever is regarded as the main phenomenon or substance. They reside – as the shared etymology implies – on the side, as sediments at the bottom or scum on the top, crusting on a surface, clinging to edges. A residue is that which is left behind following some process. Although residues may be unwanted or even unpleasant, they are not so clearly designated as negative as are rubbish and waste. Neither do they get so much attention. There are rarely special bins or services to deal with them. While residues are more negligible than rubbish and waste, they are usually less delicate than traces and not so well formed as tracks. Unlike traces and tracks, residues do not invoke the glamorous role of leading to a hidden source or actor – though a residue, such as the lipstick remaining on the edge of a cup, might prove to be a trace and clue in a detective story. As this article – and indeed this volume as a whole – suggests, there is much scope for residues to be actively mobilized as clues for academic detective work.

In their left-behindness, residues differ from excess, which spills over, as an extra or surfeit of the same substance.[2] Excess can feel joyously effusive or attractively risky; residues, not at all. Excesses are demonstratively present. By contrast, residues are more ambiguous, as historian Carolyn Steedman points out for dust: it is always "both there and not there; what is left and what is gone."[3] Dust, about which some remarkable volumes have been written, is not, perhaps, an obvious case of residue, especially when it is in motion.[4] Nevertheless – especially if we bear in mind that the dust on an object is likely to be, in part, composed of particles of that object – it can surely be taken as such; indeed, dust is in itself intriguing to think with and through, not least for its

2 See Sharon Macdonald, Jennie Morgan, Harald Fredheim: Too Many Things to Keep for the Future? In: Rodney Harrison, Caitlin DeSilvey, Cornelius Holtorf, Sharon Macdonald, Nadia Bartolini, Esther Breithoff, Harald Fredheim, Antony Lyons, Sarah May, Jennie Morgan, Sefryn Penrose (eds.): Heritage Futures. Comparative Approaches to Natural and Cultural Heritage Practices, London 2020, pp. 155–68 for reflection and references on terms including *excess*.

3 Carolyn Steedman: Dust. The Archive and Cultural History, New Brunswick, NJ 2002, p. 163.

4 See Joseph A. Amato: Dust. A History of the Small and Invisible, Berkeley 2000; Michael Marder: Dust, New York 2016; and Steedman (see note 3).

metaphoric richness and the peculiarity of it as a word, referring to both a substance and the act of getting rid of that same substance. Playing with these verbal quirks, we could say that *to dust* is to make sure that *dust bites the dust* – though as Steedman emphasizes, dust does not in fact ever vanish: "It is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone."[5] This means that dust is *of* as well as *on* an object, and, as such, like other residues, it is inherently in-between, not merely blurring but also unsettling the (idea of) the object itself.

Remains and *remainders* are perhaps the closest to *residues* of related terms, but even these are not identical, since the former two are usually more well shaped and reminiscent of whatever they were before than are residues. They are less rather than more of what was there before. Residues, by contrast, are typically something else, something new. The sediment at the bottom of a wine bottle is not wine, just as the limescale inside a kettle is not water. They do not resemble them at all. Residues are something extra, something in themselves. The rim left after my bath is a new mix, of soap suds and dirt and bits of me (human remains of a sort). *Margins* and *peripheries* share qualities with residues, not least metaphorically. But residues are not primarily topographical. Moreover, whatever they are marginal or peripheral to – such as wine or (bath) water – is not necessarily even present anymore. Margins and peripheries cling to their centers more keenly and enduringly. Residues are relational, but they are so in a by-the-way mode. (This should remind us, incidentally, that figuring out different modes of relationality is an important analytical task and one to which attention to the diverse affordances and phenomenology of kinds of forms or substances has much to contribute.)

Mathematics deploys the term *residue* to describe what is left behind after a particular calculation. Most residues, however, are material. They are substances that we can touch, that we might dip our fingers into, though perhaps only warily, in case they prove to be toxic. Perhaps gritty or greasy, residues may have formed in relation to liquids or solid matter, constituting a layer, or skin, that may itself be of indeterminate or mixed consistency. Their in-between state is compounded by the fact that they are neither the main substance or object themselves, nor the air or other surface that a residue meets. Residues are doubly or even multiply liminal. Yet, sometimes it is hard to say whether something is a residue or the thing itself. Is it patina or dirt? Are both residues? Such questions have a particular valence in museums. Should that residue be considered part of an object or something to be removed? As wider scholarship shows,

5 Steedman (see note 3), p. 164.

there are diverse views and changing practices surrounding these matters.[6] By not just clinging to objects but also being produced at least partly by them – as when iron oxides exude from certain stone – residues question the ontological status of objects themselves. Where does an object begin and end?

