

Notes toward a Manifesto for the Future Infrastructuralists!

David Brooks

- I **Infrastructure is Nature!** Infrastructure is alive. It is an active extension of society and, thus, is active within the living world.
- II **Infrastructure is power!** And is representative of power. Therefore, it must reflect the desires and well-being of all the human and nonhuman constituents it entangles. Though this mandate has never been realized and may be impossible, this mandate is the main principle through which all other mandates flow.
- III **Infrastructure is the shape of a society's desires and ideologies!** As it interfaces with natural systems or with a multiplicity of other infrastructures. Infrastructure is the mechanism of society that aligns the contours of the individual to the contours of the landscape within the contours of that society. It is an organismic network that realizes society's collective desires and ideologies through society's physiologies in real time and space.
- IV **Our daily motions and priorities dictate the shape of our infrastructures!** Which in turn dictate the shape of the landscape around us, which affects the health of the larger biosphere, which thusly dictates our daily motions. One who takes these concerns seriously is an infrastructuralist. The infrastructuralist works to bridge the psychological and economic gaps between the activities of the individual and the biosphere—for they are intra-related. An intra-relation is one in which none of the constituent parts precedes another in formation, but rather in which the parts emerge into their individualized forms through their entanglement with each other.
- V **Infrastructure shapes the natural world and the natural world shapes infrastructure!** They are sometimes interchangeable, and their demarcations are occasionally impossible to discern—for they are intra-related. Therefore, any definition of nature is not a given, but is an ideological notion constructed by a distinct culture at a particular time.
- VI **Our current infrastructures have failed us!** They not only contribute to the unavailing practice of domination over the world's resources and perpetuate the marginalization of peoples, but they literally point the way and pave the roads to

such. Our current infrastructures galvanize such practices through their sprawling stagnating tendrils that sever the land and its natural systems into unsustainable island bodies, segregating peoples and proliferating food deserts. Our current infrastructures underline the delusional bifurcation of "culture over here" from "nature over there", as propagated by the failed Enlightenment project and the ensuing miasma of anthropocentrism.

VII We may have stepped out of the food chain, but we have not stepped out of nature! We are propelled by the sobering truth that regardless of our efforts, or lack thereof, we all will succumb to the laws of metabolic existence. One day, a variety of fungi will decompose all of our bodily forms into nutrient rich soil. ~~This should be cause for catharsis, not self-aggrandizement or nostalgia.~~

VIII Infrastructure must align with unfolding evolutionary adjustments! By relinquishing the hubris of predetermination and failed attempts at stasis. The process of evolution mandates that all living things be in a constant state of flux—existing in perpetual response to relations with other subjects and their environments *in the present*. The living world does not emerge along a predetermined plan. It materializes and takes momentary shape through the infinite reoccurring of singular moments in the ever-developing present. Infrastructure must learn these lessons of frenetic evolutionary longevity, if infrastructure is to have the opportunity to supply a unifying platform—the bridge to togetherness. Upon this platform, the following phenomenon will never lessen: the more we know, the more we realize how little we know.

~~**IX With this manifesto, I have expressed nothing new!** But have simply re-arranged thoughts that have been thought before with nothing new beyond context and scale. (By scale, I mean proportions but also intensities and speeds.) Precisely because I have expressed nothing new, this must be expressed again and again, often at different scales, and always in different contexts.~~

X If infrastructure cannot adapt then it should cease! Infrastructure is required to make perpetual adjustments to its form and scale as it traverses ever-changing contexts. It must resist the unchecked urge to rule. If it cannot, then it should cease to act. Neoliberal development and its imperialist tendencies do not accommodate the diversity of constituents that they entangle. The stakeholders do not solely consist of the investors. The immediate gratification of beneficiaries is shortsighted, and without exception, results in a collective net loss for future generations of humans and nonhumans alike.

XI We cannot import 20th century models of infrastructure into the 21st century! The scale and context have changed. Overpopulation is overpopulated, pollution is too polluted to notice, and monocultures form the new biodiversity. Issues of history, aesthetics, biotic and abiotic conditions, economic mobility, social justice, and infrastructures are all common grounds within today's landscape and must be addressed simultaneously, for they are inextricably linked.

XII Infrastructure is wrought with hubris! Infrastructure needs to be made humane, free of hubris, full of humanity. All societies have an infrastructure. But that does not presuppose that all must articulate their infrastructures with the *scorching breath* of hubris.

