



Dust: A History of the Small and the Invisible

Joseph A. Amato

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While the story of the big has often been told, the story of the small has not yet even been outlined. With *Dust*, Joseph Amato enthralls the reader with the first history of the small and the invisible. *Dust* is a poetic meditation on how dust has been experienced and the small has been imagined across the ages. Examining a thousand years of Western civilization—from the naturalism of medieval philosophy, to the artistry of the Renaissance, to the scientific and industrial revolutions, to the modern worlds of nanotechnology and viral diseases—*Dust* offers a savvy story of the genesis of the microcosm.

Dust, which fills the deepest recesses of space, pervades all earthly things. Throughout the ages it has been the smallest yet the most common element of everyday life. Of all small things, dust has been the most minute particulate the eye sees and the hand touches. Indeed, until this century, dust was simply accepted as a fundamental condition of life; like darkness, it marked the boundary between the seen and the unseen.

With the full advent of scientific discovery, technological innovation, and social control, dust has been partitioned, dissected, manipulated, and even invented. In place of traditional and generic dust, a highly diverse particulate has been discovered and examined. Like so much else that was once considered minute, dust has been magnified by the twentieth-century transformations of our conception of the small. These transformations—which took form in the laboratory through images of atoms, molecules, cells, and microbes—defined anew not only dust and the physical world but also the human body and mind. Amato dazzles the reader with his account of how this powerful microcosm challenges the imagination to grasp the magnitude of the small, and the infinity of the finite.

Los Angeles Times Best Nonfiction Book of 2000

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