

Faculty of Design

2016

## Kapsula

Pearl, Zach, LeBlanc, Lindsay, Terziyska, Yoli, England, Sara, Morgan-Feir, Caoimhe, Granados, Francisco-Fernando, Dennis, Katherine, Kyba, Matthew and White, Nick

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*On the Cover:*

ISABEL M. MARTINEZ

*Infinity Starts With A Dot*  
chromogenic print  
2015

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# PROLOGUE



## Marginalia

Crisis marked the *beginning* of KAPSULA's run as an independent magazine, and crisis will mark THE END – but our address to a crisis in art criticism has exploded, expanded into various areas of social, political, and cultural unrest, ruptures that form into disciplinary bleeds, transcendent experiences, environmental shifts, and polarized politics (depending on who you ask). In our first issue, we posed a series of questions borrowed from the Brooklyn Rail's Irving Penn, including: "How can art criticism be made more relevant?" and "Are we too timid in dealing with power structures in the art world?" Where the magazine stands today, a many-legged creature with limbs stretched across the various sects of culture—though always fueled by a beating

'art—we venture a guess to Penn's queries. Or, at least, we defer to what our contributors have answered on our behalf: the crisis in criticism has roots planted in and outside of contemporary art, and, feeding from an incalculable number of streams, contemporary art molds its own provocations to suit the surroundings.

For the duration of our time publishing monthly under quarterly themes, KAPSULA has created a digital Doppler effect in its touches with art, artists, and the art world, moving toward and away from the center in order to find the sources fueling it; thankfully we've never taken to journalism, and we're always happy to reveal our sources, where the hunt proved successful. The timidity surrounding the critical state of art criticism—exactly where the crisis reveals itself a redundancy—assumed by Penn in his line of questioning can only be overcome in a willingness to venture to the margins. This means nothing in particular when the margins are always moving, and far from deciding "the end" of one element of contemporary artistic practices (for example, the Author, art criticism, the white cube, painting, to name only a few that have been repetitively predicted) we propose a regular pilgrimage to the edges,

mapping and re-mapping in order to maintain the networked center.

Each of the six writers in this issue cover a breadth of topics and circumstances that in themselves signify a particular type of ending outside of contemporary art, while at the same time gesturing to an open window, to unseen territory that presents some opportunity for additional reflection. The light at the end of the tunnel appears in multiple, signifying beginnings as much as endings—and holding no promises beyond their eventual, and more than likely simultaneous, arrival. It makes sense that our follow-up theme to the inaugural CRISIS was POLITICS OF AESTHETICS; the undercurrents of political change guiding KAPSULA's ongoing publishing activity reappears here, again, with focus on the three years since our first issue in July 2013.

Though “crisis” ultimately led to “the end” for KAPSULA, our sentiments run counter to our trajectory. If the crisis in criticism presents a redundancy, maybe the solution is as simple as removing it. Along with Penn, Peter Schjeldahl from *The New Yorker* made an appearance at the outset of CRISIS. And perhaps we identify, now more than ever, with Schjeldahl, whose statement lacks no sureness: “Intellectually, I

shun myths of decline. The present is always the best time, by dint of being the only time there ever is.” The prediction of the end, almost always a product of these myths, may never be exhausted; we've perpetuated our own with the theme of this issue. But after this impassioned plea for a de-centralized method of writing about art, we'd be remiss not to follow the lead(s). Moving forward, KAPSULA will uproot its own center by producing issues alongside partner organizations who share our impulse toward the edge, a death drive writ large.

And though the edges may never be found where we last left them, their ragged outlines remain, etched into digital spaces far and away from the ones we can control. With so many paths, endless structures to the code, criticism is not bound up in its own crisis—it's bound up in the crises that shape its production and circulation, as with any other object of contemporary art. We choose to ride the .wav, undermine the center, and embrace the present, the best time, the only time there ever is.

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# *The Future is Already Here, It's Just the End*

**KATHERINE GUINNESS**

Right now, as KAPSULA ends (well, not 'ends', but moves on, *changes*—which is all anything can do, which is all this essay can be about, which is, not to give away the end[ing], the whole argument here) the 20th Sydney Biennale is also ending, as is my life in Sydney. I'm returning to North America, concluding nearly a decade of time I've spent away. And while my own personal ending is not the point of this writing, leaving here and facing the end of a particularly significant period of my life seems to inform everything around me now. All I see are endings.

This is funny, because the theme of the Biennale in Sydney is all about beginnings – its title, "The Future is Already Here, It's Just Not Evenly Distributed," is a quote from science fiction author William Gibson. And a Biennale is inherently a thing without end, a promise of something that will always be there. Every two years, there will be an event; the Biennale is ongoing, never singular. The event follows and produces a passage of time, it marks time, but time itself cannot end—events like a Biennale tell us it cannot.

I don't think I'm alone in seeing ends in the future. Even without my end-tinted glasses on, it is easier to find the finality, not the future, of many works presented here.

*Guernica in Sand* by Lee Mingwei is, as the title clearly explains, Picasso's *Guernica* made out of sand. The floor-bound work is vast and colourful, adding bright yellow shades to Picasso's monochrome masterpiece. Also added to Picasso's version? An end: destruction. After being on display for a few weeks the public was invited to walk over Mingwei's piece, and afterwards it was swept away. Mingwei says the work has parallels to Buddhist mandalas, which are meant to only exist for brief periods of time before being ceremonially demolished, pointing out the ultimate impermanence of worldly things in the face of larger cycles of destruction and creation. Putting aside the problematic politics of choosing this

particular Picasso work to make that statement through, this is a clear end. A work exists, it gets swept away, the end.

Bo Christian Larsson has taken over historic Camperdown Cemetery for his work *Fade Away, Fade Away, Fade Away*. The title itself doesn't seem as futuristic as it does fatalistic. A cemetery represents a clear end-point for many, where we go after we die. What is more of an end than that? A name can live on, of course, and to visit the park with accompanying graves is to bring the past to the future—reading the names on the headstones ends their end, and lets them be remembered. But in Larsson's project, even the potential for remembrance is temporary. Over the course of the Biennale the tombs were covered over with thick canvas cloths, custom sewn to fit them snugly. The names of the dead are erased, eroded not by time, but by her work, speeding up an inevitable process of erosion.

It wasn't just artworks that were ending at the Biennale. Oscar Murillo, who was to show a new work, *meandering-black wall*, ended an aspect of his (legal) personhood while flying over the sea. Reflecting on the privilege he had entering Australia with British citizenship, one of several identities he could assume (Murillo is also Colombian), he destroyed his UK passport while on the airplane and was, as expected, not allowed into the country. A plaque was placed in an alley in Chippendale where the work would have been shown. In an alternative work presented, which included him speaking through a sound recording, Murillo stated "The act of obliterating a first world identity, my UK passport en route to Sydney, put me in a vulnerable position of uncertainty..."