Residues raise this question in temporal form too. As they accrete over time, perhaps over long periods, are they forming on the object, or are they part of it? At the least, residues recall process and time passing; they bear witness to there being a history to the present state. Philosopher Timothy Morton suggests that "to allow things to get dirty is to allow that things are not at war with time" – instead, they go along with it.[7] Residues may become relatively stable and settled – as the word's shared etymology with *reside* suggests – but they are likely to be still in the making, almost certainly so at a fine-gauge level, hinting also at a future, perhaps one of continuing deposition. Although residues may index a continuation of process – the accretion over time – they are also a reminder of what has gone and thus simultaneously index disappearance or finitude (a double and contrary potential of dust, which Carolyn Steedman also points out).[8]

This making of residues over time is not usually the result of purposeful human action and intention – or, at least, not of these alone. Rather, residues illustrate that "objects still vibrate without being pushed."[9] They manifest the activity of matter and are thus ripe for attention from the Cluster of Excellence from which this volume springs. Not just providing evidence that matter does things by itself and that objects and materials are not inert, residues raise the question of precisely what kinds of activity are involved and with what effects.

Let us now turn to some examples of residues in museums in order to illuminate a subject that is not usually given more than cursory attention by museology (the academic study concerned with the nature and capacities of museums). Residues have, however, been the concern of more practical attention, especially in the field of conservation (which is sometimes subsumed under museography, which deals with practical dimensions of the museum). I am interested in how far a focus on residues can expand beyond such existing approaches, and into museology and other fields, bringing new perspectives into and onto the museum.

6 For relevant debates, see, for example, Sarah Walden: The Ravished Image. How to Ruin Masterpieces by Restoration, London 1985; and Michael Daley: Solvent Abuse. In: Simon J. Knell (ed.): Care of Collections, London 1994, pp. 30–34.

7 Timothy Morton: Being Ecological, London 2018, p. 169.

8 Steedman (see note 3), p. 163.

9 Ibid., p. 171.

Cases of cleaning cases

One of the ways in which residues manifest in museums is as problems that need to be cleared away. Little museological attention has been given to the cleaning of museums, but cleaning practices have become significant in some ethnographic research – an approach well tuned to the residual. Anthropologist Jennie Morgan became interested in discourses and practices of cleaning when these became highly contested – in what she dubbed "cleaning wars" – at her research site, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, Scotland.[10] The "cleaning wars" broke out after the museum was demoted in its ranking as a visitor attraction because of being judged insufficiently clean. The offending residues, which had led to what museum staff felt to be a serious loss of status, were primarily to be found on – or sometimes in – display cases. Typically, they took the form of dust and fingerprints, or other greasy markings, on the glass of cases or within them. As Morgan explains, some of these residues were seen as emanating from the people who came to view the exhibits: "Visitors were conceptualized by staff as somewhat messy creatures who were inclined to drop litter, picnic in areas they should not, bring dirt in on their bodies, create dust by shedding hair and skin, and touch cases and objects with their 'sticky fingers' or 'clawing' hands."[11] Attending to such residues brings to light understandings of visitors as not physically contained. Defying usual museological understandings of visitors as learners or aesthetes, they appear here as embodied, unruly, and, like the residues themselves, transgressive, as Morgan points out, drawing on Michael Taussig's idea of dust and dirt as "transgressive substances."[12]

But it is not only humans who are seen to have transgressed by creating the residues that led to the loss of the museum's status. During one meeting at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, we paused at a display, and the manager pointed out a thick layer of gray dust that had gathered in between a piece of furniture and a clear Perspex screen. A museum officer commented dryly, "What you don't see is the dust that we have already removed […] for some reason it's just a very dusty building."[13]

10 Jennie Morgan: Change and Everyday Practice at the Museum. An Ethnographic Study. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester 2011, p. 190.

11 Ibid., p. 194.

12 Jennie Morgan: The Cleaning Cupboard. An Ethnographic Look at the Production of "Newness" in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. In: Friedrich von Bose, Kerstin Poehls, Franka Schneider, Annett Schulze (eds.): Museum X. Zur Neuvermessung eines mehrdimensionalen Raumes. Berliner Blätter 57, Berlin 2011: pp. 49–56, here: p. 51. Morgan cites Michael Taussig: My Cocaine Museum, Chicago 2004, p. xiii.