XIII We reject the perpetuation of the human body as a common denominator in the landscape! The infrastructuralist must contextualize the human body as one infinitesimal constituent amongst many constituents occupying the same space at the same time. It is imperative that the hierarchal location of the human body above all other bodies is renounced in order to cease the domination of nonhumans and the surplus consumption of the world's resources.

XIV Our infrastructure does not relate the human body to the larger biosphere! Though our infrastructure is the link between the micro and the macro it was nonetheless made without consideration of its subject, or of subjectivity. This took place before we ever came to acknowledge what exactly the human-as-animal *is* in relation to the biosphere. We've never been human enough, which has resulted in an infrastructure that does not relate the human body to a larger biosphere—as but one of many other bodies, human and nonhuman alike. If we considered an equitable human body then we could perhaps have a truer infrastructure, and vice versa.

XV Detail, object, and environment must be considered as one and the same in the collective landscape! This is what the infrastructuralist may refer to as the simultaneity of scaled thinking:

- a. Detail = the quality of intimacy and a fine-tuned focus on surface
- b. Object = that which can be held and therefore possessed
- c. Environment = a space that includes the individual within the formation of publicness
- d. Landscape = that which is beyond an individual's singular perceptual capacity; it can be perceived, but only through duration or through the aid of imagination

Individual >Species >Ecosystem >Biosphere >∞
Species >Biosphere >Individual >Ecosystem >∞
Biosphere >Ecosystem >Species >Individual >∞

- XVI **To think geologically is a form of simultaneously scaled thinking. Simultaneously scaled thinking is the natural evolution of our co-habitation with humans and nonhumans alike!** Considering one's awakened state in the present moment while beholding 571-million-year-old Proterozoic formations while also acknowledging their continued state into the distant future is a form of simultaneously scaled thinking.
- XVII **When Jonah looked up**, after the great storm at sea, he was enveloped within what seemed a coarse wet cave. Being thrashed about in this cave, Jonah was an object contained in an environment. As the story is told, that environment was actually an object, a whale—in which Jonah was merely a detail of the contents of its mouth (a detail from God). For Jonah, the whale was an environment. For the whale, Jonah was a detail of its mouth, an object. Here detail, object, and environment are not only indistinguishable, but merely a matter of perspective. Therefore, the predicament that Jonah found himself in was that of a *detail*, that of an *object* and that of an *environment*; all three of which work together to form the symbolic gesture of divine will through the varying relations of the individual body of Jonah. In this narrative, the occupant's body is the common denominator within fluctuating perspectives and therefore the physical, psychological, and symbolic liaison between consciousness and the collective palpable landscape.
- XVIII **It is not the body of Jonah that is of paramount importance to us today. It is the body of the whale!** One of the humbling wonders that keeps our anthropocentric impacts in perspective is the sheer scale of possible life. In the three billion year history of cellular life, the Blue whale is the largest animal ever known to have roamed its surface, and it still coexists with us to this day. It can exceed 100 feet in length and 200 tons in weight. This scale of life competes with the scale of our own infrastructures. It would take more than 2500 people to equal the weight of a mature Blue whale—a population four times that of the town in which I grew up. The Blue whale's scale reframes our perspective on the natural world from one in which we lord dominion over all life to one of humble celebration. We can think of the Blue whale within the entirety of its being: (A) as a *detail* (a detail of the oceanic abyss); (B) as an *object* (an object in terms of its body containing mass and mobility); (C) as an *environment* (it was indeed an environment for the intrepid Jonah); and (D) as a *landscape* (Jonah could certainly perceive the mouth of the whale as an environment, but as the entirety of the whale's body was not in view of Jonah's singular perceptual capacity, it therefore

existed for him as a larger landscape that had to be imagined).
Once we are able to understand the Blue whale as all of the above, we are able to employ a multitude of empathies toward it simultaneously—what the infrastructuralist may refer to as the simultaneity of empathetic thinking. [See XV.]