Perhaps all these ends shouldn't be so surprising. How else to imagine the future than after an end? We can't get to tomorrow before today is over. We have to let go, be willing to change and move on. Nowhere is this displayed more poignantly at the Biennale than in Charwei Tsai's two video works based around the Tibetan concept of "the Bardo" (a liminal state between death and rebirth). The videos, *The Transitional State of Dying* and *The Transitional State of Becoming*, are projected from the ceiling of two small rooms. As ambient sounds play (building to an unsettling intensity) and soft colours flicker (that appear

more and less representational in turns), a calming voice reads from the *Bardo Thodol*. Following the Buddhist belief that a spirit lingers in the world for forty-nine days after death, this text is read aloud to the deceased in order to help them avoid confusion and let go of their current life. I cannot help, with the swell of noise all around me, the flashing red at my feet, and the impending move in my heart, but be desperately stirred by the firm voice telling me "You can no longer stay here...now think like this...I will go forward, I will abandon fear and terror, I will recognize whatever imagery that appears as a projection of my own mind...Do not resist this, do not be afraid..."

As if this liminal handholding were not enough, the work appears at the Biennale's "Embassy of Transition" (this year's event is divided into institutions showing work, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, which have renamed themselves as "embassies"). The Embassy of Transition is located at Sydney's Mortuary Station. The station was used throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s exclusively to carry mourners and coffins to cemeteries. The videos play, so fittingly it hurts, in the stations' two waiting rooms.

The works my end-ui draw me to most, however, are two other videos, both located at the "Embassy of the Real" on Cockatoo Island. As video works become more prevalent, and ever easier to produce given access to digital cameras and editing software, artists and curators must consider how to tackle their temporality. How is a work shown? How to loop a work in a gallery space? How can its beginning and end hold up for those who come late and leave early? Some, like Douglas Gordon in his *24 Hour Psycho*, make seeing the work in its totality a Sisyphean task. Others,

like the artists from the Biennale I will primarily be discussing now, play with the loop and narrative by making the end and the beginning so indistinguishable that the video seemingly cannot end.

Korakrit Arunanondchai's video *Painting With History in a Room Filled With People With Funny Names 3* (2015) is almost thirty minutes long and the final piece in his series about a fictional artist (played by himself). This work balances beginning and end, but equally undermines both, without any possibility of linear narrative. Much of the work revolves around conversations between the artist and an unseen woman named Chantri. Chantri describes to the artist the first and last images of the film: "The first image is you covered in paint standing in a body of water" and later, "the last image is you covered in paint standing in a body of water." Both narrations (which begin and end the work) are spoken over the exact same shot—one of Arunanondchai walking into a body of water, covered in paint.

The film shows the artist's native Bangkok not as a city forgotten by time, but one collapsed by it, into it. Packs of drones float through the jungle, over hospital helicopter pads, catching large crowds of people hugging, chasing jet skiers down the River of Kings. Ancient temples are occupied by motorcycle gangs with trendy ombre hair and fans decked out in Manchester United jerseys (featuring the logo of the new sponsor, Chevrolet). A great deal of these images are accompanied by a chopped and screwed hip-hop song about Bangkok. The rest play over conversations with Chantri. The artist-protagonist asks Chantri questions, talks to her about the future, technology, and hunting the mythical snake, Naga. Apparently all three go hand in hand, for the artist tells Chantri, "the time of standard defi-

nition has ended...HD helps us come closer to spiritual beings."

If HD and other digital technologies can help us become closer to the spiritual, they are also helping us move farther from death. Or at least farther from an end of life, whatever the difference between those two may be. It is a difference that becomes more pressing in Arunanondchai's potentially futurist world where the ever-present packs of drones might be the new embodied presence of ancient ancestors, their collective data uploaded not into the cloud, but the clouds via airborne technology. He asks Chantri, "will we last forever?" and the reply is "yes we will." But a caveat: "most memory becomes data, towers of hard drives replace our body."

Cécile B. Evans' *Hyperlinks or it Didn't Happen* (2014, 22:30) transforms memories to data and bodies into pure information. The video begins with an introduction to the CGI model PHIL, (fig. A) who excuses himself as "just a bad copy made too perfectly too soon" of the late Philip Seymour Hoffman. He implores us, through words out of sync with the movements of his mouth, not to call him uncanny. Throughout the work he explains his conflict between housing the thoughts and feelings of the "real" Philip Seymour Hoffmann ("I am full of him") and being himself, not Phil but PHIL. At times he dreams that his entire existence

is the result of some extreme dissociative incident on the part of original-Phil, who imagines he is actually a computer rendering. But no, PHIL concludes that “I will always love him, I will always be here” and—where “here” is the free-floating space of the cyber—surrounded by others who live here. There is AGNES, a spambot that lives on the servers of the Serpentine Gallery in London (the first ever digital work to be commissioned by the Gallery, also made by Evans, which still exists and will most likely live on the server forever, indefinitely, as long as the server lives). They, in turn, are joined by all manner of characters—some, like Agnes, of Evans’ own creation—YouTube oddities, fun facts, and unverifiable figures. For example, *Hyperlinks* shows us videos of the women of the Wangjaesan dance troupe in North Korea. All identical, all ageless. Their immortality is in part due to their existence on YouTube in the first place, but also due to rumours about their alleged execution at the hands of the North Korean government, and then their subsequent return from the dead in 2015—all of which is discussed in *Hyperlinks* through the conversations of PHIL and AGNES. We see a viral video of a very young girl sobbing as she confesses to deleting some photos from her father’s camera. AGNES, at times sad, at times scared, comments over a male voice telling us about his dead girlfriend—she’s started haunting him on Facebook, tagging herself in photos (in the empty spaces near his head) and leaving him eerie messages, made up of her old words. AGNES diagnoses him (not unlike PHIL himself hopes to be diagnosed) with a dissociative disorder. (How can it not be him tagging those photos? Leaving those messages?)

This spiralling information forms an associative assemblage which evokes the way one experiences the internet—fragments of ephemera flashing by click through click, YouTube videos consumed on an algorithmically suggested non-stop play-next loop, Wikipedia pages consulted to see if a statement about a rumour in the comments could possibly be true, picking apart the viability of photos presented as facts, hopping onto to IMDB to see where that one guy comes from... who does he look like again? This would be dizzying if it weren’t so well crafted, controlled, and curated on Evans’ part.