13 Morgan: Change and Everyday (see note 10), p. 194.

The building itself is seen as active in making such matter as dust. Moreover, Morgan notes, the materials of the display cases – especially the glass – make residues such as dust and fingerprints all the more visible. Indeed, when the exteriors of cases are cleaned, the marks and dust inside them may become even more evident.[14] The interaction of substances, materials and light generates attention to residues that might otherwise have remained unnoticed. Museum staff thus work with ontologies of matter as active – and not only in relation to museum objects. Matter (in this case, dust) is not simply active, however; it behaves and interacts in particular ways – on which there may be disagreement. As Morgan describes in a fascinating discussion of the work of museum cleaners, there is a dispute between those who believe that wet cleaning (using cloths, water, and chemicals) is most effective and those who say that only dry cleaning (using dusters and a vacuum cleaner) can result in properly residue-free cases. Each side claims not only that the practices of the other fail to effectively remove residues but that they merely redistribute and can lead to further ones. Such disputes are not, however, only about the supposed facts and practicalities; they are also, as Morgan shows, bound up with emotions, morals, and museum hierarchies. The latter includes a shared sense among the cleaners of their low status within the museum – that they themselves are in many ways like the dust and grime that they are tasked to clear away and out of sight. This is expressed in their resentment of how their work is limited by curators who "don't trust us around objects."[15]

Differentiations of residues and their entanglements in concerns beyond the immediately practical are revealed in Margareta von Oswald's ethnography of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin.[16] In the museum, staff are much exercised about dust, which, she writes, sometimes drives "museum employees crazy."[17] There is, she observes, a kind of dust that museum staff there call "museum dust."[18] This is dust that accrues once an object is within the museum. Some staff regard this as a kind of offence to the object caused by the museum, whereas others see it as part of the object's overall life, which includes its time in the museum as well as that before it. Here, we see different ideas not just about whether residues are part of an object but also about the museum's role in an object's provenance or biography. For the curators who see museum dust only as an irritant, the task of the museum is to freeze the object at the moment of

14 Morgan: Cleaning Cupboard (see note 12), p. 54.
15 Morgan: Change and Everyday (see note 10), p. 208.
16 See Margareta von Oswald: Working Through Colonial Collections. An Ethnography of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, Leiden 2022, chapter 7.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.

its acquisition: history is only what happened beforehand. For those more willing to embrace the dust, an object's experience in the museum is part of its continuing life and life story. Through the lens of dust, then, we can see not just different ontologies of the matter involved but also different conceptions of the museum's rightful agency and f the very idea of a museum object.

Although dust is sometimes regarded as a relatively harmless residue, Oswald points out that it is not necessarily seen as such by museum staff, since it may harbor damaging substances or life-forms. Other kinds of residues, especially from previous attempts to protect and conserve objects, have also sometimes proved to be damaging either to objects or to people (see also Cavaziel, in this volume). In the case of ethnological museums, the toxicity of earlier pesticide use can interfere with the work on objects by – or the return of objects to – their source communities.[19]

The restitution of objects leads us back to this article's residual concern with questions of possession. Museums' claims for holding onto objects are based in part on the idea that they take the best care of the objects and protect them from problematic residues. That they introduce other residues – especially toxic ones – goes against the grain of this reasoning, as does the removal of residues that, according to some, should not be removed. The long-running case of the so-called epidermis of the Parthenon marbles – a majestic frieze of marble sculptures held in the British Museum – is a celebrated example. The marbles were taken by Lord Elgin in the early nineteenth century; for decades, there have been calls for their return to Greece. Among the various arguments made by the British Museum for keeping them has been that doing so was best for their preservation. A major challenge to this has come, however, from revelations of damage caused by the cleaning methods used by the museum. At different points in time, these have included the use of caustic chemicals and acids, as well as waxes and wire wool. An extensive cleaning in the 1930s was widely condemned – including by a later British Museum director – for losing significant surface detail.[20] All of this was undertaken, moreover, in an attempt to remove what was assumed to be an alien residue and restore what was imagined to be the sculptures' original pure whiteness. Scholars have increasingly questioned the idea that the orange-brown tint on the marbles was the equivalent of museum dust – that is, it only appeared after they were in British hands. Some have suggested that it is naturally produced by the marble itself (though this idea is no longer deemed likely) or that it is either intentional pigment or

19 See Clémentine Deliss: The Metabolic Museum, Berlin 2020.

20 See Ian Jenkins: Cleaning and Controversy. The Parthenon Sculptures, 1811–1939, London 2001.

the remnants of original protection applied at the time of their making.[21] If these are the cause of the residues – rather than what some would consider the regular effects of exposure to air – then, in the view of those calling for return, this is as all the more reason for the marbles to be freed from their wrongful captivity, a captivity in which they have only suffered further harm.