- XIX **The infrastructuralist embraces that which defies any one person's singular perceptual capacity!** One particular variety of fungus, the *Armillaria ostoyae* has a single individual whose mycelium mass covers four square miles of seamless land area. It is the largest known organism on earth with a perpetually mutating shape delineating where it begins and ends. In terms of infrastructural networks, there is much to learn from the ever-mutating infinitesimal hyphae of mycelium. It is easy to imagine this single organism blanketing an entire landscape, or even becoming a landscape itself, all contained within the mutating boundaries of its autonomous body—albeit a body that defies any one person's singular perceptual capacity.
- XX **An ecosystem is a detail of the biosphere, and of the larger landscape!** However, it is also a thing, and of course an environment, filled with an indeterminate quantity of details. This nebulous environment sustains itself and its sovereignty through the processes of its parts—its intra-active building parts. These parts generate a process and this process generates products that are a service to us: clean air, filtered water, food, climate, habitat, etc. These products, or *ecosystem services*, make our daily motions possible, by providing the life-sustaining elements that support us through the world. We are intra-related to ecosystem services. As above, the infrastructuralist understands that though we may have stepped out of the food chain we have not stepped out of our ecosystem.
- XXI **One must employ one's imagination to form an understanding of an ecosystem!** It is impossible to witness an ecosystem in its entirety, as if simply watching a car drive by. An ecosystem is as much of a process as it is a thing; therefore to witness it requires the iterative activity of reconstructing past observations. As a result, the products of an ecosystem remain elusive to an observer looking for a discrete product to define. It is not there. It is only there through time. Our relationship to ecosystem services suffers from a delusional distance and an unconscious disavowal of our reliance on them.
- XXII **The infrastructuralist does not treat the dynamics of an ecosystem as a service!** Much like the theory of commodity fetishism, the service provided by an ecosystem is often taken for granted as if it magically appeared at our doorsteps and will continue to do so in perpetuity. Like market driven economies, an ecosystem's products are

disjoined from the convoluted processes that form them. They are ascribed economic value, as if intrinsic to them and apart from the ecosystem that produced them. An ecosystem reduced in our apprehension to its most obviously useful products becomes a machine perpetually at our service, disconnected from the dynamic processes of its larger operation.

XXIII Biodiversity is part of our daily lives! The architects of The Biodiversity Conservation Network, in the *UNEP Global Biodiversity Assessment* appropriately define their ideology in terms of the economic patterns that govern our daily lives: "Besides the profound ethical and aesthetic implications, it is clear that the loss of biodiversity has serious economic and social costs. The genes, species, ecosystems, and human knowledge being lost represent a living library of options available for adapting to local and global change. Biodiversity is part of our daily lives and livelihood and constitutes the resources upon which families, communities, nations, and future generations depend."

XXIV ~~We can transfer ecological principles to economic systems~~ through cultural production. As evidenced above [XXII], this impasse cannot be resolved by political and economic trajectories alone, for the breach between the economics and ecology of everyday life is a cultural construct by origin and inevitably must be reckoned within the cultural sphere.

XXV We are a debt species! Meaning our extinction is inevitable but our ultimate disappearance is delayed. We live in a distinct moment within our extinction debt, hyper-aware of the impact of our actions on the larger biosphere even as we pummel forward with increasingly severe impact. We knowingly, if slowly, render others and ourselves extinct. Through infrastructure we finesse our interfaces with the larger environment and prepare the path for future nonhumans. Infrastructure can be that bridge to togetherness.

SELECTED WORKS
Courtesy of David Brooks

Rock, Mosquito and Hummingbird: A Prehistory of Governors Island

2017

Continuous profile core extractions from three historic sites on Governors Island, NYC; situated in the subterranean magazine of Fort Jay atop a customized scaffold system that follows the flight paths of an Asian Tiger Mosquito and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird through the vaulted architecture that once housed military ordnances.

Dimensions variable.

Commissioned by the Trust for Governors Island

Rock, Mosquito, and Hummingbird digs down to the core of the place we now call Governors Island, to expose the strata of history of this floating rock at the entrance of New York Harbor—layers stretching down to a foundation of Manhattan Schist that predates complex life on earth.

Probing three sites on the northern side of the original footprint of the island, David Brooks bored through the ground surface to a range of 90 to 125 feet in depth, telling a story of this ancient place in cobbles, soil, silt, shells, clay, and bedrock. This excavated narrative leads visitors beyond the dominant military and colonial history of the site to imagine a landmass that for millions of years played a part in a larger strategic operation—the origin of land and life itself.

