



EMMEDIA

PRESENTS

OIL

CURATED BY DANIEL DUGAS

**TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2011 @ 7PM
EMMEDIA SCREENING ROOM**

Oil. It fuels our cars, it furnishes our homes, it feeds our debates, and wars. Almost like magic, oil is transformed into a multitude of products: toys, fertilizers, carpets, shampoo, insulation, golf balls, credit cards, lipsticks, plastic bags, bottles. This strange philosophers' stone grants immortality to pop bottles and plastic forks.

How are we going to negotiate our dependency and oil addiction with our environmental concerns? Who defines industry practices? How can the individual contribute to the emergence of solutions? What is the role of the artist, writer, or poet?

OIL is a screening of short, slick videos to fuel the discussion! Curated by Daniel Dugas, the program addresses and explores issues and relationships we have with oil, both politically and poetically. The program will be screened on July 12, 2011, the one-year anniversary of the capping of the BP well in the Gulf of Mexico.

PROGRAM IN SCREENING ORDER:

"Oil" by Peter Aerschmann (Bern, Switzerland, 2:00 min excerpt)

"OIL'D" by Chris Harmon (Brooklyn, NY, 2:00 min)

"BASIN" by David Geiss (Victoria, BC, 7:46 min)

"SCAPE" by Kyle Armstrong & Leslea Kroll (Edmonton, AB, 3:05 min)

"A Flood and then some Desert" by Kent Tate (Shaunavon, SK, 2:10 min)

"Paper Moon, Cardboard Sea" by Valerie LeBlanc (Moncton, NB, 1:20 min)

"Tar Sand Pudding" by Xstine Cook (Calgary, AB, 4:56 min)

"Lux Aeterna" by Jacopo Jenna (Firenze, Italy, 4:41 min)

"Palabras Negras (black words)" by Anthony Gasca (Montreal, QC, 0:37 min)

"OILSPILL - The Human Ueberfluss" by Andy Fox & Jo Blankenburg (Salzburg, Austria, 3:01 min trailer)

"OIL" by Maayke Schurer (Kingston, ON, 5:10 min)

"Petrolena" by Mark Olin (Titusville, PA, 8:30 min)

BENEATH THE SURFACE

BY DANIEL DUGAS

We live in a world of oil, of tar sands, of shale gas, of pump jacks, nodding donkeys, horsehead pumps, grasshopper pumps, thirsty birds, a world of power and magic. From Plutarch's description of oilfields¹ to the advent of commercial drilling and the invention of the internal combustion engine, we have been transfixed by petroleum and possessed by an unquenchable thirst.

Sometimes, the fascination turns deadly. On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling rig, one of 4,000 in the Gulf of Mexico,² exploded, killing eleven workers. The ensuing oil spill quickly became the largest marine oil spill in history. I was, like many, stunned by the scope of the disaster. Amidst the spectacular emergency, a strange silhouette seemed to appear. It was not a ghost, but the shape of our willingness to endure, to carry on as if nothing, or very little had happened. The threshold of our tolerance, born surely from dependency, was expanding into unknown dimensions where "each step toward disaster" would be treated "as normal".³ But this state of being is not new; civilian populations have been tested before. The French theorist, Guy Debord, noted in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*:

And more assuredly, it has been almost universally accepted that the geological explorations for oil-beds in the subsoil of the city of Paris, so noisily conducted in the autumn of 1986, had no other serious purpose than to measure the inhabitants' current level of stupefaction and submission: by showing them supposed research so absolutely contradicted on the economic level.⁴

The BP oil spill was not a test, but it would be naive to think that the social data collected, i.e. - the tolerance levels demonstrated by local coastal populations did not provide a benchmark to gauge future reaction, "They lived through this; they can probably live through that."

This program presents works dealing with issues of environment, power and representation, works that speak about our world. These videographers and filmmakers are sometimes witnesses, sometimes activists, and often, the canaries in mine shafts. They each offer a personal point of view, an observation, an acknowledgement of where we are now and where we might be going.



OIL

The program opens in silence on a world of constructed realities. In a slow moving pan the camera reveals a terrifying landscape that is half inclusive getaway, and half industrial field. A soldier or mercenary with a machine gun stands calm and relaxed in front of a field of pumper jacks and Ferris wheels. Unaware of anything amiss, a couple with a dog, seems to be enjoying their strange vacation. In this allegorical work, artist **Peter Aerschmann** explores the limits of awareness and comprehension.