That said, AGNES reminds us there’s always a risk our digital

vertigo might return, as she helpfully annotates the entire project on genius.com. (Originally for uploading and annotating song lyrics, the website is now roamed by the likes of spambot art projects and Michael Hardt.) Here you learn that seemingly banal lines spoken by PHIL, like “I really feel I can touch you even in this darkness,” come from a letter dictated by kidnapped American journalist James Foley. Islamic State militants beheaded Foley in 2014, but before dying he was able to ask another hostage to commit a letter for his family to memory. The man did, and that line was among the many moving words. A speech by Pope Francis also makes a disembodied appearance, and we learn the Greek origins of the word “hyperlink,” as well as that the official name of the cinema structure Paul Thomas Anderson used in the film *Magnolia* (in which Hoffman plays a role) is known as “Hyperlink”—but also that it isn’t *Magnolia*, but the *Hunger Games* series which inspired PHIL’s creation. Soon after Hoffmann’s death, producers of the series reported that a digitally rendered version of the actor would be made so that he could complete his role. Back in *Hyperlinks*, Evans (or is it AGNES?) alludes to this through clips of the late Marlon Brando’s own digital resurrection. Video of his performance in *Superman II* was digitally repurposed so that he could return as Superman’s father two years after his death for *Superman Returns*.

How does one end an internet rabbit hole? It never ends. Much like Arunanondchai denies us a beginning or end by collapsing them into the same image, PHIL reminds us “the end is the start of the beginning.” And so, as in *Painting With History*, *Hyperlinks* draws attention to the point where its loop meets up, where time folds back on itself, and the end marks the start of the beginning. The work “ends” with PHIL earnestly stating, “So now I’m going to have to

tell you..." It then cuts off suddenly, and there is blackness, only to restart again with PHIL's face introducing itself.

Today, the digital can not only capture our image, our voice, our movements, but *ourselves*—our thoughts and information and memories. And these do not even have to be captured, as they can be created. PHIL was never formed from Philip Seymour Hoffmann—it hasn't captured him but created him. It can do things he has never done, said things he will never say, it has new agency. Bodies can be converted so easily to information, and then this information seems to be able to live forever, exist on its own (despite the fact that the hardware driving our current technology is some of the most fragile and impermanent yet). (Bollmer 2013) In 1923, Mohaly-Nagy imagined turning "the gramophone from an instrument of reproduction into a productive one, generating acoustic phenomena without any precious acoustic existence..." (Kittler 1999, 46) And now with digital animation, CGI, social media data analytics, digital doubles, we can have recordings of people themselves that are not only reproductive but productive; Marlon Brando performs in a new scene, Audrey Hepburn can wear pants from the Gap, a vocaloid pop star like Hatsune Miku, with no physical/tangible form or voice beyond that of a hologram and digital samples, can go on tour with Lady Gaga. And when Lady Gaga dies, she too can do whatever those who decide these things want her to do. There is no need for her (or anyone) to stop or end. Digital information and recordings made un-embodied non-flesh can go on forever, like a friendly (potentially product-shilling) ghost.

Jacques Derrida often discussed this technological "logic of spectrality" (Derrida 2001). He played himself in Ken MacMillan's art film *Ghost*

*Dance*, partially because he believed that being recorded had the power to call forth ghosts, and by committing himself to film he could make himself a spectre. In the film he says, "I believe that modern developments in technology and telecommunication, instead of diminishing the realm of ghosts...enhances the power of ghosts and their ability to haunt us..."(Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 48)

Last month, when I was teaching Derrida to my students, screening clips of *Ghost Dance* for them, there was an outpouring of their personal spectres: their own stories, those of friends', and (as the logic of the internet and Evans' work goes) stories heard online. One student brought the class to collective tears discussing the tale of a man who had lost his father when he was very young, but found him years later, when he could bring himself to dig out his old videogame system. This particular racing game saved a player's highest score via a mechanism called a "ghost car"—the best attempt at that race, recorded in the memory of the game, would be there to race alongside you. He was able to play his father once again, but could never win, as that would erase his ghost, and replace it with his own.

I came home that day to find ghosts of my own, not one but two. A relative had tagged a photo on Facebook, and written only, "Is this you?"—indicating that, amongst the several people in the photo, I could be the baby held in my dead aunt's arms. This photo made me sad in its unexpectedness and banality. I thought of her, saw her huge smiling face, and missed her—then went about dutifully identifying the baby in the photo as me or not me. The photo was of an actual printed photo, recaptured and uploaded to the web. (fig. B) It was fuzzy, with a giant ball of light in the centre (made by a reflective flash in the act of re-photographing the original). The orb covers a young boy's head, but I was able to identify him as a brother, determining the baby could not be me, but a different brother. I continued to identify the various faces in the image. Click, tag, click, tag, and again until the image of a final young boy in the photo, one who I had not seen at first, truly did jump out at me and yell "BOO!" A face I had not seen or thought of in so long that I cannot say, or begin to count. His presence rushed back so fast it hurt. I physically ached as if I had passed through time and suffered a brief side effect from the travel.

Shortly after filming *Ghost Dance*, in which Derrida had hoped to make a ghost of himself, his co-star Pascale Ogier died. In the film she asks him “Do you believe in ghosts?” When he was later forced to re-watch the film and found himself not haunted by himself, but still more haunted nonetheless, he said, “I had the unnerving sense of the return of her specter, the specter of her specter coming back to say to me—to me here, now: ‘Now... now...now, that is to say, in this dark room on another continent, in another world here, now yes, believe me, I believe in ghosts’” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 120).

And this is how I feel. I am not in the photo. I am haunted by it. In

a dark room, on another continent (and yes, in another world). My aunt’s young neighbor, object of so many extreme and endless pre-teen emotions that stretched well into my teens, precipitator of many firsts. Still young, in junior high maybe, I stole a photo of him from my aunt’s fridge before I had to return home after an annual extended summer-stay. He was wearing a school band uniform, a giant hat and stupid crooked grin. (I memorized that grin; I can recall it now, isolated and Cheshire Cat-like, floating in front of me as a white box with a blinking cursor waiting to be tagged: “type any name.”)

After I returned home, I carried the photograph with me. And when my friend and I called my aunt, pretending to be school friends of the neighbor boy’s asking for his phone number, I scratched it into the back of the photo with pencil. It became more of an engraving and I memorized that number like his smile. I don’t know where it is now. I mourn it by searching for traces of him, the loss of him felt only through this new photo anyway. I Google his name and nothing. To find nothing is such a rare occurrence today that I am seized by a moment of ridiculous techno-amnesiac-doubt. I run back to the photo on Facebook to save it to my computer, as if I had imagined it and him, and both will disappear like the photo off my aunt’s fridge.