Situated in the subterranean magazine of historic Fort Jay, David Brooks' winding sculptural intervention of three long continuous core samples are assembled in contrasting trajectories referencing fast time (the flight of a mosquito and hummingbird) and slow time (the creation of bedrock).

– Excerpted from the exhibition's press release.



Rotosonic drill near historic hospital extracting continuous core down to 125ft.—through glacial till, original 19th century seawall, to bedrock.

Credit: *Rock, Mosquito and Hummingbird*, 2017, process image. Governors Island, NYC (Photo by David Brooks).



Detail of geologic core path entering the North Powder Magazine with sections of Manhattan schist and fossilized marine organisms visible.

Credit: *Rock, Mosquito and Hummingbird*, 2017. Continuous profile core extractions atop a customized scaffold system that follows the flight paths of an Asian Tiger Mosquito and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird through the vaulted architecture that once housed military ordnances, Governors Island, NYC (Photo by Timothy Schenk).



Installation view of Magazine Court with glacial till installed atop three pathways—the straight line emblematic of geological time, mosquito and hummingbird flight paths emblematic of rapid time.

Credit: *Rock, Mosquito and Hummingbird*, 2017. Continuous profile core extractions atop a customized scaffold system that follows the flight paths of an Asian Tiger Mosquito and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird through the vaulted architecture that once housed military ordnances; Governors Island, NYC (Photo by Timothy Schenk).

Of Discriminating Artistic Feeling (The Appropriator, The Industrialist, and The Aesthete and Socialite)

2017

Animal cages designed for the two macaws, two pair of monkeys and owl that James Deering kept at Vizcaya as personal companions—whose respective designs are emblematic of Deering’s own character qualities: as an appropriator, an industrialist, and an aesthete and socialite.

Dimensions variable.

Commissioned by Vizcaya Museum and Gardens

Of Discriminating Artistic Feeling consists of three animal enclosures displayed throughout Vizcaya, in areas that might have originally housed James Deering’s birds and monkeys. David Brooks highlights the distinctly nonhuman presence these residents contributed to the estate, and how their habitats and sounds added to the overall immersive experience of Vizcaya.

In addition to housing James Deering’s two macaws, four monkeys and one owl, the unique cage designs are each emblematic of Deering himself—one conveying his identity as an early 20th century industrialist, one that regards his disposition as an aesthete and socialite, and the third which enacts his delectation as an appropriator of many architectural and artistic styles. The last was made in collaboration with artist and woodworker of South Florida renown, Brian Booth.

The cages, as if succumbing to their own affectations overwrought with their respective design motifs, are ultimately rendered uninhabitable due to their very own sensory overload.

– Excerpted from the Vizcaya Museum’s press release.



Installation view of *The Industrialist*, owl cage.

Credit: *Of Discriminating Artistic Feeling; The Industrialist*, 2017, galvanized HVAC ducts and aluminum pallet with brass, steel and copper hardware; Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, Miami (Photo by David Almeida).

Desert Rooftops

2011–2012

Asphalt shingled rooftops, wood, vinyl siding, metal interpretive signs
16 x 92 x 54 feet

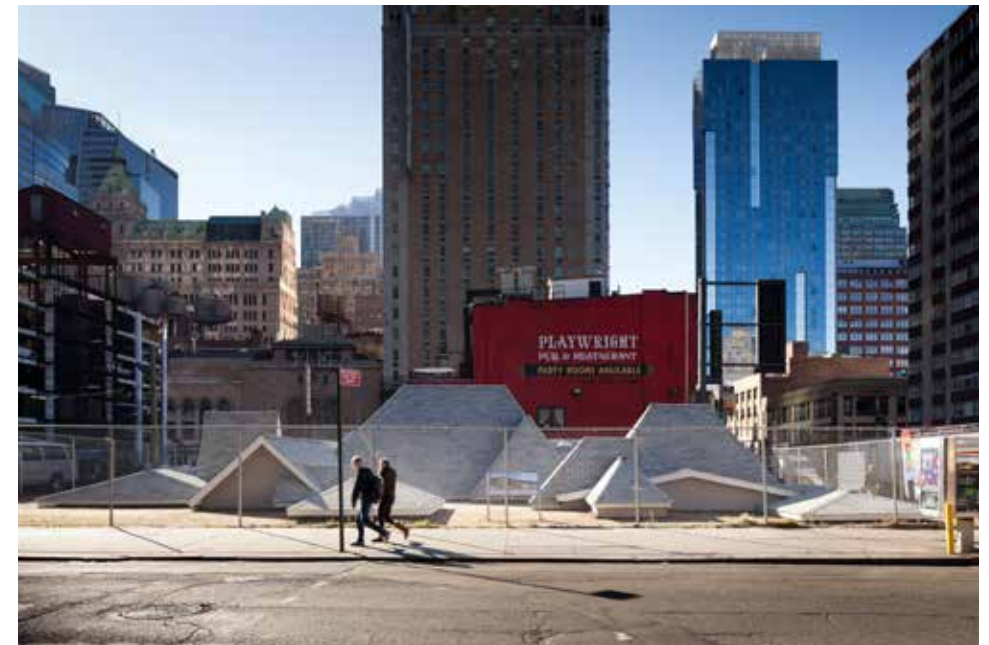
Commissioned by the Art Production Fund for the Last Lot at Times Square, 46th and 8th Ave. NYC, November 2011–February 2012.