OIL'D

The animated documentary *OIL'D* by **Chris Harmon** puts the facts of the BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill into perspective. Harmon's efforts to visualize the amount of oil that actually spilled into the Gulf led him to some shocking comparisons.

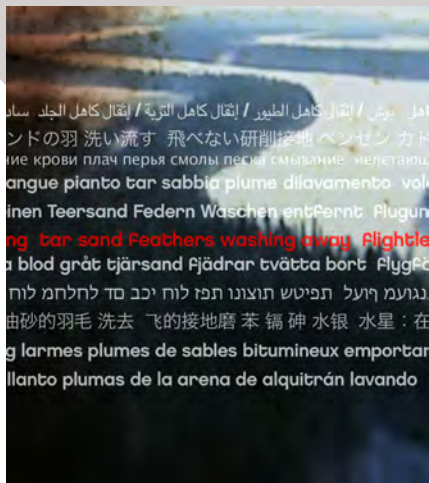


BASIN

Basin by **David Geiss** is a stunning visual poem questioning the relationship between nature and industrialization, between spirituality and bottom line. The boreal forest, the oil sands development and an aboriginal drummer are the three characters driving the narrative of this film. The journey brings us to a boomtown. It is a world of blinking motel signs with a disquieting background soundscape. Barking dogs, flapping flags and distant thunder add to a feeling of desolation and emptiness in the face of this commercial growth. The fragility of the drummer becomes an image of resilience and hope.

The oil sands, part of the Athabasca River Basin, lie under approximately 140,000 square kilometers of Alberta. It is an area roughly the size of Florida, and said to be the second largest bitumen reserve in the world.⁵





SCAPE

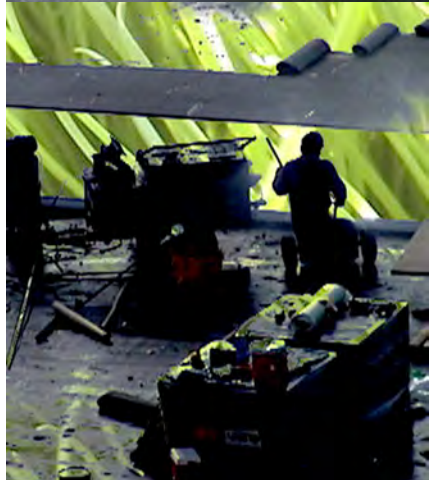
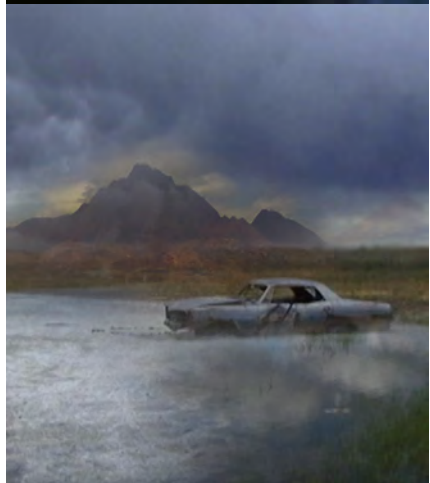
Powerful, poetic, loaded; this mesmerizing work of **Leslea Kroll** and **Kyle Armstrong** tackles the ravage of destruction by juxtaposing scrolling text in eleven languages over archival footage of an atomic explosion and industrialization. The content is reminiscent of the phrase from the Bhagavad Gita that flashed into J. Robert Oppenheimer's mind after the first atomic explosion in 1945.⁶ The images are altered, deformed, and layered with artifacts of past chemical processes. It gives the impression that the film footage was abused and abandoned. The sound track is a haunting recording by the famous castrato singer Alessandro Moreschi.

A FLOOD THEN SOME DESERT

Kent Tate brings us three distinct landscapes. Pumper jacks work along the banks of an overflowing river on a Saskatchewan prairie. In Death Valley and the Great Salt Lake Desert, a collage of images shows expanding and shrinking references to oil based economy. Ghostly oil trucks, people wandering in a desert, and what could be the proverbial 'last chance Texaco' station, appear to build a time manipulated geological history.