He killed himself before Facebook was popularized. Today, he is trapped, untagged, with no page of his own, doomed to roam the pages of others. He can exist to me now only through these two photos and my obsessive pre-teen memories, which are predominantly of the phone calls I made. I used the number, etched into the photo, to call him, but used all my bravery too—nothing left for conversation. I listened to him play videogames instead, for hours and hours. I did the

same thing a few years ago with my partner when I lived far from him – this time with the visual upgrade of Skype, turning my laptop on its side so I could fall asleep as he worked his way through whatever game it was he played. Avatar-Seymour-Hoffman and I have this in common: from his disembodied equivalent of my Mancunian bed-sit in *Hyperlinks* he watches AGNES play *Kim Kardashian's Hollywood*.

Why do I do this, listen to them play these games? Because I never want the calls to end. I don't like ends. I put off the end by bleeding into whatever these boys would do without me there. My telepresence haunts them live.

In *Painting With History*, the narrator says, "Dear Chantri, I remember you. No. Actually I don't, I made it up with old air and mud, and a lot of paint." I don't remember the boy, just my own projections; these images cast us into un-ending night. Derrida says, "In the nocturnal space in which this image of us, this picture we are in the process of having 'taken,' is described, it is already night. Furthermore, because we know that, once it has been taken, captured, this image will be reproducible in our absence, because we know this *already*, we are already haunted by this future, which brings our death. Our disappearance is already here" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 117). If our disappearance is here, what then of this image that determines our future that determines our death? Does it mean anything for us to end and to not, both at the same time? Endings are essential, as Charwei Tsai's work reminds us, we must leave this place, move on, change into something else, *transition*.

But what if we cannot end? This year's Sydney Biennale is not really ending; it has promised to extend itself through a blog—and the first entry

contained a post by Oscar Murillo, reframing his ended identity as purely transitional: "...the instinctive destruction, somewhere above the East China Sea, of my British passport was the act of a subject unresolved, always in transition." If the Biennale won't end, how will the next one come? *Painting With History* says we will live forever, with bodies replaced by towers of hard drives, but it goes on to describe hell as "made up of mountains of broken hard drives." Hard drives are vampiric. The only way to truly erase their data is to drive a drill through their centre. PHIL, who lives on a hard drive, shows that Phil is both dead and still living. Despite the director of the *Hunger Games* stating that a digital rendering of him would be "a horrible, horrible thing," James Lipton comforted a sobbing actress mourning Hoffman by saying "We have him forever now, thank heaven." We can have most anyone forever, but do we want them? These spectres?

Towards its end (which is not an end but a rounding the corner of a loop), *Hyperlinks* shows Yowane Haku singing "Forever Young" in her clipped, manipulated vocaloid voice (she too is pure vampiric data that needs no physical ties to make sound forever). "Forever young, I want to be forever young. Do you really want to live forever, forever, and ever?" PHIL says, "I ask you with all of my heart to stop, please stop." Ω

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## KATHERINE GUINNESS

received her PhD in Art History and Visual Culture from the University of Manchester. She studies contemporary art and feminism, especially the work of German artist Rosemarie Trockel. She teaches at the University of New South Wales.

# ADDITION, RENOVATION, DEMOLITION, RE-USE

## IS THE END OF ART IN ARCHITECTURE?

December 2015—The architecture collective Assemble is awarded Britain's top artistic honour, the Turner Prize. The fact that a group of architects receives a renowned art accolade is indicative of a larger transition in not only the exhibition of art and architecture, but the application of architectural techniques in art that began earlier that year.

October 2015 - The inaugural edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennale "State of the Art of Architecture" opens at the Chicago Cultural Center. Curators Joseph Grima and Sarah Herda assert, "Architecture is a dynamic cultural practice that permeates fundamental registers of everyday life" (Grima and Herda, 2016). Grima, who curated the inaugural Istanbul Design Biennale, was also the director of another prominent architectural event in 2015: IDEAS CITY, organized by

the New Museum in New York. Begun in 2011, the four-day festival is dedicated to exploring the future of cities. Yet, the New Museum's Triennial exhibition eight months prior speaks to the use of architecture in art.

February 2015—The third edition of the New Museum Triennial, "Surround Audience," opens. Curated by Lauren Cornell and Ryan Trecartin, the exhibition was positioned as being "predictive" rather than "retrospective." The works presented offer a look into contemporary art discourse while also suggesting how it might incline towards architecture.

March 2014—British curator Beatrice Galilee is appointed as the Daniel Brodsky Associate Curator of Architecture and Design. Galilee was previously chief curator of the Lisbon Architecture Triennial and associated with the Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture. Galilee's appointment seemed to signal what was



happening in the field of North American architecture, something that would eventually come to fruition in 2015.

The curators of 'Surround Audience' and 'State of the Art of Architecture' share the intention of examining their field as a larger cultural practice. In a similar vein as Grima and Herda, Cornell and Trecartin write, "'Surround Audience' explores the effects of an increasingly connected world both on our sense of self and identity as well as on art's form and larger social role. The exhibition looks at our immediate present, a time when culture has become more porous and encompassing and new considerations about art's role and potential are surfacing." Architecture and art permeate "fundamental registers of every day-life," connecting these seemingly unrelated events, and framing my question: Is the end of art in architecture?

The comparative relationship between bodies and buildings is longstanding in Western architectural theory (Vessely 2002, 29). As much as "Surround Audience" focused on the ephemeral world of information

and communications, it was still firmly about the physical—the primary realm for architectural intervention. Dan Fox concludes "'Surround Audience' is a show about technology alright...the one that's made from muscle, tissue, brain, bone, and blood" (Fox 2015). During a period of intense cultural interplay between art and architecture, 'Surround Audience' displayed the technologies of art, architecture, and flesh and how they might connect through their utopian intentions.

The disposability of contemporary art is hindered by one crucial element: our bodies. Though embodied beings, we are able to engage in architectural practices that not only metaphorically but physically change our bodies. The subtle processes guiding architecture—addition, renovation, demolition, and re-use—appear in the works presented in the floor-spanning 'Surround Audience,' specifically in relation to the body.

April 16 2015, 6:04 pm—I visit the New Museum at 235 Bowery, New York, NY.

## ADDITION

6:59 pm—Nadim Abbas' installation, composed of three concrete clad bunkers—*Chamber 664 Kubrick*, *Chamber 665 Spielberg*, and *Chamber 666 Coppola*—occupies a small corridor leading toward the exit stairs on the third floor. The roughly cast concrete skin, perforated by a single slit slightly lower than eye level, appears to be the only view into these apocalyptic enclosures. However, upon approach, the chambers reveal illuminated metal, glass, and plastic machines within.

