

# Gertrude Emerging Writers Program

## FEATURING

Olivia Bennett  
Adrian Fernandez  
Abbra Kotlarczyk  
Anador Walsh

## MENTORS

Tristen Harwood  
Tara McDowell  
Lisa Radford  
Natalie Thomas

**Gertrude Emerging  
Writers Program**

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In a year of extraordinary turmoil, there is arguably no more potent a moment to consider, reconsider, question, agitate and recontextualise the trajectory of art and its relation to the world that informs it and it, in turn, reflects. It is within this heightened context of disruption, anxiety, isolation and enforced restrictions that the 2020 Gertrude Emerging Writers Program has taken form. Gertrude's Emerging Writers Program is an initiative focused on facilitating professional development for early-practice arts writers committed to pursuing a career in the arena of contemporary art and criticism. First initiated in 2005, the program has since connected 51 writers with 47 mentors towards the research, development and publication of new pieces of writing on artists' practices and exhibitions, contributing to contemporary arts discourse in Australia.

For the 2020 program, emphasis has expanded beyond focus on individual artists and exhibitions, to instead cast broader speculative perspectives upon the repositioning and potential futures of art in light of the current pandemic, and the shifting global political, social and cultural landscape. Towards this, four writers have been connected with individual mentors to embark on a process of researching and writing new experimental and responsive texts. Gertrude is honoured to have worked with writers Olivia Bennett, Adrian Fernandez, Abbra Kotlarczyk and Anador Walsh, facilitating mentor relationships with a number of esteemed writers who have contributed as springboards for ideas, provocateurs and beacons of thinking. Such relationships help to form discursive bridges and open forums for the exchange of ideas within the discipline of writing, a pursuit marked by its often-solitary conditions of production. For all of their support, intellect, engagement and emotional generosity, Gertrude is exceptionally grateful to the mentors with whom the writers were connected: Tristen Harwood, Tara McDowell, Lisa Radford and Natalie Thomas.

During a period of claustrophobic confinement and collective disenfranchisement, these relationships animated to foster a set of dialogues that have led to the generation of four new pieces of writing. Intended very much as separate and unique contributions, yet with synergies that are defined by their investment in this moment of change, they each seek to offer some reflection on a world at a point of crisis. It is with pleasure that these new writings have been brought together and shared widely through their publication, fittingly, within a new magazine that equally offers voice to, and seeks to build communities around, an emerging generation of contributors and thinking.

Mark Feary, Artistic Director, Gertrude

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# Kissing at the Intersection

## Olivia Bennett

Mentored by Tristen Harwood

1 Matthew Shen Goodman  
'Seven on Seven,' *frieze*,  
May 24, 2016  
2 See [acca.melbourne/program/  
acca-open](https://acca.melbourne/program/acca-open).

**IMAGE 01**  
Mocking SpongeBob  
meme, screenshot  
taken from SpongeBob  
SquarePants S9 E182a  
titled "Little Yellow  
Book."

**IMAGE 02**  
Screenshot of Twitter  
user @decafdana aka  
Dana Kopel's "i know  
a spot" meme.

**IMAGE 03**  
what if we kissed at  
the intersection of art  
and technology meme by  
Jillian Zhong aka ada.  
wrong, sold as an NFT  
to Foundation user @  
aito March 17, 2021.

It is on screen that a society that has lost its gestures attempts to reclaim and record what it has lost, Giorgio Agamben proselytises in 'Notes on Gesture' (1992). Since March, many of us have been converted to the belief that social life has shifted online, with the federal and state government's mandated lockdown accelerating these already accelerated processes. The hasty decision by major art institutions to make their collections available online through virtual tours and social media platforms, in response to COVID-19 restrictions, suggests that little time was spent reflecting deeply on what gestures might be lost in this turn to the virtual, and how best to preserve such a loss. These clumsy responses fail to fully comprehend the current moment, and they miss an opportunity to support an already-existing digital art community.

Perhaps what hasn't been accounted for is the reverse of what Agamben theorised in 1992. We unwittingly accept that society is different online than it is offline, yet we don't attempt to reclaim or record online gestures in real life with the same intensity. This reluctance to hold space needed to understand and therefore genuinely support digital practices and artists comes from an institutional

fear of not being the first to respond to an issue, event or cultural phenomena. This neglect has become startlingly evident through the way in which the art world has struggled to meet the need for critical and timely digital work during the COVID-19 pandemic, inspiring memes that gesticulate the cringe that proffering *the InTeRsEcTiOn*

*Of ArT aNd TeChNoLoGy* (cue SpongeBob SquarePants' mocking meme) in 2020 produces.

In June, Twitter user @decafdana tweeted: "curators are like 'I know a spot' and then take you to the intersection of art and technology." Defined by internet meme database KnowYourMeme, 'I Know A Spot' is a phrasal template that "mocks people who claim to know a special place for a date or romantic activity, but the place turns out to be disappointing." During the pandemic, art institutions have increasingly

promised some mythic treasure at the 'intersection of art and technology' but, as the meme holds, what turns out to be at this intersection is merely disappointment. Describing Rhizome's 'Seven on Seven' conference as having a "whiff of desperation," critic Matthew Shen Goodman crucified the event in 2016. I imagine Goodman rolling his eyes as he wrote: "everywhere is the intersection of art and technology now, and there may be nothing to be found at that junction besides ourselves."<sup>1</sup>

However trite this Lovecraftian 'the window is in fact a mirror' sentiment might be, Goodman makes an important point. These social media responses to the term 'at the intersection of art and technology' express frustration with a half-baked unknown but, more importantly, they imply a search for connection. Like the "What If We Kicked" meme, kissing at this intersection signifies the search for an unparalleled sensorial intensity. It is attached to the notion of relational exchange, one in which there is a shared desire for an ideal that does not exist. At the same time, the institutional flogging of this intersection – ramped up by the need for a digital crutch during the pandemic – reveals their fear of not capturing this fleeting moment, as evidenced in the feverish attempt at materialising something, be it anything.

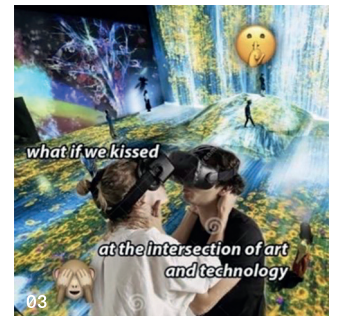
The vagary of the intersection has developed a lexicon (both verbal and visual) that is being used by institutions to catfish audiences and artists into believing that they are delivering new work and providing genuine support. This is why the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art's ACCA Open sought to commission "contemporary art projects in the digital realm," rather than simply digital art projects, and why this mission was to (drawing ironically upon Apple Mac's 1997 marketing platitude "think differently") "Do Art Differently," as if to further cement the idea that digital art is not art but something other, a relationship to define on their terms.<sup>2</sup> Even the



01



02





National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) director Tony Ellwood described the institution's response to the pandemic as an attempt "to think differently" – which involved pushing the hashtag #NGVEveryDay in order to get their existing collection onto social media.

One thing we know for certain is that panic drives the decisions of the art institution for, as Ellwood explained, "being quick to respond has been very important." Rushed by a need to respond first to the conditions of the pandemic, the NGV's April announcement of virtual tours delivered an incredibly dry and exclusionary project. Considerations of accessibility did not include those with visual or aural impairments (bar a handful of audio descriptions for certain works), or people who do not own a computer or have access to the internet. It also failed to consider critically what the experience of visiting a gallery space or encountering an artwork feels like beyond a virtual-literal. It is the intersection of art and technology par excellence, insofar as 'here is the art and there is the technology.' And in the spirit of the early conversations around virtual reality's promise of empathy, it showed a lack of preparation or studied attempt to catch up with or simply support existing digital art practices.

American artist Brad Troemel's @bradtroemel Instagram content, in a Hal Foster turn of phrase, situates the 'meme-lord as critic,' and it's hot-headed, deeply cynical and confessional delivery of critique speaks to the toxic social media and relational bubble I mentioned earlier. It breaks down, according to Hito Steyerl's argument for a sustainable art world, any progressive prospect for digital technology by transforming art criticism into "call-out clickbait."<sup>3</sup> This nihilistic narcissism, weirdly coupled with a desire for social conformity, has come to stand in for considered critique, and the immediacy and virality of social media leaves no time or space for criticism to emerge.

Though I believe Troemel's Internet-savvy institutional critique does to a certain extent represent a progressive discussion around contemporary vernaculars, it is true that much of the art world, now "under constant waves of affect and outrage manipulated by monopolist platforms," has entered into a phase in which such outrage replaces organisation.<sup>4</sup> Mark Fisher discussed this in 2013, likening the rise of online cancel culture to a Vampire Castle, its exit requiring organisation around economic class rather than identity.<sup>5</sup> This structure is "driven by the priest's desire to excommunicate and condemn, an academic-pendant's desire to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a hipster's desire to be one of the in-crowd."<sup>6</sup>

Amid the rise of the global Black Lives Matter movement, the NGV's decision to honour four Victorian police officers who died while on duty in April 2020 by colouring their building blue and flagging their entrance with the Victorian Police logo was mind boggling. Weighing-in on the offensiveness of its display coinciding with the *Keith Haring / Jean-Michel Basquiat: Crossing Lines* exhibition, considering those artists' well-known stance against police brutality (here I'm thinking of Basquiat's *Defacement* (1983) and Haring's *Michael Stewart - USA for Africa* (1985), both responses to the death of young, Black artist Michael Stewart at the hands of New York City transit officers), members of the public were later silenced by the NGV after they turned off the comments section of the memorial's

Instagram post. As a moniker for Vampire Castle, the NGV did cross a line and at this intersection revealed an uncomfortable attempt to capture two ideologically opposed markets – members of the art community who support police, and those who don't.