PAPER MOON, CARDBOARD SEA

A lonely worker seems determined to cover the lush green landscape under his feet. Perhaps he is working on a parking place or tailing pond. The task appears to be monumental and rolls of tarpaper are already covering some of the grass. This video by **Valerie LeBlanc** deals with the uneasy relationship between economic expansion and the natural world. The images are set to a remix of *It's only a Paper Moon*, written by Harold Arlen.





TAR SAND PUDDING

Tar Sand Pudding by Xstine Cook is a video dedicated to “all of the ducks that have died in the oil sands tailing ponds.” It could be seen to offer a parody on two recent initiatives by Alberta oil and gas companies. Those initiatives are aimed at kids. First *Talisman Terry*, the friendly Fracosaurus who teaches, in a fun way, the value and the safety of fracking.⁷ Looking at the images of the colouring book, we understand that natural gas explorations will make the earth look even better; at the end of the process there will be more animals and even a rainbow! The second initiative is from the Encana Corporation. In this ‘cup cake video’, Mike, team lead for Horne River Development,⁸ shows very young children how drilling is done. Mike is using a layered (yum-yum) cup cake model as the earth and the kids really seem to get the message. Beyond the irony, *Tar Sand Pudding* forces us to reconsider the quality of heritage that will be passed down to these children.⁹

LUX AETERNA

The landscape is harsh; one can feel the heat, the sun. A man is seen carrying a makeshift apparatus across the land. There is a sense of urgency as he struggles with the heavy load. Is this *Eternal Light* related to the *Eternal Fire* found in the middle of the *Baba Gurgur* oil field, near the city of *Kirkuk* in *Iraq*?¹⁰

Jacopo Jenna proposes a symbolic and spiritual work that examines our dependence on oil. Perhaps it illustrates the leap of faith required to accept the value and sustainability of alternative solutions to the energy crisis.

PALABRAS NEGRAS

Black words, black gold interspersed with green flashes of consciousness. The enigmatic flash of a hand draws attention to the greatest instrument for manipulating the environment. A river flows downstream and upstream. *Palabras Negras* by **Anthony Gasca** appears as a cautionary tale on the nature of wealth, and decisions that value oil over water.



OILSPILL - THE HUMAN UEBERFLUSS

OILSPILL by composer **Jo Blankenburg** and photographer **Andy Fox** was an experiment to visualize what birds trapped in oil spills might experience. Seven women volunteered as victims, while nine litres of a black oil-like substance was poured over their faces. The resulting high-speed, visually seductive video raises issues of representation. What is the meaning of a message when tragedy looks good? What does it say about the tragedy, and what responsibility does it place on the witnessing audience? There is something unsettling here. It calls to mind the controversial photography of **Oliviero Toscani**, best known for his work with **Bennetton** (1982- 2000).



OIL

The dreamy trash-landscape of **Maayke Schurer** calls to mind the Great Pacific Patch that builds momentum in the North Pacific Ocean. On Schurer's flotsam, a dolphin jumps into the water, crows search for food, plastic bags and clouds share the skies. Yet beauty has never been so deadly.

Mainly comprised of plastic, the Great Pacific Patch is so big that, in French, it is called the *Eighth Continent*.



PETROLENA

Pennsylvania has a long history with oil. It was there, in 1859, that the first well was drilled in the USA. Josh Fox, the director of the documentary film *Gasland* also hails from there.²¹

Pennsylvanian **Mark Olin** brings us into the woods for a visit to a small oil drilling company. He documents the operation, the movement of the machines, the belts, the spigots, the steam, the gauges and the noise of it all. The power and the magic of oil seem reduced by antiquated technologies used to extract the precious liquid.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Ellis, Oliver C., *A History of Fire and Flame*. Kessinger Publishing, 1932 (October 2004)

² According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), there is in the northern Gulf of Mexico nearly 4,000 active oil and gas platforms. *Map of platforms*. Accessed June 29, 2011. http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/o6mexico/background/oil/media/platform_600.html

³ For more information about the expansion of normality please see *Shifting Baseline Syndrome* by Paul Kedrosky, Accessed June 29, 2011. http://www.edge.org/q2011/q11_9.html

⁴ Debord, Guy. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, First published in French by Editions Gerard Lebovici, 1988, Chapter XVIII. Translated into English by NOT BORED! 2005. Accessed July 7, 2011. <http://www.notbored.org/commentaires.html>

⁵ The Pembina Institute, *Alberta's Oilsands*. Accessed June 29, 2011. <http://www.pembina.org/oil-sands/os101/alberta>

⁶ Worster, David. *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*. Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 342. The AGE OF ECOLOGY opened on the New Mexico desert, near the town of Alamogordo, on July 16, 1945, with a dazzling fireball of light and a swelling mushroom cloud of radioactive gases. As the world's first atomic bomb went off and the color of the early morning sky changed abruptly from pale blue to blinding white, physicist and project leader J. Robert Oppenheimer felt at first a surge of reverence. Then a somber phrase from the Bhagavad Gita flashed into his mind: "I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds."