Behind a pane of glass, the quarantine chambers each contain a single bed occupying the entire interior with polyester hospital sheets wrapping the mattress. An individualized piece of art is mounted above the bed and corresponds to the objects exhibited on the chamber's small shelf. Mugs, glasses, molecule models, and toilet paper along with the art make reference to the filmmakers from whom each chamber received its name.

Two pipes, appearing to be a form of air supply for the hermetically sealed chamber, connect the mechanical frame of the fluorescent bedroom. While almost completely sealed, two sets of black rubber gloves—one for the inhabitant and one for a guest—mediate the internal world of the chamber and the hostile exterior. Both sets of gloves are offset, limiting the visitor's extension in the contained interior ecology.

*Chamber 664/665/666* employs architecture as an armature, a cyborg entity to preserve a state of interiority. The inhabitant of Abbas' work is evidently under threat. Openings and perforations, biological sites of disease, are contained within an architectural environment—extending the boundary line of the skin. Here, architecture becomes an additive construct for the artist to maintain a stable interior for the body. To protect the body—flesh, blood, and bone—from disease, an augmentation is re-



quired. Like most modernist additions on existing infrastructure, the chambers are supplements rather than parasites. Abbas' structures form an additional skin to negotiate exterior and interior through architecture technologies.

The three imposing monoliths hidden in the corner of the museum recall Paul Virilio's 1975 *Bunker Archaeology*, a survey of abandoned Nazi bunkers along the French Atlantic coast. In it, Virilio writes, "the bunker was built in relationship to this new climate...its armor plating, iron doors, and air filters—all this depicts another military space, a new climatic reality" (Virilio 1975, 39). In Abbas' *Chamber 664/665/666* this "new climatic reality"—both physical and digital—is produced through an architectural addition. The suggested air handling equipment provides a clean, inhabitable space free from potential bio-warfare (and maybe even a Wi-Fi signal).

In the face of Ebola outbreaks, biological weapons aimed at our interior, and the seemingly endless exteriority of digital information, Abbas responds by physical turning inward toward safety. It is only with the production of an external framework—a material utopia—that the felt protection of the inhabitant is generated. This can only be achieved through the creation of a shell, a spatial technique of addition.

## RENOVATION, DEMOLITION

6:19 pm—The hybrid kitchen-bathroom apparatus *The Island (KEN)* sits behind a glass partition that divides the Joan and Charles Lazarus Gallery from the museum's main lobby space. Conceived by DIS Collective in collaboration with luxury plumbing supplier Dornbracht, the domestic machine is described as "sculptural in its appearance," with the fixtures being "highly architectonic." Unlike Abbas' chambers, the island washes the artifice of architecture away by purifying and renovating the body through the domestic spaces of the kitchen and bathroom. Renovation cannot occur

without destruction, thus both the architecture and the body are demolished to give way to a renovated state.

The looped video playing on a wall-mounted monitor beside the installation presents a stylized advertisement for the product. "The utopian impulse has turned inward. It has become domestic," coos the narrator as she stretches across the surface of the appliance. The clothed woman is showered from the suspended fixture above as she continues, "Where there is water the impulse to remake the word is strongest." The inclination to move inward, to invert architecture, follows the logic of Abbas' *Chamber 664/665/666*, yet positions the possibility of demolition and renovation as spatial strategies for metaphorically and physically changing the body.

The advertisement for *The Island (KEN)* climaxes as the narrator whispers, "Renotopia, the modest ambition, to perfect end-user plumbing." What is "perfect end-user plumbing"? Can it somehow perfect our bodies? The metaphoric and material connection between plumbing, genitals, and gender is illustrated in the scholarship of Lucas Crawford. Crawford's "original plumbing" corresponds to biological sex (Crawford 2014, 621-22), referenced in the installation as "perfect end-user plumbing."

Perfect household plumbing in turn perfects the binaries of gender. The addition of *(KEN)* suggests that, like the Mattel figurine, the modern kitchen-bathroom is in genital crisis. Its lack of "original plumbing" fails to reflect an ascribed gender. Alone, it cannot fulfill the desire for "perfect plumbing."

Yet the two vertical faucets mounted to the skin and bathtub allude to the island's sexuality. Both faucets wash the female model—the bathroom fixture showering her from above while the kitchen faucet washes the food she prepares. It appears that the gender neutrality of the architecture is demolished by its interaction with the female model. Her gentle touch of the controls stimulates the faucet as it begins to expel water. In turn, the physical renovation of home soaks the model's white blouse ex-

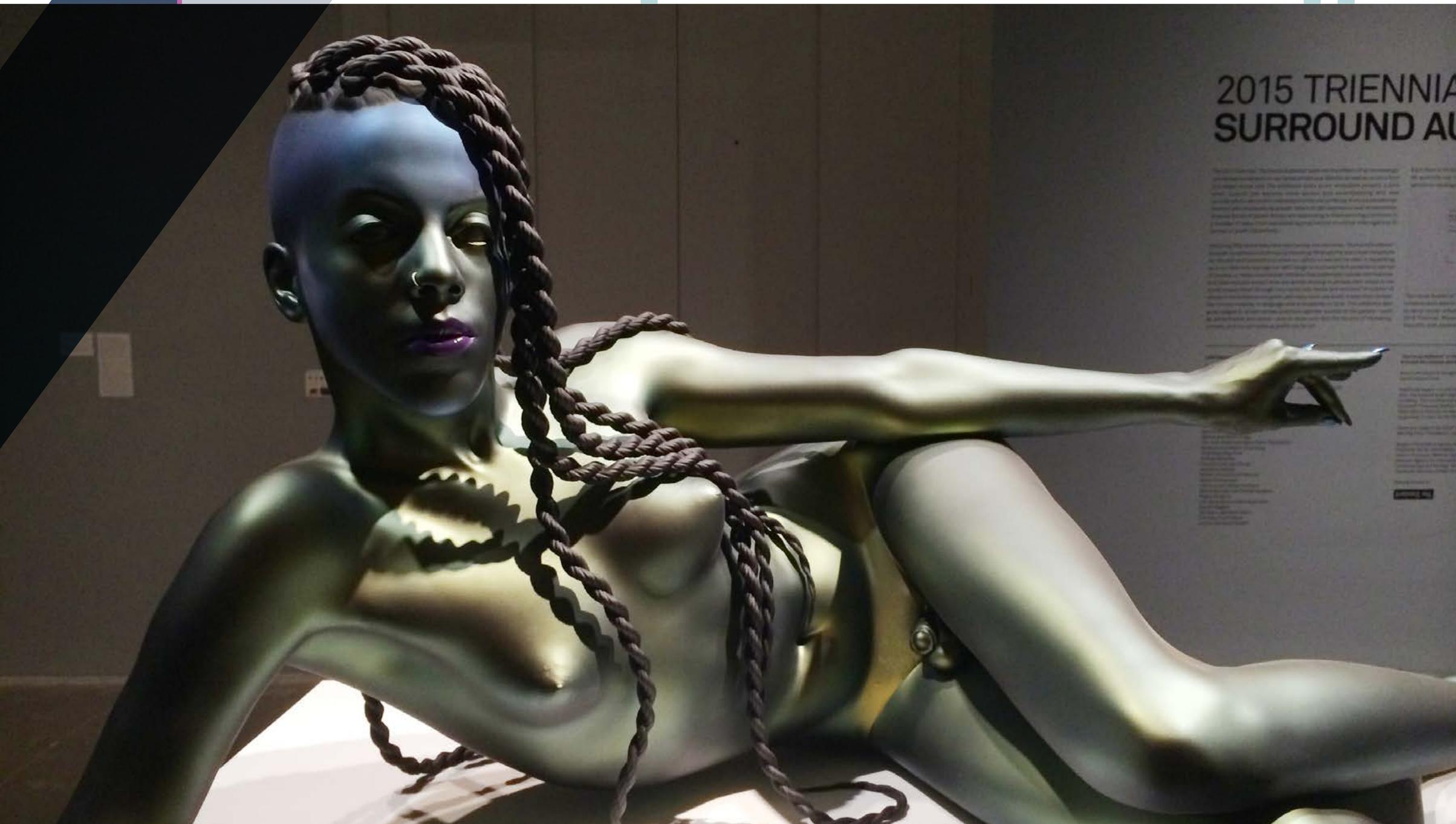
posing her organs and “perfect end-user plumbing.”