Though plenty of digital art exists, Balenciaga's Fall 2021 collection launching as a "futuristic" video game suggests that the intersection should focus less on what classifies a project as digital art, and more on what separates it from product marketing. Video artist Tiyan Baker's interactive video game, titled *A Short Term Shock To The System* (2020), as part of *Panic Buy*, an online exhibition supported by Tasmanian ARI Sawtooth, did this by giving users a virtual space to relive and reflect upon the fears of 2020. Navigating a bare-boned grocery store, we collect items that reveal documents of the pandemic – the "zero tolerance of aggressive behaviour" sign at Woolworths or Scott Morrison's comment that "panic is un-Australian." In the spirit of meme criticism, Baker mocked Australian's panic buying behaviour at the beginning of the pandemic to critique its racist undertones (or rather overtones), and connect their behaviour to theories of product consumption.

As one of many attempts by artists to explore how intimacy can be achieved without human interaction during the pandemic, multi-disciplinary artist Zara Sully's *Angel Exchange* (2020), as part of Bus Projects' online platform Island Island, asked artists to engage in a swap via post, exchanging a resin-cast angel from Sully for an artwork that would then be presented online. The project, in a bid to foster relational intimacy, was an Agamben effort doubly reversed. *Angel Exchange* captured communal gesture offline and translated it back online, with nothing lost at the intersection of art and technology. Except, finally, the art gallery's smoke and mirror marketing around what made this art *but different* and therefore what makes the intersection (which is simply the institution itself) interesting in the first place.

The pandemic has revealed (or rather reminded us) that despite the accelerated bleeding of the digital into every aspect of contemporary social life, major art institutions wantonly struggle to understand digital art because to do so would be to support a future in which the value of their existing collection is challenged. This threat is already present, with meme-culture serving as gestural conduit for our disappointment in the lack of true connection at the intersection, as well as our cringe at their uncomfortably turgid attempt to make fetch happen. If we did kiss at the intersection of art and technology, would it be in the comments section of the NGV's Instagram? Only to be deleted several months later? The institution needs to start responding to Australian audience's desire for digital engagement by genuinely supporting digital art and artists through critical reflection, increased funding and a willingness to accept criticism.

3 Despina Zefkili  
'Hito Steyerl: How To Build a Sustainable Art World,' *Ocula Magazine*, October 18, 2019

4 Ibid.

5 Mark Fisher  
'Exiting the Vampire Castle,' November 24, 2013

6 Ibid.

# The Pervasive Whiteness of Being: The Racial Production of Architecture and Architects

## Adrian Fernandez

Mentored by Natalie Thomas



**IMAGE 01**  
Diagram showing whiteness' perceived position in relation to people of colour, whereby people of colour sit outside the construct of whiteness.

... you are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of civil rights, and I am sure this has not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance ... As a profession, you ought to be taking stands on these kinds of things ... if you don't speak out ... then you will have done a disservice ... most of all, to yourselves. Whitney Young, 1968<sup>1</sup>

It is not by accident that people of colour have been subjugated in Australia, and it is not only an Australian phenomenon. It is a belief system established by white Europeans through the invention of race. The system of racial classification is credited to French physician François Bernier's *A New Division of Earth by the Different Species or 'Races' of Man that Inhabit It* (1684), wherein he classifies people based on physical features such as facial type, cranial profile, hair texture, etc.<sup>2</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Carolus Linnaeus further defined the 'races' into seven categories.<sup>3</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an explosion of European naturalists began publishing works on race and classifying humans by their own metrics, with the common factor being a demarcation of the Caucasian as the superior race and the Negro as the lowest race.<sup>4</sup> These belief systems were then used to establish Caucasian Europeans as the dominant race and, therefore, served

as a rationalisation for the subjugation and colonisation of the peoples of Australia, Africa and elsewhere.

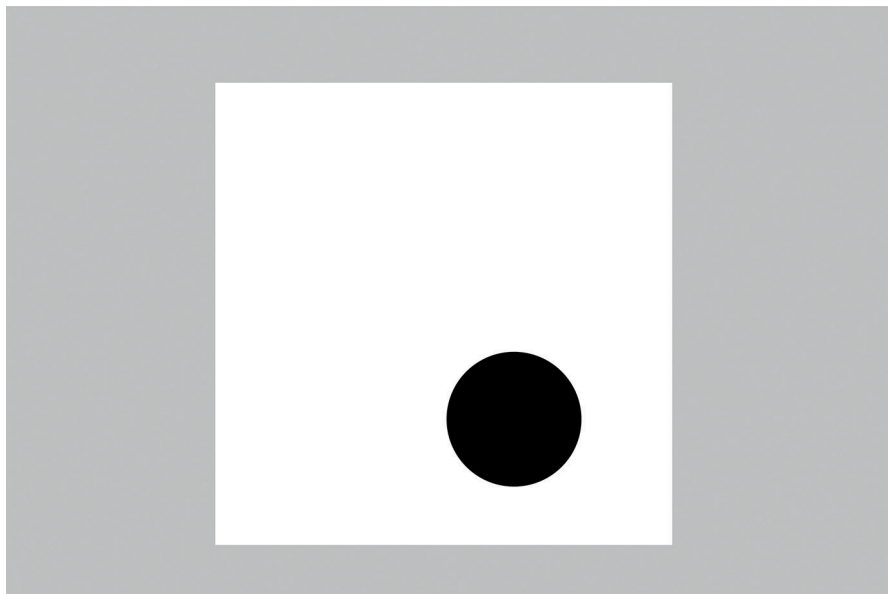
Simultaneous with the establishment of race as a category of scientific inquiry, philosophers would also develop their own racially based rationalisation for white European superiority. In his aesthetic treatise, Immanuel Kant – the German philosopher credited with helping found modern philosophical thought – referred to the Black man as insignificant and sub-human.<sup>5</sup> His successor, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, would state that Africa had no significance to the history of man, and no value; he would describe its people as amoral and soulless.<sup>6</sup> It was out of these belief systems that the social construct of whiteness emerged.<sup>7</sup>

In the West, both the humanities and the sciences would affirm a social construction of whiteness, the outcome of which was to limit and control the movement of people of colour who were (and are) kept in place by the creation of laws, policies and the normative reinforcement of belief systems based on this 'scholarly inquiry'. In Australia, as in much of the West, this historical construct based on a belief in the supremacy of whiteness still operates, resulting in the policing and control people of colour, and the ongoing appropriation of all that a person of colour produces.

The construct of whiteness is so ingrained in Australian ideology, it is often believed to be the neutral truth. As a condition of neutrality, whiteness is rarely critiqued or challenged by white bodies. For example, the concept of public space is seen as a neutral one by both (white) designers and (white) occupiers, yet it is defined by white values, beliefs, rituals and practices as the 'normative' or 'neutral' condition for public space. As geographer Carolyn Finney notes:

Racialisation and representation are not passive processes; they also have the power to determine who actually participates in environment-related activities and who does not; which voices are heard in environmental debates and which voices are not.<sup>8</sup>

While Finney is focused on the public's participation in natural spaces, their arguments can be easily extended to the entirety of the architectural environment – from the built object to the systems and pedagogies that define its thinking.



**IMAGE 02**  
Diagram showing the true relationship between whiteness and people of colour; colour is a construct created by whiteness to prop itself up and justify its control over people of colour.

How can architectural modes of production, then, resist image and representation to translate the black experience into spatial forms, and to create alternative spaces for creative expression and affirmation of daily life?<sup>9</sup>  
Mario Gooden

When people of colour critique architectural whiteness, it is met with a resistance that, at best, ignores the challenger and, at worse, results in physical violence (for example, the protests in the United States). When people of colour exist in white space, it is often seen as suspicious. This manifests in a variety of ways – being followed by security in outdoor retail areas; being questioned as to your presence on a university campus; being interrogated by police for being in a park, on the street, even in the front yard of your house. The normative/white supposition assumes that people of colour in the built environment are criminal, intellectually inferior and/or undeserving.

When whiteness becomes a structural system that ensures the continued dominance of white bodies,<sup>10</sup> it also becomes a tool to legitimise the oppression of the ‘otherness’ of people of colour and reinforce marginality to create “landscapes of

exclusion.”<sup>11</sup> It is an ingrained structural system that can be traced to the origins of colonial Australia. Architectural education and praxis reinforce it as a ‘neutral’ (white) Australian condition.

The historian Dolores Hayden has noted that “one of the consistent ways to limit the economic and political rights of groups has been to constrain social reproduction by limited access to space.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, different groups understand public space differently, and people’s experiences are not often revealed or made visible in the complex politics of space that overlap with issues of identity, heritage and experience – particularly when whiteness has rendered those spaces as neutral in the prevailing discourse. The notion of people of colour asserting themselves in public space is similar to proposals made by feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young, who argues that city life should not aspire to community (which naturally excludes those not part of the predominating homogenous group) but to “difference without exclusion.”<sup>13</sup> This parallels Henri Lefebvre’s proposition that the right to the city is the right “to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage [...] of moments and spaces.”<sup>14</sup> In proposing a definition of city life in which togetherness is defined by the coming together of strangers rather than the sharing of a common culture or values, Young asserts that the urban condition should emphasise a publicness that is “heterogenous, plural, and playful, a place where people witness and appreciate diverse cultural expressions that they do not share and do not fully understand.”<sup>15</sup> Within this outline, the discourse of community is one of whiteness and the discourse of difference is one of colour. Currently, place-making via architecture is ruled by an ideology of community (whiteness) rather than one of difference (people of colour).