⁷ Talisman Energy. *Talisman Terry's Energy Adventure*, colouring book (PDF). Accessed June 30, 2011. http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/pdf/201106/201106talisman_coloringbook.pdf

⁸ Encana, YouTube video: *A Look Underground*. Accessed June 29, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9qr1DiYTPo&feature=player_embedded#at=85

⁹ Oil companies have always been keen to market their activities in the best possible light. For a fascinating look at the celebrated and biased arrival of the oil industry in Louisiana please see Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948) commissioned by the Standard Oil Company.

¹⁰ Wikipedia. Baba Gurgur (Eternal Fire). Last modified March 15. Accessed June 29, 2011. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baba_Gurgur

¹¹ Gasland: A film by Josh Fox. Accessed June 30, 2011. <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/>

ABOUT THE CURATOR:

Daniel Dugas is a poet, musician and videographer. He holds an MFA, Time Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was an artist in residence at: the Banff Centre, in both the Visual Arts and the Music Department; Sculpture Space, New York; EMMEDIA, Calgary; A.I.R. Vallauris, France, and more recently at the Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney, Australia.

His sixth book of poetry: *Hé!*, was published last spring by *Les Éditions Prise de parole*, Sudbury, Ontario. In the last few months he was invited to participate in the Festival international et Marché de Poésie Wallonie-Bruxelles, Belgium; the Frye Festival, Moncton, NB; and the Festival de poésie de Montréal, QC. Daniel is currently living in Moncton, New Brunswick where he is pursuing a PhD in creative writing at the l'Université de Moncton.

You can see his own *video-reaction* to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico at the following address: <http://www.vimeo.com/13229495>

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES (IN ORDER OF SCREENING):

Peter Aerschmann was born in Fribourg, Switzerland in 1969, and now live and works in Bern. He attended the Basel University of Art and Design in 1991 - 1992 and from 1994 - 1999, attended the Berne University of the Arts. Since 1999, Peter Aerschmann works as an artist in the fields of video and interactive computer installations. His work has been exhibited internationally at galleries, festivals, and museums. Awards include the Swiss Art Award (2002), the Aeschlimann-Corti Award (2006) and residencies in New York, Berlin and South Africa. (www.aerschmann.ch)

Chris Harmon was born and raised in Atlanta, GA where he attended school at the Georgia State University. After graduation, he moved to New York City to earn a masters degree from Parsons. For over five years now, he's has been freelancing for major broadcast design studios. In that time, Chris has worked on projects for HBO, ESPN, ABC, FOX, MTV, Universal and USA to name a few. You can view his work and reel at www.arbitrarydomain.com

David Geiss grew up on a family farm near Regina, Saskatchewan. He obtained a BFA in Film & Video Production, University of Regina, on scholarship, and is an independent filmmaker, artist, writer, and occasional performer. He has exhibited across Canada, the United States, and Europe. His practice includes several genres of work including recurring actor roles on the TV comedy series *Corner Gas*, serving as Festival Coordinator for Queer City Cinema Biennial International Queer Arts Festival, and four years as Editor of the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative independent film magazine, *Splice*. David's recent short film *Basin* has been screened at venues internationally. It was also a Hall of Fame winner at the Magmart Video Under Volcano Festival Internazionale di Videoarte, placing it in the permanent collection of the Casoria Contemporary Art Museum in Naples. David will be entering the MFA program at the University of Victoria in September 2011.

Kyle Armstrong is a Canadian filmmaker working predominantly in short format non-narrative film, creating over 15 original film projects in the last six years. Armstrong frequently makes use of hand altering film techniques, using bleaches, dyes, scratches, paints, found footage and is now utilizing DIY digital optical printing methods. His work frequently explores concepts of isolation and decay. His recent collaboration with sound artist Mark Templeton premiered on influential music blog *Altered Zones* and was subsequently picked up by pitchfork.tv. In July of 2010, he was invited by Canadian auteur, Guy Maddin, to collaborate on and direct short films for Guy Maddin's *Hauntings* project. Kyle is currently in pre-production on an auroral imaging film to be scored by avant/pop legend Jim O'Rourke and is currently a term instructor at MacEwan University in Edmonton in the Design Studies program.