*The Island* (KEN) demonstrates that renovating our home parallels a similar renovation of the body. McKenzie Wark aptly summarizes this spatial, bodily transformation, asserting “renotopia promises that through careful attention to the inside and outside surfaces of your body, you too can attain a certain form of life” (Wark 2016, 97). Alongside this bodily renovation is the company’s statement, seemingly unaware of the critique they are falling into. “The company has expanded the idea of bath culture,” writes Dornbrach “and cultivated a whole new life in bathroom and kitchen habits.” Through renovation, an effort toward “cultivating a whole new life,” DIS Collective critique the idealized body projected in the modern bathroom in kitchen—one historically rooted in culturally constructed expectations of sexuality and race.

The advertisement ends as the narrator’s honeyed voices rolls over the line “To build a private oasis in a planet-wide desert.” Renovation offers the potential to demolish the old, the dirty, that which does not fit our utopian impulses. Renovation lets us replace the desert with a glass condo.

## RE-USE

6:24 pm—The elevator doors open to a relatively sparse gallery. The room is dominated by the works occupying the three walls framing it. In the midst of a massive projection, avatars, and a series of paintings struggling between figuration and abstraction sits Frank Benson’s *Juliana*. With her back facing the crowd of visitors spilling out of the elevator, the metallic sculpture of the multi-dimensional transgender artist Juliana Huxtable, placed intentionally off center, becomes the locus.



*Juliana* vividly illustrates the architectural practice of re-use. Crawford argues that transgender is a sense of modes “actions rather than states” when considered spatially (Crawford 2011, 52). *Juliana* is one such spatial action of transgender. Rather than the traditional reclining nude she could be so easily mistaken for, *Juliana* clings to the platform, supporting the ease of her recline, while pointing across the gallery. She examines both the viewer and the projection in front of her. Her braids slip and curl over her metallic body, ready to dismount the pedestal at any moment.

The emphasis on movement and action is encapsulated in the sculpture, as Huxtable notes: “The proportions of my body have changed at a rapid pace. Frank’s sculpture is a sort of pastiche of me at different points” (quoted in Guidicci 2015). Thus not only an action in-itself, the sculpture is a body-archive, chronicling previous actions taken on the body. The archive is inherently spatial, linked historically to the ancestral home. Spatializing the archive is an activity that transforms the body. Crawford summarizes this as “a transformation of the body that requires the remodeling of the life into a particular narrative shape” (Crawford 2011, 52). Benson’s sculpture resides only feet away from Huxtable’s works in the Triennial. The two portraits, alter egos or avatars of Huxtable, are narrative projections of her IRL/URL identity. Together with Benson’s sculpture, they become both a material and digital body-archive—a collection of the active process of re-using a body.

Is the archive the end or the beginning? “The Internet represented, for me, the ultimate library” notes Huxtable. “What I didn’t realize was that this archive was totally ephemeral” (quoted in Huxtable and Hershman Leeson, 2016, 314). Benson’s sculpture spatializes this ephemeral archive. It is simultaneously an archive of a body and an image of one that never existed. The re-use of the physical body is linked to the re-use of the digital body.

*Juliana* represents the re-use of a body, engaged in a spatial activity of trans-ing. The body is a site for biological addition and demolition, of gender renovation. The sculpture also materializes the trans-body-archive. The 3D printed sculpture, conceived from a pastiche of scans, is a hybrid of physical and digital information – at once tangible and intangible. It is a record of bodily activity and a fictional narrative. By representing the body as process of building or becoming, the metallic *Juliana* Huxtable not only adopts an existing body but re-uses the body as an archive.

## THE END

Utopia is a central theme in the work of Abbas, DIS, and Benson; whether a constructed utopia in light of a potential apocalyptic future, a renotopia, or a queer/transtopia, these works materialize the fleeting body-archive. Utopia is ultimately an architectural configuration, the end to what existed before. It is an addition, demolition, renovation, and re-use of the world prior to its inception.

Articulated most clearly in the late fifteenth century by architect Filarete in his ideal city /Sforzinda/, utopia is a concept only achieved through these architectural processes. *Sforzinda* was a city founded on geometric rigor with the belief that in perfect form, the city would positively impact the lives of its inhabitants (Perez-Gomez 2016, 244-45). It was envisioned as an addition to the landscape, demolishing the issues with the medieval cities that came before. The city represented how, through a perfection of architecture, the citizen’s body could be both re-used and renovated.

“Surround Audience” has, in my reading, depicted the embrace of architectural processes in its inclinations toward utopia. This can be viewed in light of a larger cultural shift in the discipline of architecture.