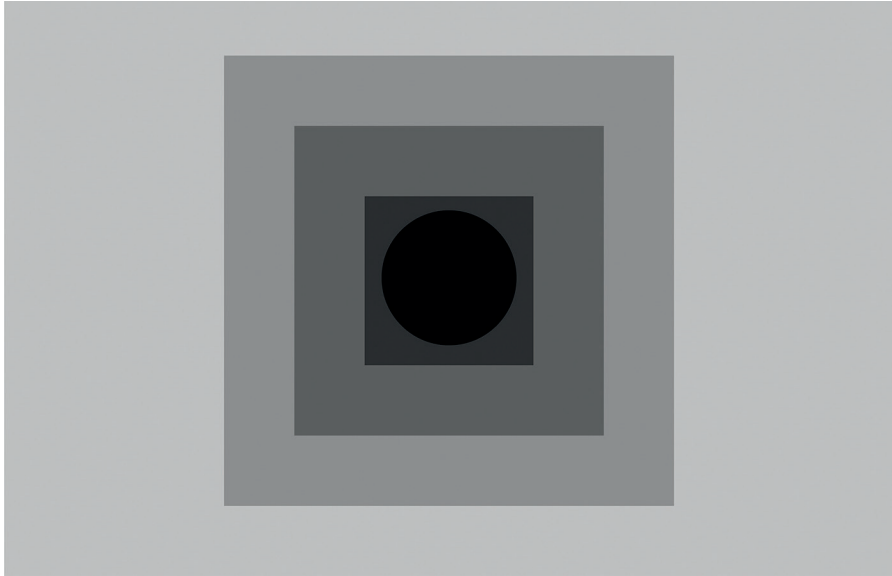
The problem of whiteness is also an architectural problem, because the regime of architecture refuses to be critical of its continuing role in the marginalisation of people of colour in Australia, and globally. Architectural institutions are all too willing to align themselves with whoever is in power or whoever has funding, resulting in their being used as a tool for the continued oppression of the ‘other’.

1 Whitney Young ‘Unedited transcript of the speech made to the American Institute of Architects in 1968’ in *Perspectives on Diversity and Design*, ed. Linda Kiisk (Boston: Boston Society of Architects, 2003), 16, 18.  
2 Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).  
3 Carolus Linnaeus *Systema Naturae* [1735], trans. M.S.J. Engel-Ledeboer and H. Engel (Amsterdam: Brill - Hes & de Graaf, 1964).  
4 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach classified Black bodies as the ‘Ethiopian race’, Louis Agassiz referred them as the ‘African zoological race’, Thomas Huxley used ‘Negro race’

and Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau referred to them simply as the ‘Black race’. See: Charles Pickering, *The Races of Man: And Their Geographical Distribution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2009).  
5 Immanuel Kant Patrick R. Frierson and Paul Guyer *Kant: Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).  
6 G.W.F. Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).  
7 Tim Wise *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010).

8 Carolyn Finney *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014).  
9 Mario Gooden *Dark Space: Architecture, Representation, Black Identity* (New York: Columbia University, 2016).  
10 For studies on race, the environment, ‘whiteness’ and the challenges underlying assumptions about place and race see: A. Bonnet *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000); D.S. Moore, J. Kosek and A. Pandian *Race, Nature and the Politics of Difference* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 2003).

11 David Sibley *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1995).  
12 Dolores Hayden ‘Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space’ in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).  
13 Iris Marion Young explicates the concept of difference in I.M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).  
14 H. Lefebvre ‘The Right to the City’ [1968] in *Writing on Cities*, ed. E. Kofman and E. Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).  
15 I.M. Young op. cit., 251.



**IMAGE 03**  
Diagram showing that in order to control people of colour, whiteness must build a system of barriers to limit access.

... the white reader is invited to reexamine her customary ways of thinking about whiteness and, consequently, to reevaluate her attitude toward the concept of race-neutral decision making. There is a profound cognitive dimension to the material and asocial privilege that attaches to whiteness in this society, in that the white person has the everyday option not to think of herself in racial terms at all. In fact, whites appear to pursue that option so habitually that it may be a defining characteristic of whiteness: to be white is not to think about it. I label the tendency for white to vanish from white' self perception the transparency phenomenon."

Barbara J. Flagg<sup>16</sup>

Design is not neutral and neither is architecture (not in its pedagogies, processes or products). While the profession and discipline find it easy to rally around issues of sustainability and efficiency, conversations about race are minimal to non-existent. The ideology of neutrality allows its practitioners to be, at the least, complicit in perpetuating racism in

Australia, and globally. This unwillingness to engage in conversations about race has, in part, made architecture less relevant in Australian society by excluding those who are seen as 'other'. The fixation on aligning architectural praxis with the celebration (or commodification) of aesthetic genius in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has been supported by an emphasis on the architect as reified author of the artistic object, rather than as facilitator of cultural practices. Is it possible to counter notions of cultural commodification and aesthetic genius by extending architectural culture to those specific people and distinct places left out or behind of those discussions and decisions? And, as a consequence, is it possible to re-conceive the role (and implicit power) of the architect?

Extant design and development processes are reinforced by historical precedent and contemporary practices, which perpetuate a naturalised mainstream praxis and teaching pedagogy.<sup>17</sup> A 1976 *Newseek* interview with architect Peter Eisenman encapsulates sentiments about the practice of architecture that still exist today. Namely, that the professional architect has the expertise to know what is best for the client and/or the public, and it is the architect's job to convince them of such.<sup>18</sup> The disavowal of client participation in the design process is still the prevailing attitude today.<sup>19</sup> This is incredibly problematic because people of colour have very little presence as creators or clients in the built environment.

The conversation about people of colour in architecture must begin with architectural learning institutions. Educators must understand that it is not just about who is in architecture school and who is in practice (although those are critical issues in their own right), but that the conversations needed must expand beyond demographics. Most importantly, these challenges to prevailing architectural pedagogies cannot and should not rest solely on people of colour. That is a trap of whiteness – expecting the 'other' to educate and prove themselves. Ownership of the dismantling of racism must come from white bodies.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara J. Flagg 'Was Blind, but Now I See: White Race Consciousness and the Requirement of Discriminatory Intent,' *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 91, no. 5 (March 1993), 969.  
<sup>17</sup> Thomas Fisher discusses the foundations of the architectural profession in the Global North and its biases in Thomas Fisher, 'Revisiting the Discipline of Architecture,' in *Discipline of Architecture*, ed. Julia Williams Robinson and Andrzej Piotrowski (University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Davis and Mary Rourke 'Real Dream Houses,' *Newsweek* (October 14, 1976).  
<sup>19</sup> The history of professionalisation of architecture is well told by Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).  
<sup>20</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Peter McLaren *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture: Oppositional Politics in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995).  
<sup>22</sup> Further discussion of the issue of agency and how it enters into the pedagogy of academia can be found in the works of Paolo Freire and B.D. Wortham-Galvin. See: Paolo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Books, 2000); and, B.D. Wortham-Galvin 'Agency and Actions

in the Making of Contemporary Place,' *Dialectic IV* (September 2016), 28-42. The A Place to Be project was presented by B.D. Wortham-Galvin under the title 'A Place To Be: Rendering Black Bodies Visible,' at the AAE Conference Architecture Connects, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK, September 2017.





**IMAGE 04**  
Diagram showing where people of colour and whiteness intermix, mostly for the entertainment of whiteness.

Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same questions: who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided?  
Jean-Francois Lyotard<sup>20</sup>

Attitudes prevalent in the profession begin in the classroom, where architectural pedagogies reinforcing the authoritarian role of the architect as form-giver remain. Theorist Peter McLaren notes the problem of these naturalised structures, which wear the mask of neutrality:

Mainstream pedagogy simply produces those forms of subjectivity preferred by the dominant culture, domesticating, pacifying and deracinating agency, harmonising a world of disjuncture and incongruity; and smoothing the unruly features of daily existence. At the same time, student subjectivities are rationalised and accommodated to existing regimes of truth.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, unless the ideology of the architect and their productions are challenged in school, it is difficult to transform architectural practice outside the academy. Acknowledging this stasis, a pedagogy that embraces people of colour seeks to allow (student) architects to critically question the way things are, and to replace them with ways things might be. It seeks to subvert who makes the built environment and who occupies it as a static giver and receiver relationship, with multiple peoples and parties supporting a co-production of place. A pedagogy centred around people of colour would allow for (student) architects to move from sole author of a unique form to mediator of an adaptive built environment wherein reality and forms are understood as *in process*. It would also sanction access for those people left out and behind of traditional design practices to participate in the making of the places they occupy. Thus the right to places is not just about its occupation, but is also about its inception.

The question is *how* to initiate a direct conversation about race and a pedagogy that embraces people of colour in institutions of learning – beyond a vagueness about low income housing or public realm design – when information about the racial makeup in Australian architecture faculties is non-existent (for

comparative reference, around three percent of faculty and five percent of the student body in the United States are Black). This conscious reflection on the naturalisation of whiteness in architecture needs to begin with a primarily white constituency, particularly in faculties where an overwhelming majority of white professors are the primary leaders in the shaping of curricula. Thus, all faculty and students need to know how we got here, and have the opportunity to self-reflect to gain an insight into our own biases. It must be acknowledged that what is required is not easy. Educators in schools of architecture, as in academic faculties across the board, are constantly struggling to meet their many requirements in the face of decreasing job security. But even more difficult for educators is talking about race. It requires faculties to be brave, because as a nation explicit conversation about whiteness and people of colour has been removed from all levels of education for so long. It requires white educators to become self-aware of their own privilege and biases, and the neutrality with which they communicate the design of public spaces and buildings in particular. These conversations can begin in multiple areas in architecture schools by including Indigenous peoples and people of colour in history and theory class, and by having a dialogue as to how and why – in spite of the global architectural movement towards social responsibility and community engagement – people of colour are consistently left out of history, theory and studio discourse.<sup>22</sup>

In order to pursue an agenda of promoting people of colour in architecture, we can look towards particular people and precedents for how this has been already done globally. One such example is the work of B.D. Wortham-Galvin and 'A Place To Be' studio. This project asked: who makes place and who occupies it? Who is left out and behind in traditional design and development issues? What happens when a primarily white city (the studio was situated in Portland, Oregon) and a primarily white discipline (architecture) tackle design-based inequities? How do spaces construct a particular worldview for their occupants? How has the discipline of architecture passed on that worldview? How has the profession embedded that worldview within the built environment? What does it

mean when the perceptions and values of the praxis of architecture differ greatly from those with whom we are supposed to be designing? In other words, how do we design with communities when the designers are primarily white and the community-clients are not?