Leslea Kroll is delighted to be collaborating with Kyle Armstrong on *SCAPE*. They worked together previously on the short video *Rx: Normal*. Her play *Auksenberg: Trial by Fury* was staged earlier this spring at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus. Leslea's other plays include *Swallow*, *The Fifth Chamber* and *Domesticatrix*. Later this year, Edmonton's *Broken Arrow Press* will publish her collection of poems, *Sturgeon*. Her writing can also be found online at vicoletters.blogspot.com

Kent Tate creates artworks that involve the use of root elements for a description/representation of this dynamic living planet. Since 2005, his primary focus has been on making movies that represent various separate, yet co-existing worlds, some of which are rapidly expanding, while others are quickly disappearing. Kent's movies have been shown in numerous international film festivals, and in various public screenings/exhibitions.

Valerie LeBlanc is a pluri-disciplinary artist and writer, and has lived and worked in many regions of Canada. She has presented, and participated in residencies, and workshops - throughout Canada, the United States, France and Australia. She graduated from the Glass Department of the Alberta College of Art + Design in 1984, and received her MFA, Time Arts Program, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL in 1993. Her practice fluxes between media arts, performance and installation. Many of her video poems emphasize the importance of non-spectacular time, the significance of the day-to-day, and the beauty present in available aesthetic. She describes herself as an existentialist with a conscience.

Xstine Cook is a Calgary artist. A mask and puppet maker and experimental theatre creator for over 20 years, she is making the leap to new media. Maezy, Medina and Zaiyah are Xstine's daughters, age 7, 5, and 3. As practicing anarchists, the trio tackle order and injustice with equal passion on a daily basis. Xstine's films have been shown internationally at various film festivals. *Tar Sand Pudding* is Xstine's fourth film, and the first with her daughters.

Jacopo Jenna is a visual and dance artist from Italy. He is a graduate of Sociology and studied in Holland at the Codarts-Rotterdam Dance Academy. His artistic production is focused on the meaning of the body, thought as a place of feeling and exposure through the form and movement. The works are oriented towards a research of co-existence between the practices and techniques of performing art and the use of languages such as photography and video.

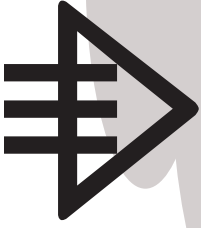
Anthony Gasca is a researcher and observer. Tools and Methods are 'quickest to the hand'.
<http://pandaclock.com/ax>

Andy Fox was born in Germany in 1968 and currently lives in Salzburg, Austria. His first contact with a camera was a ROLLEICORD SLR that belonged to his grandpa. Since then, he developed his own photographic skills by attending workshops and assisting renowned photographers. He now works with various magazines, advertising agencies and brands winning several awards such as the TRIERENBERG, FWA. In February 2011, the multimedia project *OIL SPILL - THE HUMAN UEBERFLUSS* was officially selected to sideline the Berlinale Filmfest.

Jo Blankenburg was born in Germany in 1972 and is currently living in Auckland, New Zealand and Munich, Germany. At the age of six, he began playing the piano and the drums, growing up to be an active member of two jazz formations. During his two-year stay in New York City, he collaborated with various musicians and composed, produced and arranged music in the genres of Funk, Soul and RnB. He won the "MTV Europe Songwriting Contest", awarding him with an artist contract with Warner Chappell Germany, Warner Brothers Music. The winning track *Drag Me Down* was published in Germany and the music video rotated on MTV Europe Music Television. Since 2005, he is focusing on writing music for motion picture advertising, and scoring feature films, TV -movies, short films and documentaries.

Maayke Schurer is a Canadian/ Dutch artist who's passion for the environment has led to an ongoing mission to develop improved means of raising respect and awareness. With a fine arts as well as a biology background, she has recently completed a MFA at the Glasgow School of art and currently resides in Kingston Ontario. (<http://maayke.com>)

Mark Olin is a sophomore film student at Syracuse University. He studies in SU's Visual and Performing Arts program and had his videos featured at the Everson Museum of Art as well as the Spark Contemporary Art Space in Syracuse. Olin's works attempt to portray the physical and psychological flaws of humanity by capturing confessions of fault: *Petrolena* is the fault of ignorance. The oil industry lives independent from our thought whilst we live dependent on its prosperity.