Is the end of art in architecture? Possibly. Maybe not. What these spatial strategies of addition, renovation, demolition, and re-use in relation to the body suggest is a sense of flexibility during a time of finality and disposability. Though each work reflects specific utopian trajectories, intended to end or replace what came before, *Chamber 664/665/666*, *The Island (KEN)*, and *Juliana* occupy a liminal state between. They are caught within the process of building, a constant state of becoming. "Being in the show [Surround Audience]," muses Huxtable "It doesn't have any sense of finality" (quoted in Guidicci 2015). Ω

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## E V A N P A V K A

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# 26 June 2016

JESSICA SIMS

I write from London.

The notion of The End is suddenly met with a multiplicity of new meanings three days on from the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. I'm not from here and, feeling an all-encompassing sense of disjuncture, can't help but think of home—a concept imbued with turmoil, especially now.

I am uncertain of the extent to which those abroad are invested in this news. I hope that its significance has permeated borders, acting as yet another reminder for collective engagement at a time when it is urgently needed. I fear that maybe it's only because of my immediate proximity to this seismic shift that I am unable to think of much else, unable to look back.

Three days on and every action, every ritual is tinged with repressed panic. I leave the house, having to physically distance myself from the screen that told me what was happening, moving forward minute by minute until night became morning. That screen, affixed to the wall as if it were a vacuous portal, would drive me to conflate real events with some kind of perverse cinematic sequence. Now reality is the movie.

The End has simultaneously occurred and is occurring. It is easier to locate the historic ruptures—be it within a context of political turmoil, or the history of art and its criticism—than it is to capture or understand how The End is a lived sentiment. If The End has already happened, then we are always still implicated in it. I think I've momentarily become less interested in the question of *what* has brought us here, and far more preoccupied with the question of *how* we are able to persist.

Today I ventured as far as I could from that screen, and wound up across the city at the Serpentine Gallery. Not organized enough today to sufficiently plan a route, I was pleasantly surprised to find a comprehensive exhibition of works by Etel Adnan—*The Weight of the World*. Often we strive to find meaning only when and where we want it to be. But as I write, I know that it was here, in the most inconvenient of places, sought only through my need to retreat and forget, where something began to emerge from nothingness.



Inside the exhibition, I am first met with early canvases—bright, responsive, and saturated with melancholic sincerity. I understand rather quickly why the artist is often referred to as a Baudelarian colourist. A block of amber, a red sun. Adnan had fallen in love with Sausalito's Mount Tamalpais in the 1970s and began a series, encompassing both paintings and prose, of attempts to understand it, to locate it. For her – and indeed for us viewers – a painting is a territory within which dynamic events occur. How else can one define painting? Right now it is the act of exhaling.

At this moment I am also thinking about what it means to be not of one's time, or even ahead of it. Often the concept of time is trivialized in the form of an aged cliché. Now it is fashionable to try and rewrite history, granting the chance for artists late in life to think retrospectively, giving credit where it is due. But time for Adnan is made complicated by enframement, by the boundaries of the canvas. Nothing about her, or indeed the work, is finished. The work is poignant because it is defiantly *not of this time*. It has happened, and is still happening. I feel safe here inside the open wound.

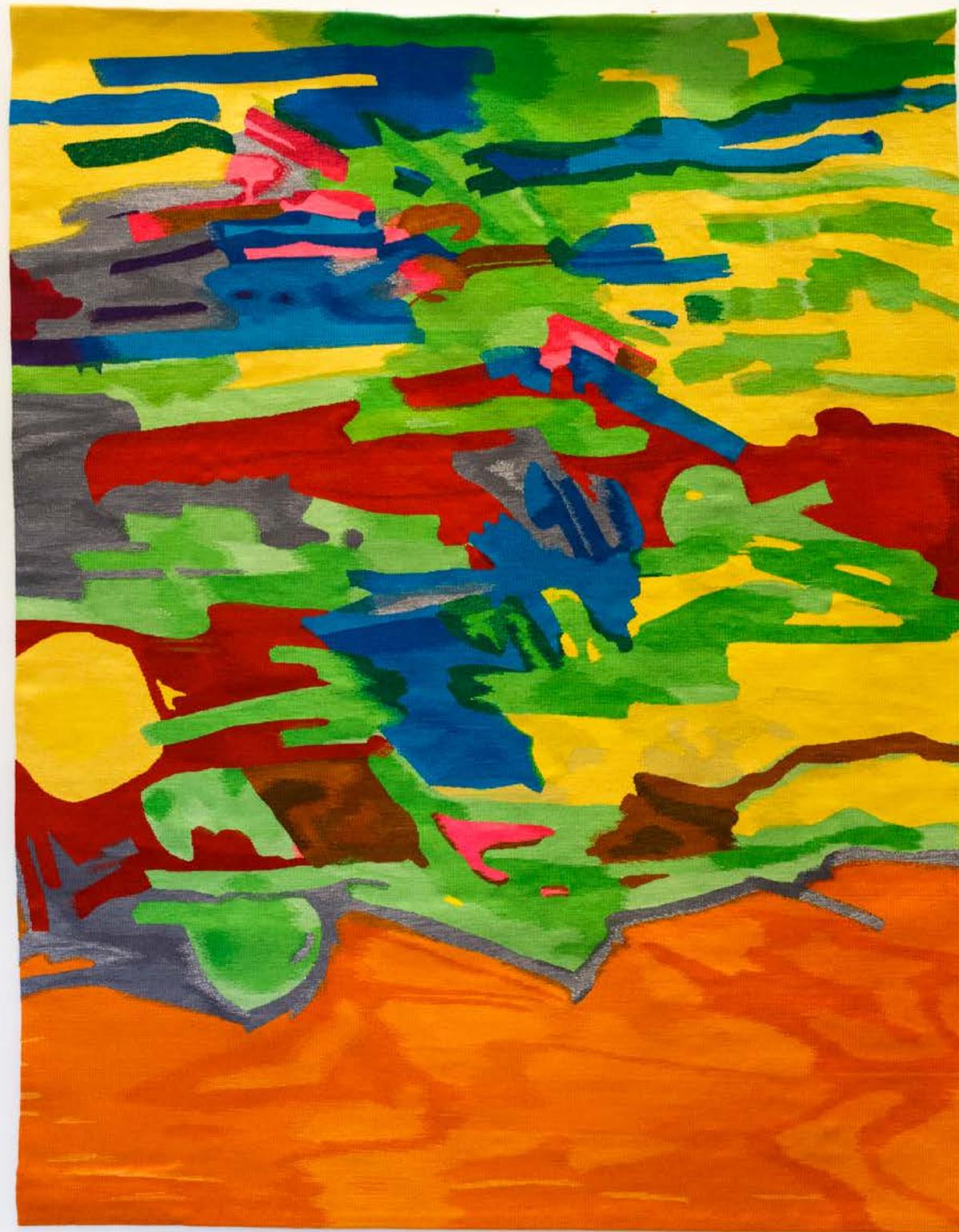
I am thinking about economies of loss in the work of Etel Adnan. This particular methodology is not new—I know this. But after *The End* takes place, what are we to do? I could think about how global diaspora are depicted and reflected back in a post-documentarian aesthetics of exile, or how Adnan's multidisciplinary approach as a painter, poet, filmmaker functions to renegotiate and rewrite her

identity as an artist, as a maker, as a Lebanese woman. Instead, I am caught in a space between oscillating poles of blue and red, of light and dark, of image and after-image, of circles and squares. It is within this space that I am attempting to elucidate how a slow encounter can foster a more immediate, harmonious formulation about Adnan's work. Rather than perceiving this space as lost, or worse entropic, I am beginning to see how it can be a site for burgeoning potential.