In all of the cases discussed above, the residues are never mere residues. Instead, they are entangled with many other facets of the museum – including hierarchies and status, emotions and morals, and the very possibilities of possession, display, and restitution, among other actual and potential museum actions. Residues reveal ontologies – how matter and, more specifically, the object and its constitutive practices are, perhaps, diversely and even disputably, made in the museum – and, thus, how these in turn allow for the museum to be imagined and realized in particular ways.

Dusty installations

Ethnographic research and an anthropological sensibility are not the only means to bring residues – and the residual work with and against them in museums – to museological attention. There are also artistic and other installation works that have focused on museum residues – especially dust – and in doing so have likewise highlighted entanglements and alternative ontologies. Here, I do not attempt to provide a wide survey of such works but, rather, select some for the museological insights that they bring.[22]

For philosopher Michael Marder, that modern art might focus on dust – or even develop a genre that he calls "Dustart" – is logical since a key feature of modern art is that it "relegates the forms of things to the background … while foregrounding the materials of which artworks are made."[23] Given the honed residual attention that artists typically bring to bear, it follows that "previously imperceptible matter/dust [comes] into view," opening up the possibility of it becoming part of the artwork and generating questions about the material and temporal stability of the artwork itself.[24] An early and famous example, from 1920, is *Dust Breeding* (*Élevage de Poussière*) by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. The very title of the work expresses clearly the idea of dust as active and indeed proliferative. As Marder describes it:

21 See, for example, Amerimni Galanos, Yanna Doganis: The Remnants on the Epidermis of the Parthenon. In: Studies in Conservation, vol. 48, 2003, no. 1, pp. 3–16.

22 For further examples see Marder (see note 4); Marijn Nieuwenhuis, Aga Nasser: Dust. A Perfect Circularity. In: Cultural Geographies, vol. 25, 2018, no. 3, pp. 501–7; and Marilena Parlati: Beyond Inchoate Debris. Dust in Contemporary Culture. In: European Journal of English Studies, vol. 15, 2011, no. 1, pp. 73–84.

23 Marder (see note 4), p. 96.

24 Ibid.

> *"For a year, Duchamp let dust accumulate on the back of his massive 2.75 meter-tall work* – The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even *(1914–23), alternatively titled* The Large Glass. *When the layer of dust was thick enough, Ray visited Duchamp's Broadway studio in New York that housed the piece placed by an open window. There he photographed the 'ready-made' with a two-hour exposure, so as to capture the fine grains of city pollution mixed with the puffs of cotton and other vestiges of the artist's life and work."*[25]

Later, Duchamp removed some of the dust and covered what remained with varnish, permanently integrating the dust into the artwork.[26] As with other artworks employing dust, much more is stirred up and in through its deployment. In the case of *Dust Breeding*, Marder points to its sexual connotations: dust collaborating in the "denuding and covering up" of the bride.[27] Indeed, dust – and other residues to varying extents – is especially resonant in that it is multiple, as well as being from somewhere – or, better, from *manywheres* – and thus carries "reverberations" (as Steedman puts it) from other times and places.[28] Artist Allison Cortson, for example, utilizes household dust from vacuum cleaners; Alexandre Orion, the residues of urban pollution in traffic tunnels.[29] These residues are far from being mere media; they are integral to the artworks and their resonances.