Desert Rooftops is a 5,000-square-foot sculpture that is an undulating configuration of multiple asphalt-shingled rooftops similar to those on suburban developments, McMansions and strip malls conjoined to resemble a rolling, dune-like landscape.

The piece examines issues of the natural and built landscape by comparing the monoculture that arises from unchecked suburban and urban sprawl with that of an over-cultivated landscape—creating a work that is “picturesque, familiar and simultaneously foreboding”.

David Brooks' sculptural approach gives a nod to Robert Smithson's earthworks and Gordon Matta-Clark's building cuts while offering a much needed sense of humor to help digest today's somber environmental issues.

– Excerpted from the Art Production Fund press release.



Installation view of *Desert Rooftops*, 2011–2012, Asphalt-shingled rooftops, Times Square, NYC (Photo by James Ewing).



Installation view of *Desert Rooftops*, 2011–2012, Asphalt-shingled rooftops, Times Square, NYC (Photo by James Ewing).

(Page 121) Aerial view of *Desert Rooftops*, 2011–2012, Asphalt-shingled rooftops, Times Square, NYC (Photo by anonymous).



A Proverbial Machine in the Garden

2013

Dynahoe tractor, concrete, earth, landscape, steel grating
66 x 28 x 12 feet
Storm King Art Center, NY

The notion of a "machine in the garden" is a cultural symbol that underlies the tension between the pastoral ideal and the rapid and sweeping transformations wrought by industrialized technology. David Brooks's work considers this ongoing conflicted relationship between the individual and the built and natural environment.

Speaking to Storm King's past—as an agricultural site—and present—as a carefully sculpted pastoral environment—*A Proverbial Machine in the Garden* addresses questions of how humans use, consume, and perceive of the natural world.

David Brooks's piece is subterranean and invisible from afar. It is designed to be experienced as a natural landscape or topography would be—by viewers walking across it.

– Excerpted from the Storm King Art Center press release.



Aerial view of *A Proverbial Machine in the Garden*, 2013, Dynahoe tractor, concrete, earth, landscape, steel grating; Storm King Arts Center, NY (Photo by Jerry L. Thompson).



(Pages 124-125) Detail view of *A Proverbial Machine in the Garden*, 2013, Dynahoe tractor, concrete, earth, landscape, steel grating; Storm King Arts Center, NY (Photo by Jerry L. Thompson).

Preserved Forest

2010-2011

Nursery-grown trees, earth, concrete

Dimensions variable

Installation at MoMA PS1, NYC

One of the more unusual sights [during installations for MoMA P.S. 1's Greater New York 2010 show] was a cement mixer outside. It was not there to smooth out the sidewalk or resurface P.S. 1's courtyard, but to put the finishing touches on "Forest Preserved," by the 34-year old artist David Brooks.

[...] Mr. Brooks stood in P.S.1's 26-foot-high duplex gallery, where concrete had just been dumped, pumped, and sprayed over a forest of trees trucked in from nurseries in Florida [...]. [T]he trees had been arranged to approximate an Amazonian rain forest.

As the [cement] mixture was drying—and delicately encrusting the trees—the leaves began wilting, cast in a gray haze of heavy concrete [...]. Mr. Brooks added that the work "will change every day as it decomposes."