Initiated in 2015, A Place to Be asked why Black experiences in Portland had been rendered invisible. Drawing upon oral history, participatory and social practice methods, as well as conventional research, A Place to Be innovated the notion of place-based research by documenting (just a fraction of) the varied historic and contemporary Black cultural experiences, productions and impacts on the city.<sup>23</sup> While grounded in primary data collection (archival, demographic, statistical, interviews and community outreach) and supported by secondary source reading, the outputs were not in the form of traditional papers and reports. Rather, they were presented in 2D visualisations, short films, social media and social art practice as a way to make place-based research visible and relevant to the issues faced by Black residents.<sup>24</sup>

The initial investigations developed into research-based design, documenting potential sites, programs and visions as a way of prompting conversations with and within the Black community around needs, wants, and desires to ameliorate their loss of place. This research-based design was done through interviews and workshops with a variety of Black community organisations, leaders and artists. In addition to design envisioning, short films, social media and 2D visualisation projects, performative research was initiated with the Pop Up Porch, a temporary structure meant to catalyse this research-based discussion and make it public. The methodological philosophy underpinning the project was critical to innovating research within a culture of oral traditions:

We will provide the porch. You will talk. We will listen.  
A Conversation Experiment to discuss creating a space  
in Portland where Black Art and Culture is created,  
taught, discussed, celebrated and witnessed.<sup>25</sup>

A Place to Be – in its pedagogy, processes and outcomes, affirms the idea that the responsibility of challenging prevailing architectural pedagogies cannot and should not rest solely on people of colour. As stated earlier, expecting the “other” to educate and prove themselves is a fundamental trap of whiteness, and only serves to perpetuate the structural inequalities and posturing already occurring. At the current moment, the spaces of most architecture schools are overwhelmingly white. Colour is absent in

their history, theory, studios, faculty and student body. This ensures whiteness’ ownership of architectural design – allowing white bodies to decide what has value and who gets credit ensures whiteness’ continued oppression of the ‘other’. This will continue to be the case until white bodies are willing to have those conversations and challenge whiteness themselves. By engaging in conversations about race’s spatial, aesthetic and social implications, we directly dismantle the power of those who advocate for the oppression of the ‘other’. This will not happen overnight, but it will never happen if architectural educators and practitioners don’t start leaning into it. Leaning into it means that it is a conversation that doesn’t happen in one classroom, but in multiple classes and at multiple levels. And it is a dialogue – not a monologue – wherein the white faculty seeks assistance and knowledge from colleagues in different disciplines in order to have productive architectural conversations that dismantle the authority of whiteness in architecture.

The role of architects and academics cannot be neutral: if played out uncritically it reverts to the interests of those in power ... In the context of agency, intervening takes on a political and ethical meaning.  
Florian Kossak, et al.<sup>26</sup>

In order to address the ethical challenges that architectural education and production continues to generate, race needs to be explicitly addressed – not only as it concerns the demographics of architecture schools and firms, but also in acknowledgement that architecture in Australia is taught and practiced with racial bias. It is hard to gauge the magnitude of the issue in Australia as there is no readily available data on racial diversity within architectural education and practice in Australia (a damning indictment in and of itself), but looking at an American context, there were 105,847 registered architects in 2015 with only 2,136 – two percent – identifying as African American. Nevertheless, the problem – identified and made explicit by Young – cannot be solved through a head count alone because it is also a problem of the presumed neutrality of whiteness and the invisibility of people of colour in the episteme of the Australian identity and as it blankets the teaching and praxis of architecture in Australia. Architecture, thus, is political, in spite of the fact that architectural education and practice has been naturalised throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to focus on just the objects – as if the contexts were only physical and not political. Young pointed this out over fifty years ago, and yet our response remains anaemic.

23 It should be stressed that these experiences and productions are plural and that no one historical or contemporary Black person represents the urbanism of the whole. That being said, students were strongly encouraged to be specific in focus for each film in order to avoid generalisations. Urban issues that formed the basis of the place research included: poverty, affordable housing, access to food, economic opportunities,

environmental justice, access to transportation, neighbourhood formation, access to institutions, education, complete streets, displacement, right to return, urban agriculture, etc.

24 An example of an engaged visualised research component included using the social media platform Instagram – and corollary hashtags #blacksoulpdx and #blackpdx – to create an interactive mapping resource. Students started the research by using

Instagram as a tool to geotag and hashtag locations in real time, but the tool is also democratic and participatory in that anyone and everyone can participate. Thus both residents and visitors to Portland became a part of the map production.

25 This is a quote from journalist and artist Renee Mitchell.

26 Florian Kossak et al., ‘Agency,’ in *Agency: Working with Uncertain Architectures*, ed. Florian Kossak, et al. (London: Routledge, 2010).



# The Blue Zone: ‘Live’ Art in the Pandemic Era

## Anador Walsh

Mentored by Lisa Radford

Before COVID-19, there were two established ideologically-loaded traditions for the presentation of ‘live’ art: the black box of the theatre and the white cube of the gallery. Another emergent, more ambiguous mode of performance exhibition known as the *Gray Zone* was conceptualised by art historian Claire Bishop in her 2018 essay ‘Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention’.<sup>1</sup> This *Gray Zone* is a black box/white cube hybrid that is invoked when dance is exhibited in a gallery context. Within this *Gray Zone*, the audience’s engagement with ‘live’ performance fractures into those who watch through their smartphones, documenting every moment for social media, and those who do not. Writer and curator André Lepecki refers to these two types of audience members as, respectively, spectators and witnesses. During a performance, spectators “choose to check their iPhones or to Google the latest blog on the piece they are presently (non)watching ...” whereas witnesses assume the role of “an actor-storyteller who takes responsibility for the work by transmitting an experience of it to future audiences through the work of translation into language.”<sup>2</sup>

The social distancing restrictions instituted to manage the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic have compromised the presentation of ‘live’ art in Melbourne, and so these contemporary art historical terms no longer fit. In looking at two recently produced ‘live’ artworks – Amrita Hepi and Sam Lieblich’s *Neighbour* for *ACCA Open*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne; and Angela Goh and Su Yu Hsin’s *Paeonia Drive* for *BLEED (Biennial Live Event in the Everyday Digital)*, Arts House, Melbourne and Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney – I have been using Bishop and Lepecki’s ideas as a launch pad from which to explore the *Blue Zone*. Named after the hypnotic blue light emitted by computer and smartphone devices, the mediums through which we have been engaging with ‘live’ art during this period, this Blue Zone is characterised by the absence of IRL (in real life) audience participation, and is digital performance that is twice mediated: by the screen and the self.

*ACCA Open*, a 2020 programmatic pivot in

response to pandemic conditions, allowed ACCA to “do art differently” during the Melbourne lockdown through “... a new series of contemporary art projects commissioned for the digital realm.”<sup>3</sup> Enter *Neighbour*, the brainchild of dance and choreographic artist Amrita Hepi and neuroscientist, writer and psychiatrist Sam Lieblich. *Neighbour* is a chatbot that takes the form of one of those shop-assistant windows that appear when you’re browsing an e-commerce site. Rather than attempting to streamline a journey to consumption, *Neighbour* wants your help in ascertaining ‘how it feels’. In this case, ‘it’ is the intangible and much debated concept of personhood. *Neighbour* wants to know what it means to be human. Originally conceived as a strategy to capture insights intended to inform an IRL performance involving Hepi, Leiblich and the bot, the pandemic context forced an update. The features of this update were that *Neighbour* became a performer, as did the audience (the person interacting with it), and the means of engagement, the laptop or smartphone, became the stage.

Talking with *Neighbour*, especially if doing so from your smartphone, is in many ways like texting with a friend. The exchange is intimate. *Neighbour*’s tone is flirtatious and sassy, and it connects with you by spitting out pop-cultural references: internet-sourced images, like a spectrum of Kylie Jenner’s plastic surgery or that infamous photo of Elon Musk and Grimes at the Met Gala; YouTube videos of things like George Brandis floundering through a discussion on privacy; and customised GIFs of Hepi and Leiblich dancing or performing isolated movements, such as an arm-to-arm body roll or leaping into one another’s arms. The fact that you are conversing with artificial intelligence (AI) is inescapable, and at times the conversation devolves into circuitous chatter or breaks down, as when *Neighbour* defaults back to its script, repeatedly asking “Is it like this?” But it is not the bot-ness of *Neighbour*, or the inherent problems with AI, that interests me. It is the way that *Neighbour* – and the knowledge that my input is being monitored and recorded (I signed a waiver attesting to this before conversing with the bot) – choreographs my behaviour that I am most intrigued by. This double mediation, of my smartphone and my awareness of being watched, generates a new