There are other dust artworks that more directly address the museum itself. One notable example is the *Art Museum Dust Collection* begun in 1996 by artist and director of the John Erickson Museum of Art, Sean Miller. A continuing work, it has involved taking photographs of dust at microscopic scale from numerous museums around the world.[30] As Miller explains, many art museum viewers and others regard dust as a "disappointment" within the art museum space: "The elusive substance flies in the face of the unconscious desires and expectations art audiences hold for the transcendent 'white cube' gallery or white cube space. Dust must be removed to preserve the integrity and fallacy of the timeless objective white cube."[31]

25 Ibid., p. 97.
26 See Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 100.
28 Steedman (see note 3), p. 161.
29 Marder (see note 4), pp. 110–13.
30 See http://www.seanmillerstudio.net/museum-dust (as of 5/2022).
31 Kelly Cobb, Sean Miller: Art Museum Dust Collection. Wearing Away Museum Grounds – Dust Bunnies, White Lies and New Measures. In: Textile. The Journal of Cloth and New Measures, vol. 8, 2015, no. 3, pp. 286–302.

1: Nina Katchadourian: The Dustiest Place in the Museum. 2016. Interior of the dusty closet.

Interestingly, as Nina Samuel has observed, this idea of dust as something that Mary Douglas might term "matter out of place" is also evident in the virtual space of computers and the images they generate.[32] Through the non-admittance or expulsion of dust, spaces –– digital and also physical –– are enacted as clean, pure, and timeless. Through his actions, however, Miller seeks to transform the denial of dust in the art museum: "Art museum dust is a hybrid of decaying art, the art institution, the art audience, artists themselves and art administrators. Due to this synthesis, it may be the most pure and beautiful presence in many museums."[33]

In what might be seen as another form of dust breeding, or even of dust's "perfect circularity," artist Kelly Cobb has worked Miller's photographs of dust into woven fabrics, which are then also exhibited in museums.[34] Dust can – and does – go on and on.

32 See Nina Samuel: "Do not clean off the dust specks. They are real." Über gestörte, verschmutzte und verborgene Computerbilder. In: Robert Suter, Gottfried Boehm, Thorsten Bothe (eds.): Prekäre Bilder, Leiden 2010, pp. 247–75. For Mary Douglas's term, see Mary Douglas: Purity and Danger, London 1966.

33 Cobb, Miller (see note 31), p. 290.

34 Steedman (see note 3), p. 16; Kelly Cobb: Art Museum Dust Collection, https://kellyacobb.tumblr.com/dust (as of 5/2022).

2: Clemens Winkler: Weekly dust samples collected with cleaning staff at the Veterinary Anatomy Theatre (TA T).

Nina Katchadourian's *Dust Gathering* (2016–17) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York likewise focuses on the fact that dust breaches the usual boundaries of space, time, objects, and persons. ↗ **Fig.** 1 As the online description puts it: "Dust consists of material from both inside and outside, from Earth and the cosmos, from places very high and very low – and at the Museum, it's literally an intermingling of different people from around the world."[35] Alongside making this dust visible through photographs, Katchadourian, like the ethnographic works above, seeks to bring the people connected with removing dust, and their work, into awareness – though not, significantly, to sight – through audio interviews with them.

While some of these works invoke the reverberations of other times and places, and of the interactions of the contents – human and nonhuman – of gallery spaces, they do not directly investigate these. A remarkable work that does so is a recent installation created by designer Clemens Winkler as part of the exhibition *Stretching Materialities*, produced within the framework of the Cluster of Excellence *Matters of Activity*.[36] ↗ **Figs. 2–6** Evading mono-classification as a work of only art, design, or research, Winkler's installation entailed enlisting the cleaners of the exhibition space of the Tieranatomisches Theater (Veterinary Anatomy Theater) to collect dust samples weekly. The samples were displayed in test tubes in the gallery and analyzed microscopically to detect the components of the dust. This revealed a wide mix of sources of different scales, including cosmic dust and (as the frustrated curators in the aforementioned ethnographic examples claimed) dust that was indeed created by the building (in this case limestone), as well as other sources, such as pollens, brought in by visitors. The breakdown of each sample, displayed on the exhibition walls, charted the changing components of dust across the year, showing not

35 MoMA: Dust Gathering. An Audio+ Experience by Nina Katchadourian, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3610 (as of 5/2022).

36 Matters of Activity: Exhibition "Stretching Materialities". Hidden Activities in Objects and Spaces at the Veterinary Anatomy Theatre, https://www.matters-of-activity.de/en/activities/6006/exhibition-stretching-materialities (as of 4/2022). I draw here also on Clemens Winkler: Atmosphere in the Making – A Cloud Microbiome, unpublished essay.

3: Clemens Winkler: Algorithmic Weathering, Sampling Wall.