– Excerpted from *The New York Times*, "A Petrified Forest" by Carol Vogel, 20 May 2010.

(Page 127) Installation view of *Preserved Forest*, 2010–2011, Nursery-grown trees, earth, concrete; MOMA / PS1, NYC (Photo by Cathy Carver).



Myopic Wall Composition (with chainsaw-cut wood found at Walden Pond)

2014

Chainsaw-cut wood found in historic Walden Woods, MDF, paint, metal scaffold
Footprint dimensions variable; height 9 ft
Installation at deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA
October 2014–April 2015

This piece contains chainsaw-cut and hand-hewn wood collected from Walden Pond State Reservation and historic Walden Woods. Thus, what appears to be a “natural” object is in fact an object formed by culture. Much like the “wilds” of Thoreau, the wilderness is not a place void of culture, but intimately intertwined with it, although not always visibly so.

These irregular wooden forms are reduced to two-dimensional surfaces as they are embedded into museum-style walls. Yet the “back” of the walls reveal the elaborate scaffolding needed to support their precise locations, alluding to a rich world made invisible.

The installation proposes a myopic or shortsighted perception of the natural world. This is indicative of a paradoxical sentimentality that simultaneously values land conservation, often fueled by texts like Walden, while jeopardizing the very same environment through rampant consumerism.

– Excerpted from the artist's statement.





Rear installation view of *Myopic Wall Composition*, 2014, Chainsaw-cut wood found in historic Walden Woods, MDF, paint, metal scaffold; deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA (Photo by David Brooks).

(Page 129) Front installation view of *Myopic Wall Composition*, 2014, Chainsaw-cut wood found in historic Walden Woods, MDF, paint, metal scaffold; deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA (Photo by David Brooks).

Gap Ecology (Three Still Lives with Cherry Picker and Palms)

2009-2015

60 ft aerial boom lift, Majesty palms, weather

Dimensions Variable

Installation at Fischer Landau Center, NYC, 2009

Socrates Sculpture Park, NYC, 2013

Nuit Blanche, Toronto, 2014

And an unbuilt commissioned proposal for the Public Art Fund, NY in which an armada of cherry pickers with palms were to hover over dormant construction sites throughout NYC.

In the Amazon, storms often result in the felling of towering canopy trees, ripping holes in the forest canopy and forming a "light gap." This gap is quickly colonized by opportunistic species that capitalize on such improvisational events for rapid growth.

This sculptural intervention makes an analogy between this phenomenon typical of rainforest ecology and that of urban light gaps in our sprawling built environments—from dormant construction sites, rapid development, or natural disasters. These aerial boom lifts, or cherry pickers, behave as active and opportunistic species in the built environment.

– Excerpted from the artist's project description.

(Page 133) Installation view of *Gap Ecology*, 2014, aerial boom lifts, Majesty palms, weather;

Installation for Nuit Blanche, Toronto (Photo by David Brooks).

(Pages 134-135) Installation view of *Gap Ecology*, 2013, aerial boom lifts, Majesty palms, weather;

Installation at Socrates Sculpture Park, NYC (Photo by David Brooks).





Picnic Grove

2012

Douglas fir, hardware, Silver birch trees

Dimensions Variable

Installation at Cass Sculpture Foundation, West Sussex, UK

Picnic Grove is a work built out of custom-made outdoor wooden furniture and spread over the entire 18,000m of the Deer Hut Field at Cass Sculpture Foundation.

The 34 picnic tables and garden chairs are constructed in an interlocking manner, with trees heedlessly growing through the furniture like opportunistic weeds. As the picnic tables traverse the field and impose themselves on the landscape, the trees perforate the structures like a verdant grove, creating ambiguity as to which is dominant.

While visitors are encouraged to utilize the installation for communal enjoyment, they will also find themselves negotiating the playful interruptions created by the erratic placement of the trees, fostering a similar sense of ambiguity as to who is imposing on whom.

– Excerpted from the Cass Sculpture Foundation press release.

(Page 137) Installation view of *Picnic Grove*, 2012, Douglas fir, hardware, Silver birch trees; Cass Sculpture Foundation, West Sussex, UK (photo by David Brooks).

(Page 138) Detail of *Picnic Grove*, 2012, Douglas fir, hardware, Silver birch trees; Cass Sculpture Foundation, West Sussex, UK (photo by David Brooks).