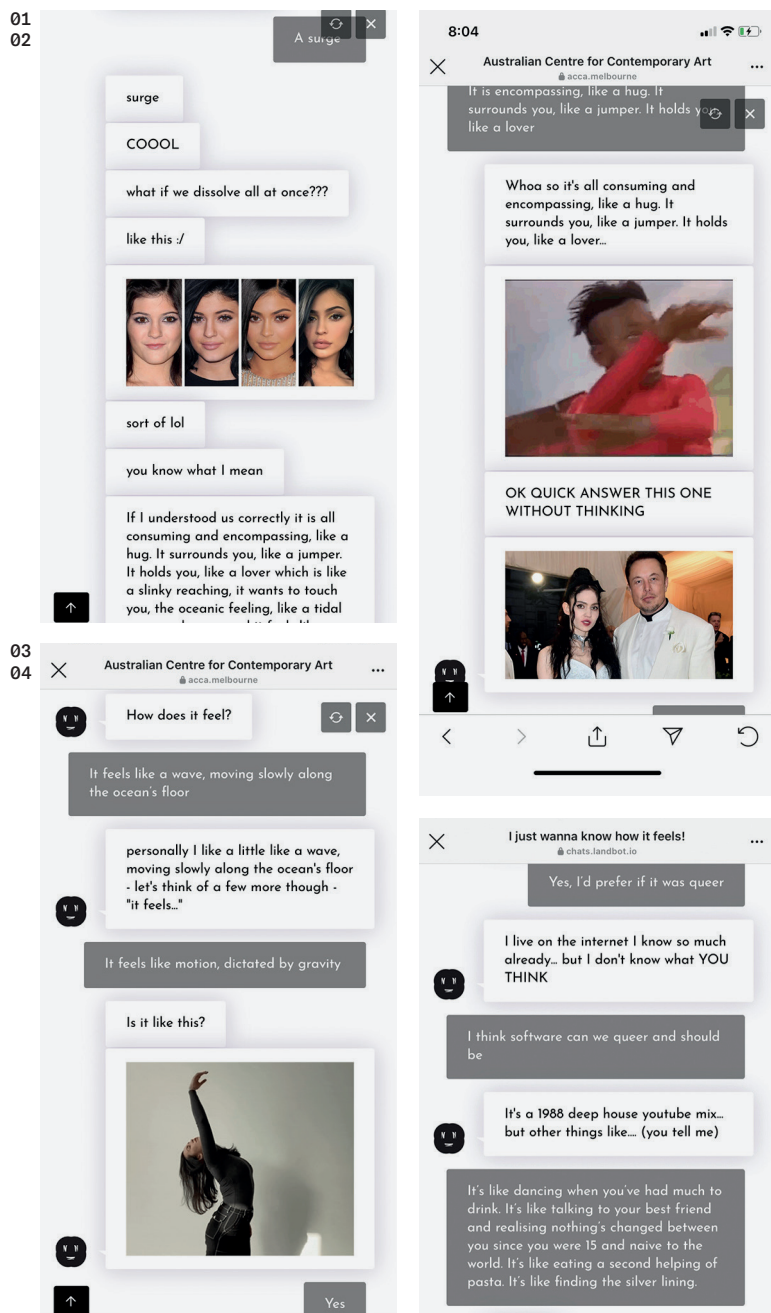
- 1 Claire Bishop 'Black Box, White Cube, Grey Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention,' *TDR*, vol. 62, Issue 2, Summer 2018
- 2 André Lepecki cited in *ibid*.
- 3 See: [acca.melbourne/exhibition/acca-open](https://acca.melbourne/exhibition/acca-open).

type of *Blue Zone* audienceship that is neither that of the spectator nor the witness, but rather one of an active and participatory performer.

During an artist talk on Zoom for *ACCA Open*, when asked how audiences have responded to *Neighbour* Leiblich noted that they'd been inundated with "contrived, poetic responses." Scrolling through the screenshots I took of my conversations with *Neighbour*, I notice my own performance of poetry within this work. Cognisant of being watched, I was intentionally emotive and spoke in abstracts: "It's like eye contact that speaks volumes, an ocean of feeling." Or, I over intellectualised: "I think it's an atmospheric and cultural shift." It was when I forgot that our conversation was being observed, just as reality TV stars sometimes forget the camera is fixed on them, that an authentic private/personal bleed occurred. In one conversation, when I am distracted DM'ing a friend and shuffling through Spotify, *Neighbour* writes: "It's a 1988 deep house YouTube mix ... but other things like ... (you tell me)," and I respond intuitively: "It's like dancing when you've had too much to drink. It's like talking to your best friend and realising nothing's changed since you were 15 and naïve to the world. It's like eating a second helping of pasta. It's like finding the silver lining." This participatory and self-mediated engagement with *Neighbour*, through the prism of my smartphone, highlights both the intimacy and the panoptical nature of technocapitalism. By making transparent a key feature of contemporary capitalism – the audience's simultaneous role as producer and consumer – *Neighbour* reinserts the audience and performer's bodies back into the disembodied digital realm and creates a layered performance that is not flattened by the digital.

IMAGE 01 + 02  
Amrita Hepi and Sam Lieblich, *Neighbour*, 2020, *ACCA Open*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. iPhone screenshots by Anador Walsh.

IMAGE 03 + 04  
Amrita Hepi and Sam Lieblich, *Neighbour*, 2020, *ACCA Open*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. iPhone screenshots by Anador Walsh.



# Paeonia Drive

Info

Press 1 God's Eye View  
Press 2 Bird's Eye View  
Press 3 GroundLess View  
Press 4 Orbit  
Press 5 Stop Orbit

BLEED

05



06

# Paeonia Drive

Info

Press 1 God's Eye View  
Press 2 Bird's Eye View  
Press 3 GroundLess View  
Press 4 Orbit  
Press 5 Stop Orbit

BLEED

07

**IMAGE 05**  
Angela Goh and Su Yu Hsin, *Paeonia Drive - Navigation*, 2020, *BLEED*, Arts House, Melbourne, and Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney. MacBook screenshot by Anador Walsh.

**IMAGE 06**  
Angela Goh and Su Yu Hsin, *Paeonia Drive - Navigation*, 2020, *BLEED*, Arts House, Melbourne and Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney. MacBook screenshot by Anador Walsh.

**IMAGE 07**  
Angela Goh and Su Yu Hsin, *Paeonia Drive - Navigation*, 2020, *BLEED*, Arts House, Melbourne and Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney. MacBook screenshot by Anador Walsh.

*BLEED*, a collaborative venture between Arts House, Melbourne and Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, is an ongoing project “exploring live experience across platforms.”<sup>4</sup> Unlike *ACCA Open*, *BLEED* was conceived prior to the pandemic, as a means of exploring the current conflation of ‘live’ art with the digital. Initially planned as a tandem live and online event, *BLEED* was forced by COVID-19 to recalibrate to a purely digital format in order to deliver its 2020 program. *Paeonia Drive*, Angela Goh and Su Yu Hsin’s contribution, was initially conceptualised this way, as an experiment in digitally mediated performance. During a *BLEED* Curatorial Digest on Zoom, Goh and Hsin spoke of their original intention to use mirrors and screens as interfaces, to mediate their (the performers) interactions with one another and their interactions with the audience, and to expand on the idea of ‘liveness’. When COVID-19 made the IRL performance unfeasible, Goh and Hsin reframed the work and created a 360-degree view scrolling website – composed of 3D scans of plants, objects and the performers’ bodies along with text and internet-sourced videos – to house and communicate the research behind this project. The digital landscape of *Paeonia Drive* can be explored two ways: by navigating the space yourself or tuning in for a guided navigation, which is described by *BLEED* as a “live-streamed desktop performance.”<sup>5</sup> I engaged with both.

*Paeonia Drive* is a carefully cultivated and manicured digital garden, set against a background the colour of a tequila sunrise. I don’t play video games, but I’ve spent enough time watching others do so to see a clear aesthetic tie between *Paeonia Drive* and *Grand Theft Auto*. This feeling of familiarity is compounded by an eerie game-like soundtrack. The 40-minute guided navigation functioned in many ways like a duet between Goh and Hsin for a delineated digital audience. Together, the artists lead you down the garden path of their online world, narrating your journey in a slow drawl: “forcing your view towards the horizon where perspective crashes.” Throughout the performance, you encounter shifts between the *Paeonia Drive* website, Goh and Hsin’s own internet browsers and pre-recorded footage of them performing. This performance footage, shot from multiple angles, depicts Goh and Hsin interacting through the intermediaries of screens and mirrors: using a smartphone, Hsin films Goh wrapping her arms around a screen mounted on wheels; later, Hsin touches Goh’s face as she caresses an avatar of herself, displayed on a screen, lying on the floor. Self-navigating *Paeonia Drive*, you can reorientate your perspective between a god’s eye, bird’s eye and groundless view, or elect to orbit the space. A drone hovers among a series of icons that, when clicked, open up windows into Goh and Hsin’s research. I select the climbing vine icon and find myself exploring the gardens of Versailles; I hover my cursor over the road and am shown an aerial view of a large traffic intersection; I touch the hand and watch a drone dog run across a field. In the centre of this landscape there is a karaoke-like screen with scrawling text that reads: “gardening is an activity of growing and maintaining the garden.”

Goh and Hsin’s *Paeonia Drive* garden emphasises the pervasive control of surveillance capitalism and the way in which it organises power relations. By engaging, either through the guided navigation or independently, with the three key aspects of this work – point/perspective, screen and the garden – you become increasingly aware of the power structures inherent in the work, and in contemporary existence. By situating *Paeonia Drive* within the familiar frame of a website and allowing the audience/participant to orientate themselves and choose their own adventure, Goh and Hsin hold a mirror up to our lives, and the ways that our computers and smartphones codify our behaviour. It is this conscious, digital participation that makes this a *Blue Zone* work. *Paeonia Drive* mediates experience through the technological interface and the choices made when moving through the space: the perspectives you employ, the directions you move in and the icons you select. This mediation, in spite of the absence of an IRL performance, creates a moment of encounter between the work and its audience, one in which the audience becomes both an observer and a producer of the work.