EMMEDIA

Gallery & Production Society

Where media arts live.

EMMEDIA is a Calgary-based organization that promotes and advances video, audio, and time-based media arts production. We work within the artistic, social and cultural community to provide broadcast and high definition video and audio production and post-production facilities. The centre also maintains a public exhibition program year-round. EMMEDIA offers an array of media and web production workshops and residencies, commissions and access programs in the media arts. EMMEDIA has been a voice and a venue for the media arts in Alberta since 1979.

EMMEDIA is supported through assistance from The Canada Council for the Arts, The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Calgary Arts Development, National Film Board, Alberta Media Arts Alliance, Webcore Labs, private and corporate donations, self-generated revenues, and the volunteer efforts of the arts community.



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HOURS OF OPERATION:

Monday - Saturday @ 10 AM - 5 PM

Plutarch's description of an oil-field illustrates one natural occasion for the confusion of unctuousity with choler. Here we have in the geocosm the volatile sulphur of "fat" being emitted from the choleric earth, and the passage is quoted in full, except for a somewhat tantalizing hiatus in the middle, because it is one of the finest historical documents in the history of fire and flame :

"In Ecbatana, Alexander was much surprised at the sight of the place where fire issues in a continuous stream, like a spring of water, out of a cleft in the earth, and the stream of naphtha, which, not far from this spot, flows out so abundantly as to form a sort of lake. This naphtha, in other respects resembling bitumen, is so subject to that fire, that before it touches the flame it will kindle at the very light that surrounds it, and often inflame the intermediate air also. The barbarians, to show the power and the nature of it, sprinkled the street that led to the king's lodgings with little drops of it, and when it was almost night, stood at the further end with torches, which being applied to the moistened places, the first at once taking fire, instantly, as quick as man could think of it, it caught from one end to another, in such a manner that the whole street was one continued flame. Among those who use to wait on the king and find occasion to amuse him when he anointed and washed himself, there was one Athenophanes, an Athenian, who desired him to make an experiment of the naphtha upon Stephanus, who stood by in the bathing-place, a youth with a ridiculously ugly face, whose talent was singing well. 'For', said he, 'if it take hold of him and is not put out, it must undeniably be allowed to be of the most invincible strength'. The youth, as it happened, readily consented to undergo the trial, and as soon as he was anointed and rubbed with it, his whole body broke out into such a flame, and was so sized by the fire, that Alexander was in the greatest perplexity and alarm for him, and not without reason ; for nothing could have prevented him being consumed by it, if by a good chance, there had not been people at hand with a great many vessels of water for the service of the bath, with all which they had much ado to extinguish the fire ; and his body was so burned all over that he was not cured of it for a good while after. Thus it is not without some plausibility that they endeavor to reconcile the fable to truth, who say this was the drug in the tragedies with which Medea anointed the crown and veil which she gave to Creon's daughter. For neither the things themselves, nor the fire, could kindle of its own accord, but being prepared for it by naphtha, they imperceptibly attracted and caught a flame which happened to be brought near them. For the rays and emanations of fire at a distance have no other effect upon some bodies than bare light and heat, but in others, where they meet with airy dryness, and also sufficient rich moisture, they collect themselves and soon kindle and create a transformation. The manner, however, of the production of naphtha admits of a diversity of opinion".

It is just here that the hiatus so tragically occurs. He resumes :

"Or weather this liquid substance that feeds the flame does not rather proceed from a soil that is unctuous and productive of fire as that of the province of Babylon is, where the ground is so very hot that oftentimes the grains of barley leap up and are thrown out, as if the violent inflammation had made the earth throb ; and in the extreme heats the inhabitants are wont to sleep upon skins filled with water. Harpalus, who was left governor of this country, and was desirous to adorn the palace gardens and walks with Grecian plants, succeeded in raising all but ivy, which the earth would not bear, but constantly killed. For it is a plant that loves a cold (heavy and wet ?) soil and the temper of this hot and fiery earth was improper for it. But such digressions as these the impatient reader will be more willing to pardon if they are kept within a moderate compass".