THE magazine: What kind of materials do you use in your sculpture?

Dana Chodzko: Earth, but it takes many forms. Sometimes it's adobe, sometimes it's fired clay, sometimes rock or stone, and sometimes cement—all variations of earth. I like to use natural materials because they're ancient and because it's where we all come from. And it's where we're all going.

TM: Do you mean that we're all from the same mud?

DC: Yeah.

TM: Why do you live and work in the country?

DC: I live in La Luz—the 'Land of Light'—in southern New Mexico because I want to be in a place where the earth meets the sky.

TM: How does language figure in your work?

DC: I'm interested in abstract shapes of abstract ideas—double abstractions. Often the language comes to me first and then I develop a form that represents a fragment of an idea or of an abstract thought.

TM: An example?

DC: Take the phrase: 'The small end of nothing whittled to a fine point.' I ask myself a question: What does that phrase look like? Then I make a piece that defines the phrase.

TM: Where did that phrase come from?

DC: It came from a poem that I wrote when I was 18 years old. The entire line from the poem was, 'I want to leave about as little as the small end of nothing whittled to a fine point.' It's about a form that diminishes into nothing—like matter into energy.

TM: What comes first for you—the concept or the site?

DC: I usually have my idea first and then develop it for a particular space. I've done sketches of my ideas, but how the piece develops in three dimensions is another story.

TM: How wedded are you to your original idea or concept?

DC: I don't worry about that because the finished work often ends up very close to my initial impulse.

TM: Why do you work big?

DC: Because I can't help myself. Every time I do a small piece, I end up making 50 of them, and they become a large piece. It's difficult to go back to making small pieces once you've worked big.

TM: What's the biggest piece you've made?

DC: I think of my sculptures that echo architectural fragments, such as *The Coming and Going of Grace*, in which one fragment of the work is 14 feet high and 26 feet long. But the largest piece I've designed to date was *Beyond the Z Gates*, for the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). I completed phase one and phase two of the project, but it has not been installed due to institutional logistics. The sculpture is a huge Z that traverses the landscape—it's 800 feet long and made from 300 tons of steel from the fixtures used in all the ideas and experiments at SLAC. It is big and it is a meeting of art and science.

TM: What are you working on now?

DC: I'm developing an installation based on spatial relations.

TM: Meaning?

DC: When I was a kid, prepositions were something that I had to learn in school. In order to do that I learned them to the tune of "Yankee Doodle." Like this: 'About' is 'Yankee'; 'above' is 'Doodle'; 'across' is 'Dandy'; and so on. What I'm going to do is an installation where I will make a language of shapes and forms that represent the 35 prepositions.

TM: Where will you do this installation?

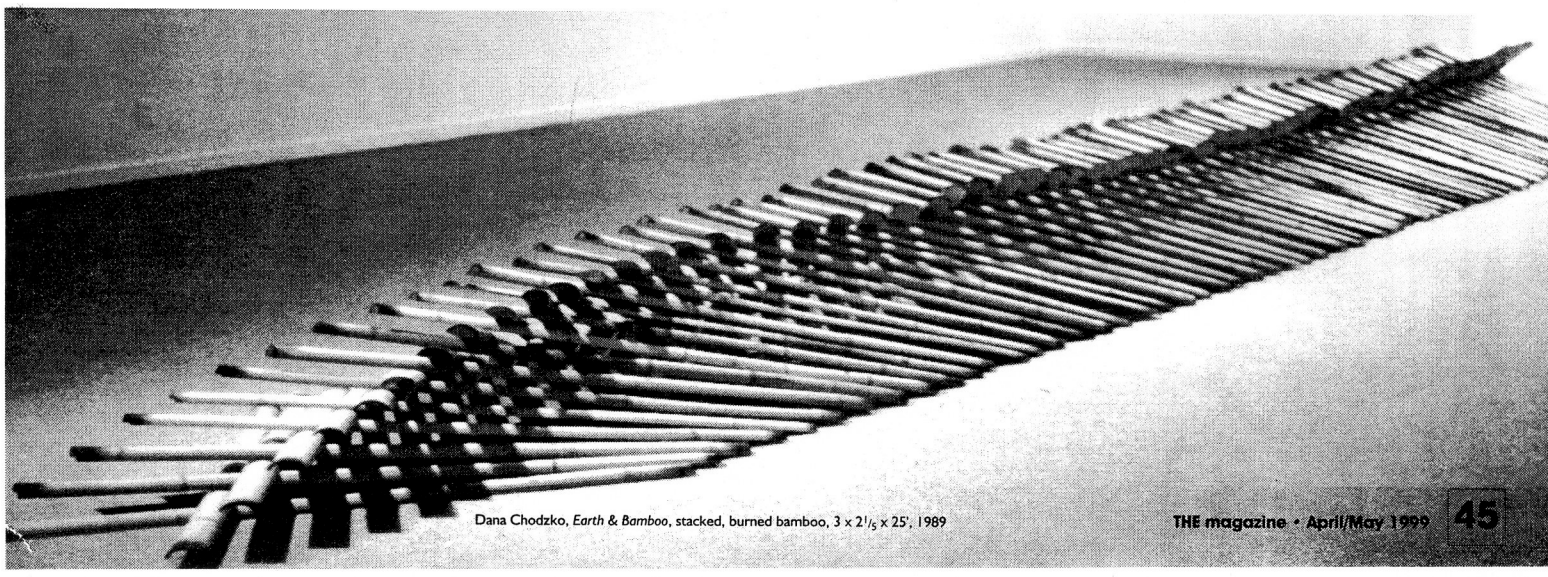
DC: I hope in a space like the John Gaw Meem building, at 8th and Silver in Albuquerque, where I showed *Circle of Evolution* last year. That space lent itself perfectly to my process and to my materials.

TM: Is working with earth and other degradable materials difficult in regard to shows and selling the work?

DC: Sometimes, because the earth is vulnerable, at the end of a show I'll break up the installations and sell the parts—the objects and the wall drawings that make up the piece. Other times the work is temporary and gets dismantled. Sometimes I'll give the work away and other times I'll destroy it, although I don't think of it really as destroying—I think of it as recycling the material when I return it to its original form. I'm as interested in the object of art as I am in the process of creating art. Getting there—meaning the process—is critical for me.

TM: Talk about that process of getting there.

DC: The process is phenomenological in many ways. I have to surrender a lot and give in to the nature of the materials. I can't always determine what earth materials are going to do—they have minds of their own. But I love that element of chance where I'm not really in control. To pretend that I have control over anything is absurd, even though I know exactly what I want and what I'm doing. I also have to be extremely flexible because the chance elements are often the most powerful aspects of a piece. I also have to be able to bend with the nature of the materials. And then, in retrospect, I'll stand back and go 'Wow!' The power of the piece resides in that moment—and that moment is the power of the process. ()



Dana Chodzko, *Earth & Bamboo*, stacked, burned bamboo, 3 x 2 1/5 x 25', 1989