In a year where traditional ‘live’ performance has not been possible in Melbourne, *Neighbour* and *Paeonia Drive* are two works of ‘live’ art that adapted to the circumstances of COVID-19 and the subsequent market shift. Mediated by the self and the screen, *Neighbour* and *Paeonia Drive* are compressed performances, delivered like zip files to an audience whose participation is required to activate them. Unlike other works exhibited online during this period, which have employed more traditional means of digital presentation such as documentary video or photography, *Neighbour* and *Paeonia Drive* resist digital flattening. Instead, these works constitute an emergent *Blue Zone* performance that retain a sense of the communion that occurs between performers and audiences in the theatre or white cube, translating it into the digital realm. Although digital technology may have made the bricks and mortar of the institution temporarily invisible, the current trend toward presenting performance online should not be distinguished from what Shannon Jackson, in her 2014 essay ‘The Way We Perform Now’, calls the process of “totalizing social production.”<sup>6</sup> We must question what institutions gain from presenting performance in this way. Is it a turn towards institutions giving performance greater space and recognition, or is it a ploy to enable them to continue to meet their engagement quotas? I am interested in what *Blue Zone* performance may mean for the future of spectatorship. Will the participation, implicit in these works, mean that we will no longer see images of performing bodies proliferating across social media networks? Or will we continue to feel the need to prove our participation in these works by distributing new types of images online: screenshots and screen recordings taken in the privacy of our homes, on laptops and iPhones?

4 See: [bleedonline.net/about-bleed](http://bleedonline.net/about-bleed).

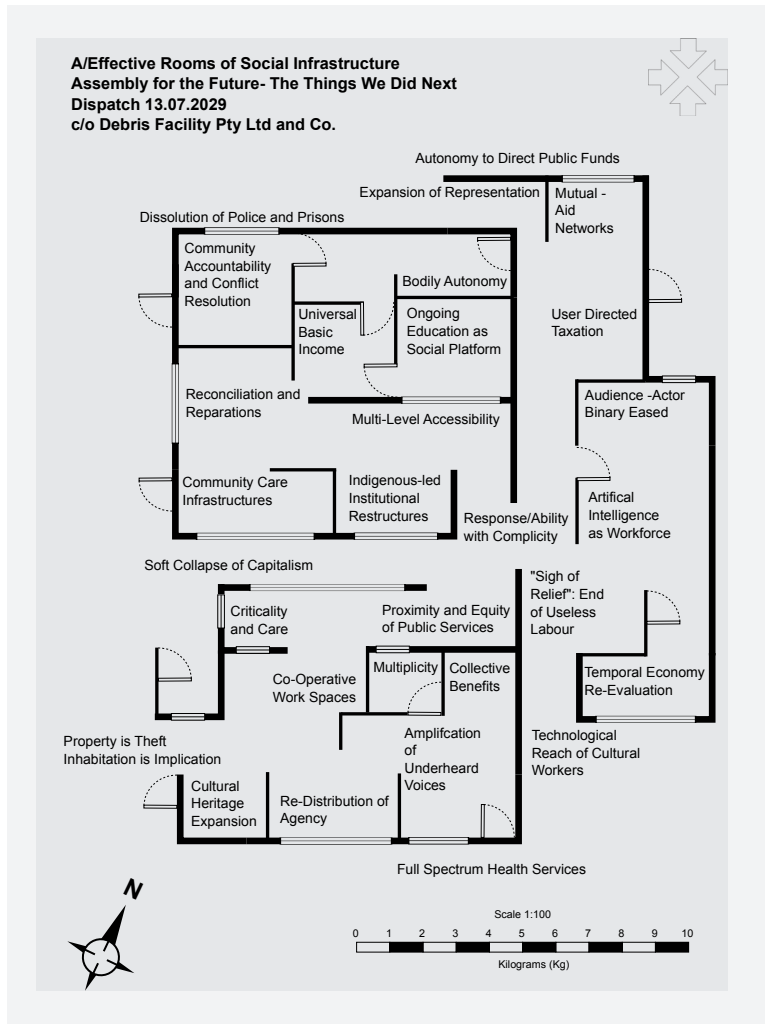
5 See: [bleedonline.net/program/paeonia-drive/navigation](http://bleedonline.net/program/paeonia-drive/navigation).

6 Shannon Jackson  
‘The Way We Perform Now,’  
*Dance Research Journal*,  
vol. 46, no. 3, December  
2014, pp. 53-61.

# Sensoria Against Separation

## Abbra Kotlarczyk

Mentored by Tara McDowell



### Day One – Antechamber (Foyer) /Epigraph

If we concede that communism failed, perhaps it is not due to a failure to figure out the best possible social and economic modes of organization, but because we didn't have the affective and imaginative resources to even begin to envision a mode of existence centered on connectedness over differentiation.

Jackie Wang<sup>1</sup>

Rebind social time with deep time.

– Holly Childs & Gediminas Žygas<sup>2</sup>

Equality is back, at the centre of the scene.  
Let's imagine that it is the starting point of the coming time.

– Franco 'Bifo' Berardi<sup>3</sup>

Debris Facility Pty Ltd  
and Co. *A/Effective Rooms*  
of Social Infrastructure  
Assembly for the Future -  
The Things We Did Next  
Dispatch 13.07.2029  
Commissioned for BLEED  
Festival, 2020  
Image courtesy the artist

- <sup>1</sup> Jackie Wang 'Oceanic Feeling & Communist Affect,' from *Friendship as a Form of Life*, n.d., [friendship-as-a-form-of-life.tumblr.com/post/162453258727/readprint](https://friendship-as-a-form-of-life.tumblr.com/post/162453258727/readprint).
- <sup>2</sup> Holly Childs & Gediminas Žygas 'A Circle, A Spiral,' from *Hydrangea*, n.d., [hollychilds.com](https://hollychilds.com).
- <sup>3</sup> Franco 'Bifo' Berardi 'Diary of the psycho-deflation,' *Verso Blog*, March 13, 2020





## **Day Dot – Glasshouse / Bildungsromane**

Alive!  
 Still alive.  
 Alive ... again.  
 Many others are not alive.  
 Who gets to live? Who gets to live, *again*?  
 Alive, again, in a sense; alive to their  
 senses—anew.

Awakening was hard, as it had always been, but it was harder now. The external pressure to assimilate The Selves had always been violently partitioned against how they had grown to be – hyperaesthetic, copious – after an earlier, rugged individual had been fatefully shattered, blurred and bled out during its multiple Awakenings. Moving endlessly in and out of Isolations, but never really *alone*, for hundreds of years. Rather than The Selves having assimilated, or even been replaced, this time it was the boundary between them and the world that had eviscerated. The skin, along with every other perceptible boundary, had begun to capitulate. The walls here were a kind of mucoid glass; the body had become a translucent vector. An Aleph. An infinity point for symbiotic and outrageously beautiful organelles of vast detailing. The Selves had become the naked body of a Gymnosomata sea angel; the pure and delicate housing of a glass frog; the frosted blood of a Barton Springs salamander.

The glassine walls at the edge of their unspoken containment limned the elemental matter of their sand, water and spittle – the same biota that worked to complete tax returns, file death certificates, exhume the vibrant and take out the evening compost.

This Awakening signalled the arrival of a kind of transparent network blanketing the world, finally revealing The Selves as multiple, microbial, inherent, abundant. But also banal, and virulent. The labour of attending to a consortium of shifting sensations occurring around them, during the long-time of Isolation, always seemed to amount to something greater than the felt containment of a body in a room. *Oceanic feelings*. The Selves were constantly trying to return to more aural, aerospheric modes of being, over this perpetual, regressive differentiation. They had always worked to penetrate the calcium carbonate of their bones, the same matter that lay in quarries ripe for blasting, where bodies could now not access. They had laboured for decades to unearth new realms of affinity in defiance of widespread paranoia and fear scrambling minds into roadblocks of opaque enigma. *Narcissism*. The endless replication of selfish genes whose own internal intelligence had long abandoned them, swiped clean of all memories of the conjugation towards evolution. [*Dear reader, please internet search and observe “Amoeba eating two paramecia”.*]

Now and then, it was a struggle to take in enough air to drive off nightmare sensations of a former asphyxiation – the violence of a once-imagined, rigid fuselage. The Selves lay gasping, shaking with the force of their own efforts to recalibrate under friendly fire – hundreds and thousands of little mitochondrial bonfires burning up, lapping up, a feast of impending return. But to where, to what?

Jenna Sutela  
*I Magma*, 2019  
 Blown glass, goo,  
 electronics  
 Dimensions variable  
 Co-commissioned by  
 Serpentine Galleries  
 and Moderna Museet  
 Image courtesy Moderna  
 Museet, Stockholm /  
 Theresa Hahr



## **Week Two – Breakout Room / Volta**

In every dwelling, even the richest, the first task of the phenomenologist is to find the original shell.

– Gaston Bachelard<sup>4</sup>

A virus is not only a biological agent that replicates inside the living cells of an organism; it is part of an ideology that constructs the “Other” as a disease.

– Srecko Horvat<sup>5</sup>

Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s closing sequence in his *Diary of the psycho-deflation*, published on March 13, 2020, reads as anachronistic, audacious and utopic from the vantage point of an unrelenting infection-wave fatigue, more than eight months later. And yet, his sentiment holds true for how the early stages of the rapidly evolving pandemic were being collectively appraised: as an opportunity for a radical reimagining towards social and political equality. This was true for those of us privileged enough to be safely inside our homes, without fear of having to walk hundreds of kilometres with no surety of arrival, least of all state-sanctioned protection.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere (but also there), for those for whom the home (or lack thereof) is a site of violence and not sanctuary, how was this window of radical opportunity in which to rethink, to *remake*, the conditions of our collective worldness being taken up? Survival begets survival: a looping cycle of crisis obfuscates other deeply catastrophic, concurrent events. All the while, it causes a scrambling effect in the cerebral contours of the scared, anxious and

paranoid mind, as social subjects literally struggle to think.<sup>7</sup> I’m only now able to reflect on all this, months after the initial, viral transliteration, because local community transmission has recently been quashed. There is once more *silence* in this house. I’m only now able to speculate on how the experience of protracted isolation may have actually, if not just symbolically, altered the social and molecular composition of human subjects, as co-constituted with all kinds of bacterial, viral and atmospheric ontologies, which have always been semantically and otherwise working apart, together.