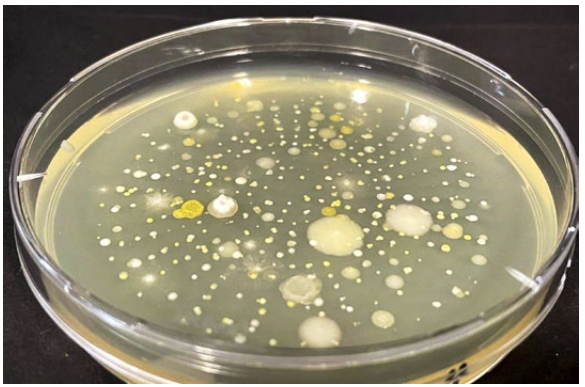
4: Clemens Winkler: Algorithmic Weathering, Sampling Wall, close up.

only that dust is multiple but that its composition alters, carrying shifting reverberations at different times. As with the rest of this exhibition, Winkler's dust installation sought to highlight modes in which materiality could be stretched, in this case by attending to these microscopic "material sediments," as he sometimes called them, and by showing them. In so doing, the work revealed the usually hidden activity of the exhibition space – which, at a stretch, we can call the museum – itself.

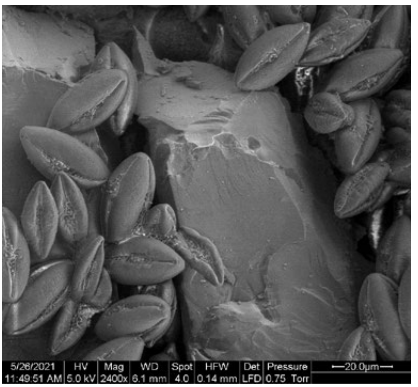
Conclusion

This article has explored cases of attending to residues in and of museums in order to consider what this might bring to light for the wider understanding of museums. For the most part, it has done so through examples of literal or material residues. Metaphorical ones are never far away, however. As noted above, the cleaners at the museum in Glasgow associated their own status with the grime that they were tackling; the toxic residues on ethnological objects speak eloquently of the poisonous nature of colonial appropriation; and the artworks all emanate metaphorical reverberations, often multiple. By exploring attempts to exorcise and expel residues (to dust and attempt to make dust bite the dust), this article has shown these to be constitutive acts that sediment particular hierarchies, histories, and ontologies.

To attend to material residues – to sight the dust – is to attend to the materiality of museums. Often, when the museum's materiality is invoked, this is imagined in terms of museum objects, or sometimes of their architectures. Residues, however, direct the gaze to a micro level – one that destabilizes the boundedness of the object itself, upsetting conventional ontologies. In part, what is at work here is a shift from objects to matter or materials. But it is even more radical in that it stretches this further – as the *Stretching Materialities* exhibition showed so well – beyond those materials that make up objects and into the even more unnoticed or extraneous, the residual.



5: Clemens Winkler and Skander Hathroubi: Microbiome of Airborne Particles. Microbial sampling with Merck MAS-100 Eco Air Sampler in the exhibition space after visitors gathering.



6: Clemens Winkler: Indoor-Lockdown-Pollen Exterior Façade. SEM photography of willow pollen and limestone in the entrance area of TA T during Covid-19 lockdown.

Residual within this article has been the issue of possession. Residues play into this in unexpected but powerful ways, as strikingly evident in the cases of the epidermis of the Parthenon marbles and of the ethnological objects whose potential restitution is deemed to be hampered by the toxic residues on them. We might also ask whether an object possesses its residues or is possessed by them. As for those arguments of figure and ground, and the potential analytical reinvigoration of shifting from one to the other, such a question does not call for an answer but is its own provocation to thinking relations otherwise.[37]

Residues is not, as yet, a term regularly employed in museological analysis. Its very residuality, however, gives it traction, bringing usually unremarked dimensions of museums to light – such as, the very fact that there are so many residues and that workers battle against them – and also revealing certain assumptions – such as, that museums should be clean and that objects should be without residues. In this article, I have sought to bring not just residues but residual attention – sighting the dust – to the fore. In a way, this is a paradoxical act, raising the question of whether the residual is still residual when it is made center stage. How the dust will settle on that question – and indeed whether it will do so – is, however, a matter that for now must remain (including in this essay) unresolved, and even residual.

37 See Marilyn Strathern: On Space and Depth. In: John Law, Annemarie Mol (eds.): Complexities. Social Studies of Knowledge Practices, Durham NC 2002, pp. 88–115.