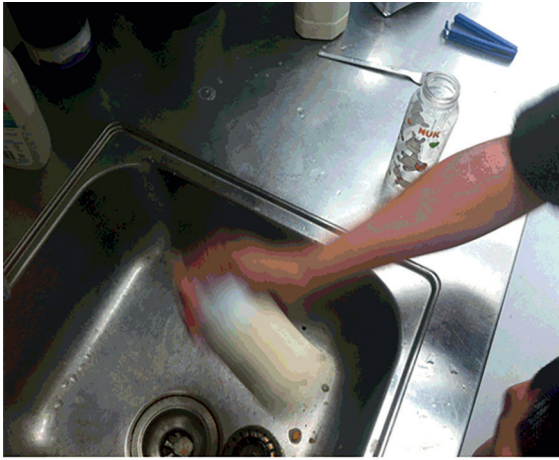
Let us now throw up Jack Halberstam’s provocation for a way forward that is “less an angel of history and more a ghost dancing at its own funeral.”<sup>8</sup> Then let gravity do the work and take it back down to earth.

They rose to their feet, squinting sunburnt at the light that inundated the room, penetrating their newly-vulnerable organs. Was it making a joke? Laughing at them?  
“Outside to what?” they thought.  
“Education. Work. The beginning of a new life,” the light seemed to be saying.

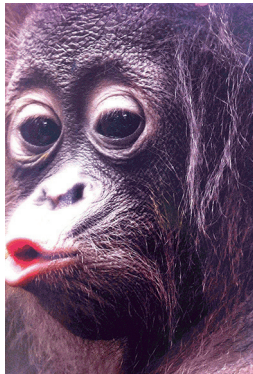
They proceeded to carefully bind their torso, head and limbs with the helmeted pinks of a tender balsam. *Rebind social time with deep time*, they seemed to be saying, on no particular linguistic terms.

Jes Fan  
*Xenophobia* (video still),  
2020  
single-channel digital  
video, colour, 7:35 mins  
Videography: Asa Westcott  
Commissioned by the  
Biennale of Sydney with  
assistance from Canada  
Council for the Arts and  
the Consulate General  
of Canada in Sydney  
Courtesy the artist and  
Empty Gallery, Hong Kong





Manuela Gernedel,  
i like you 2, 2014  
GIFF  
Image courtesy the  
artist



## **Now – Wave-pool (Backyard) / Parable**

Reading anything in a considered way has been almost impossible this year, the result of having attended to numerous caretaking needs during extended periods of severe lockdown. This was a time in which – contrary to anecdotal narratives of an abundant well of untapped, virgin *time* – reading became untenable in the face of expectations to maintain both originary and modern definitions of ‘economy’: a 16<sup>th</sup> century etymology for household management<sup>9</sup> and the current psycho-production of competitive and differentiating tendencies towards so-called survival. The other reason has been the lengthy delay of book arrivals, due to the overburden on postal services and the fact of so-called Australia being an island nation cut off from the rest of the world by the same body of water it has instrumentalised towards viral suppression and, let us not forget, white nationalist sanctity.

From what little I have read and heard about Jack Halberstam’s *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (2020), the book concludes with the nautical parable of the ninth wave, depicted in Ivan Aivazovsky’s eponymous painting from 1850: the proposition that “sets of waves at sea gain progressively in intensity, until, by the ninth, they have reached a climax of water, weight, height, and force”.<sup>10</sup> The myth goes that the ninth wave is the one you cannot see approaching; the one that gathers its momentum by drawing on the depth of the ocean that floats you; the one that either annihilates you or expels you, alive still, from its force. During a recent discussion with Halberstam on the philosophy of wildness as more an unruly ocean than a plotted road map – a central tenet of Halberstam’s book – Jane Bennett observed that the sea is morally indifferent to us. Waves exist beyond anthropocentric metrics of good and evil.<sup>11</sup>

4 Gaston Bachelard  
*The Poetics of Space*  
(Massachusetts: Beacon  
Press Books, 1994), 4.

5 Srecko Horvat ‘Why the  
coronavirus presents a  
global political danger,’ *New  
Statesman*, February 19, 2020

6 Arundhati Roy ‘The pandemic  
is a portal,’ *Financial Times*,  
April 4, 2020

7 Wesley Cecil ‘The Social  
Contract During a Pandemic,’  
*Humane Arts*, September  
29, 2020

8 Jack Halberstam *Wild  
Things: The Disorder of Desire*  
(Durham; London: Duke  
University Press, 2020)

9 Douglas Harper “economy,”  
*Etymonline*, n.d., [etymonline.  
com/search?q=economy](https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=economy).

10 Jack Halberstam  
‘CONCLUSIONS: The Ninth  
Wave,’ in *Wild Things: The  
Disorder of Desire* (Durham;  
London: Duke University  
Press, 2020)

11 ‘Wild Things: A conversation  
with Jack Halberstam and Jane  
Bennett,’ *Intellectual Publics*,  
October 27, 2020



## **One Day – Sanctuary (Living Room) / Carrier Bag Fiction:**

Many of us live the uneventful catastrophe, the everyday state of emergency, the social distribution of death that targets the ones deemed fungible, disposable, remaindered, and surplus. For those usually privileged and protected, the terror of COVID-19 is its violation of and indifference to the usual distributions of death.  
– Saidiya Hartman<sup>12</sup>

People, planetary awareness just arrived.  
We just found out the hard way how humankind means solidarity with nonhuman people.  
– Timothy Morton<sup>13</sup>

Now I see, everything in technocolour.  
– cktrl (ft. Marti)<sup>14</sup>

Their hearts beat so fast, too fast. All the former Selves of their hundred years' Isolations came flooding in, in unison. Former Selves that amounted to all the lived experience of a systemic marginalia the world could have possibly dreamt up. Vertical and horizontal lineages too: ancestors rushing through their veins, distributing sensation to all corners of the body, cutting across polite time like loyal, rebellious disciples. It was so loud: there were too many BPMs for having never known clubs or live music, urban dirt or dissonance – all those free

radicals feeding off the streets, freeways and public squares. They curled around their heart, foetal, slaving to the cacophonous rhythms of a leaf unfurling, a rock migrating north over the course of a millennium.

Circulation soon began to return to their arms and legs in flurries of minute and warmly exquisite spasms. A centurion of growing pains. They felt a quiver at the periphery of where their skin had been – the derma of their contiguous silken matrix – turn inward to darm. Their intestines were enveloped and entangled in a vast inner microcosm of the world 'out there'. The vitrics of their skin were a cuticular coastline in the way they imagined the contours of the land to yield towards its mother ocean.

The inside was now the outside in remarkable ways, ways unnoticed before. The Selves had always embraced the chance to be many, to be more, inside an enduring alterity but never at such levels of intricacy and expansion. Isolation was getting to be different here – it was both supra-estranged and supra-connected. Mutual Aid was no longer an addendum to the requirements for getting by; rather, every part of this ecosystem welcomed its other in order to thrive. Orgies were reserved for Wednesdays and Fridays, aside from during cosmic events. The rest of the week was dedicated to training the senses towards new pedagogical and adaptive modes forward.

Jenna Sutela  
*Holobiont*, 2018  
(video still)  
Image courtesy the artist

12 Saidiya Hartman 'The Death Toll,' in *The Quarantine Files: Thinkers in Self-Isolation*, Los Angeles Review of Books, April 14, 2020

13 Timothy Morton 'Thank Virus for Symbiosis,' *STRP*, April 4, 2020

14 cktrl (ft. Marti), 'Blossom,' December 13, 2016

15 Emily Dickinson *The Single Hound* (Surrey: Alma Books Ltd, 2018), 29.

16 Elizabeth A. Povinelli 'Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories,' *e-flux* #81, April 2017

17 Paul B. Preciado 'The Losers Conspiracy,' *Artforum*, March 26, 2020

18 Karin Bijsterveld *Sonic Skills: Listening for Knowledge in Science, Medicine and Engineering (1920s–Present)* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1-2

19 'Wild Things: A conversation with Jack Halberstam and Jane Bennett,' *Intellectual Publics*, October 27, 2020

20 'Franco "Bifo" Berardi on the future possibility of living well,' *e-flux* podcast, 2018

21 'Anicka Yi on nonhuman ecologies and embodied machines,' *e-flux* podcast, 2020



## Nighttime – Transept (Hallway) / Essay:

There is a solitude of space,  
A solitude of sea,  
A solitude of death – but these  
Society shall be  
Compared with that profounder site,  
That polar privacy –  
A soul admitted to itself:  
Finite infinity.  
– Emily Dickinson<sup>15</sup>

It seems to me that at least in settler late liberalism, geontology and its three figures [the Desert, the Animist and the Virus] huddle just inside the door between given governance and its otherwise, trying to block entrance and exit and to restrict the shape and expanse of its interior rooms.  
– Elizabeth A. Povinelli<sup>16</sup>

No one can be philosophical with an exploding head.  
– Paul B. Preciado<sup>17</sup>

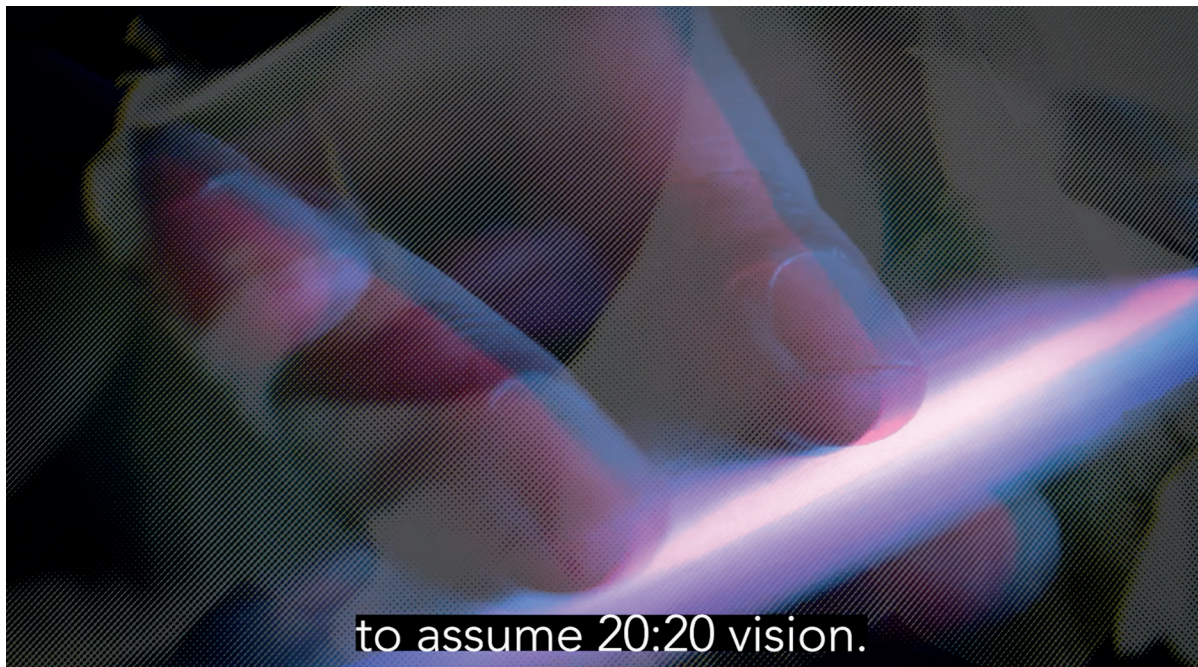
In 2014, American geologists sent sound waves deep into the earth and discovered a ‘super ocean’ some 300 miles below the earth’s surface, where no human has either seen or been. “Just as a knock on a table sounds different from a knock on a glass of water under the same conditions,”<sup>18</sup> the scientists knew what they had discovered, by rote of ear. But many had trouble believing the existence of this other ocean – their findings had not yet been *proven*, because the phenomenon had not been *seen*.

Despite what we now know to have been the quixotic and naive misconceptions of an unrealised emancipation, part of Bifo’s statement endures: the ‘let’s imagine’ proposition. It endures because it is more needed now than ever; because the so-called ‘coming time’ lives constantly in the seat of the imagination, where the only fixed parameter for envisioning our lives from one day to the next occupies the shape of a persistent uncertainty. We live by this abstraction, alongside a fundamental faith in, and respect out of fear of, viral imperceptibility. Why not, then, place

our faith elsewhere, where many cannot wholly see, or *touch*, as a way further into this mess of being utterly in-volved? Let’s channel Halberstam’s ghost dancing at its own funeral: a way of living wildness that calls on us as unstable subjects able to tune into modes of queer vitality and imperceptibility, while simultaneously staring into the abyss of greed, stupidity and injustice that this virus further ramifies.<sup>19</sup> Let’s not feed the chaos with more war, as Bifo urges.<sup>20</sup> Instead, let’s discover new biorhythms, new neuroplastic possibilities for relation that render withdrawal and divestment as key drivers for change. The time for equality is only ever coming, never having arrived.

Stay-at-home orders and enforced isolation hardly form the ideal conditions in which to test the flexibility of the various valves of self that open and close onto the world, but life under the duress of COVID-19 does bring these relations into stark new focus. For one, we learn from the function of viruses – not-quite-living but part of a living engine nonetheless – that partitions of perceived ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘human’ and ‘non-human’, must be radically breached in order for reproduction and proliferation to occur.<sup>21</sup>

Let us be more accountable to the often-unseen realities of resonant and sonorous entities, who might evade our haptics and who have always already occupied modalities of isolation and obfuscation implicit in the hierarchical project of extractive colonial governance. Resilient entities and ontologies that labour against the false meritocracies of 20:20 vision that privilege certain lifeforms over others: atmospheric pressure systems; geontologies; invisible and misunderstood oceans; viral and semiotic ‘hallucinations’; Indigenous knowledge systems as non-exhaustive assemblages of living and non-living; newly endangered superb lyrebirds who turn the skin of planetary ecosystems over to much-needed aeration; whole species of whales struggling to effectively echolocate over the fracas of human-produced noise pollution; the calligraphic chants (to borrow from Fred Moten) of exiled, poor, neuro-atypical, queer,



to assume 20:20 vision.

Fayen d'Evie  
BROADCAST EPISODE 2  
(video still), 2019  
for Next Wave Festival  
Videography by Ella  
Sowinska  
Courtesy the artist  
and Next Wave Festival

trans, immigrant, precarious, elderly, racially and ethnically-subjugated, and differently-abled bodies in deep practice with survival, who account for billions shut away indoors, in care facilities, prisons, nursing homes, refugee camps and other institutions, who write out of necessity for an audible liberation against societies that sequester them. These livelihoods and utterances should become a fundamental wayfinding apparatus for how we might think to cart around our rebranded liberties and their fatigue wear, once we re-emerge back into the light of the post-enlightened power structures 'out there'.

The outside *did* look different here, it was true, but not in the way the light seemed to be suggesting. It took The Selves some time to register it, but the sky had changed during the last gestational phase toward Awakening. The moon, previously only present at night, was now omnipresent, orbiting overhead like an unfailing Möbius strip uniting day and night. A horizontal, haloed presence that left a rime of crystalline hoar frost along the edges of their extremities – a perpetual reminder of the matter origin of former Selves, of a nocturn imaginary still always *there*. It was this glacial edging, this protective layering of a pellucid potential, that became the arsenal needed for their great crossing, breaching the mucoid walls that enabled them to reach out, *beyond*. To cross is at the same time to leap over an infinite vertical wall and to walk on a line drawn in the air.<sup>22</sup>

Shells echo vast, resonant ecologies into which we can be transported beyond the rigid distillations of the here and now, through careful positioning of our ear to the vessel. At the same time that shells house fluid reverberations, they also lodge within the churnings of geological matter that extractive governments continue to pollute in a riven attempt to pit sentient logics against themselves. While we cannot altogether control the valves that route to sensorial entanglements with inner and outer worlds, and with bodily seepages, we can strive to better understand the ethical textures and circumstances of these porosities. Where periods

of isolation can foster heightened conditions in which to locate and examine the original shell of being, to re-emerge from this place enables an opportunity to pause and ask more fully, with Elizabeth A. Povinelli: “what is it that I’m putting in and taking out?”<sup>23</sup> From experiences of staying still – but still always sensing and reading the body in relation – we could become more obsessed with the qualities of what we are putting in and taking out, as symptomatic of our ability to imagine a world driven by connection over differentiation. We could become more obsessed with the nature of our interactions with, divestments from and consumptions of the very things that sustain us – the very things that are *in* and *of* us. This is the place – of bodies as necessarily cooperative sites of sense relations – from which I wish to labour, alongside and through artmaking in the commons. This is the place from which I want to find urgent and necessary, multi-sensorial and sense-enabled, art being made – from the inside-outside of an endless sensoria where the self can be understood to multiply through and alongside the insensate, by which I mean dissolve and stretch temporally, as well as materially and fluidly. My sense is that artworks that are intent on subverting languages of given governance – of bodily surveillance, industrial extraction and cartographic attempts at segregation and ownership – can populate a slower vision for worldly imagining, thus enabling a blueprint of shifting scales for a way forward that divests from the failed accelerations of our current epoch.

It was only as recently as 1967 that biologist Lynn Margulis renewed our understanding of the endosymbiotic origins of humans from out of the bacterial genesis of mitochondria and plastids.<sup>24</sup> I often wonder how our obligations to the apparent non-living might be reappraised if the skin were to become a translucent vector allowing us more apparent entry into the vast, earthly habitats that we originated from, and hence mirror in our own constitution. As Povinelli speculates, such a level of obsession – and I would infer, imagining – might just “disrupt our practices of obligation and care down the hierarchy of life,” to more fully dissolve the false chasm we’ve created between life and non-life.

22 Paul B. Preciado *An Apartment on Uranus* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2019), 43.

23 Kunsthall Trondheim 'Who Wants to Live Forever? Podcast Series: Elizabeth A. Povinelli with Susanne M. Winterling,' October 2020

24 Michael W. Gray 'Lynn Margulis and the endosymbiont hypothesis: 50 years later,' *Molecular Biology of the Cell* 28(10), May 15, 2017

25 'Franco "Bifo" Berardi on the future possibility of living well,' *e-flux podcast*, 2018





**Dawn – Universe / Epilogue**

“Once upon a time the enemy was censorship. Now the enemy is white noise [...] the excess of information [...] How can we be able to provoke an effect of blackout of the white noise? How can we be able to create a condition for listening to the whispering of the voice [...] The real problem is to create the conditions of silence, of spiritual, of mental, of bodily silence. A soul that we can rediscover what is really essential for our life, for our desire. And be silent now *[laughs]*.”<sup>25</sup>  
 Abbra Kotlarczyk, November 2020

Megan Cope  
*Untitled (Death Song)*, 2020  
 instruments made of repurposed soil  
 augers, oil drums, piano strings, and  
 rocks from South Australia Drill Core  
 Reference Library, Adelaide, sound  
 Installation view for 2020 Adelaide  
 Biennial of Australian Art: Monster  
 Theatres, Art Gallery of South  
 Australia, Adelaide  
 Photo by Saul Steed  
 Image courtesy the artist and Art  
 Gallery of South Australia

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