I stood among her delicate leporellos, folding out infinitely like quiet accordions. Within these works I see her calling as a polymath begin to seep out. At once a writer, a painter, and a draughtsperson for micro and macroscopic time, she tells stories about her family, of genocide, of accountability. These works are urgent but subdued—a merger of my various states of being at present. For Adnan, the act of making may in part be a process of catharsis. I think that this process is still occurring, gathering up those near it regardless of whether or not they choose to really look or read. The damages left behind by rhetoric affect those within Adnan's proximity and those in this country. The failure of policy and its material action becomes difficult to bear. We see how we have been led to this point, and now, three days on from the precipice, have fallen into a fever dream.

Having realized the temporal potency available in this combination of unravelling text and image, one cannot help but think of these leporellos in relation to cinematic diegesis. Maybe it could be considered a Deleuzian object, where the time-image is activated to create slippage between the real and the imaginary. How are we urged to think of the ways in which we exist inside this same narrative, or at least simultaneously crossing between like-narratives? We are left to wonder how we might go on.

Around a corner there are ceramics. In these precarious works Adnan's forms appear slightly more chaotic and in-transit—I recall Sonia Delaunay, also





the Suprematist wedge. But it is the honesty, the borderline naivety in these works that form the crest of the wave for me. Scanning the corridor I realized that the work seems hardly there at all. A combination of so many simultaneous factors—her life, my life, existence inside a spherical globe—are collapsing into one another, but there is an urge to make sense of it, to try and rebuild.

In a series of new works titled *Le poids du monde 1-20*, we find a return to the circle, to the sun. From these works the exhibition as a whole takes its name—*The Weight of the World*. Like a set of tarot cards, these celestial tokens seem to offer the chance of endless possibility, which comes as a reassurance. In a greatly abbreviated segment of Joanne Kyger's poem *Night Palace* the poet intonates that the past keeps happening ahead of us. I think that this sentiment is no more apt than here, in a place where we encounter artworks that may not insist on holding a mirror up to us, but do so nonetheless. An unforgiving, yet necessary, infinite return.

There is an intrinsic immediacy to Adnan's works, but they are simultaneously moving forward and looking back. I came here because I wanted to forego my own being, and in *The End* I was entangled in everything once again, but there was no pain. I read an excerpt of one of Adnan's texts where she says that, when the fluidity of the mind collides with the fluidity of being, we experience some kind of illumination. It did feel warm. Then I went home. Ω

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## J E S S I C A S I M A S

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# SEEKING THRESHOLDS

**JACLYN BRUNEAU**

*I am a person who continually destroys the possibilities of a future because of the numbers of alternative viewpoints I can focus on in the present.*

Doris Lessing  
from *The Golden Notebook*

*Holy Ghost People* (1967) is a 16mm cinema verité documentary which captures an evening in a Pentecostal Christian sect in West Virginia. People congregate in the hope of receiving the Holy Spirit, that ecstatic, horrifying experience we've seen in cult films like *Jesus Camp* (2006), the experience which Shaw has here dubbed quickening. "Quickening," is defined as the first time a pregnant woman can feel her foetus and as the death of an immortal by beheading (Shaw 2014).

In his video work *Quickeners* (2014), Jeremy Shaw plays god and re-edits *Holy Ghost People*, this time set 400 years after the extinction of humans as we know them today. He distorts the

speech of the participants in a convincing glossolalia, inserting subtitles to give himself *carte blanche* on the new, imagined contents of the scenes.

The narrative line appears somewhat similar to the original: a camera in a truck drives up the hill of a small rural community as an authoritative British narrator provides an introduction. Referring to the congregation, the voice-over states: “Their aesthetic appearance is not unlike that of any quantum human; their biological and technological makeup the same, and their direct neural link to The Hive concurrent with our unified quantum human society” (Shaw 2014). It’s a time “when humans become equal with machines” (Kobialka 2014), and I reflexively (unfortunately) recall the hedonistic, deathly bored and world-hating protagonist of Michel Houellebecq’s *The Possibility of an Island* (2006)—a deeply misogynist, dystopian sci-fi novel that Shaw cites as influence for this work, alongside Ursula Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), literature on the history of snake handling and others. Le Guin wrote that science fiction is never a prediction of the future but rather an assessment of the present, a salient description when considering each fold of *Quickeners*.

“They are immortal quantum humans like you and I,” the narrator intones about the congregant, using the second person to implicate the viewer as native, thrust into that time and space as a participant. “But there is one thing currently separating them from our social order...” (Shaw 2014)

Where the source footage offers a peek into worship behaviours of the American Bible belt, Shaw presumes instead that the individuals pictured are sufferers of “Human Atavism Syndrome” or HAS. This fictional condition’s root, *atavism*, refers to lost traits from human history (be it biological or cultural) making a sudden return after centuries of disuse. Think ancestral trauma, genetic memory. It’s therefore implied that the sincerely religious behaviours exhibited in *Holy Ghost People* are, in *Quickeners*, relegated to discarded traits of a distant cultural past. The behaviours dubbed atavistic include “dancing, convulsive dancing, singing, shrieking, shouting, preaching, praying, testimonial-giving, speaking in tongues and snake handling” (Shaw 2014) many of which are of course inherent not only to religious practices but to life itself.

The film quietly culminates toward the moment that poisonous serpents are removed from crates and handled in worship. Shaw expresses his own “fondness for

the manipulative possibility of the cinematic experience,” (Natale 2014) and his meddling manifests in part via the soundscape which utilizes tones proven to provoke anxiety. In the moment of quickening, a “neural disconnect” (Shaw 2014) occurs between whomever is experiencing it and “The Hive” —understood as any of the overarching factions that bond humans culturally, emotionally, intellectually or socially, *en masse*, like *The Cloud* or *The Matrix*. It looks like ecstasy: the *après minuit* effects of the street drug ecstasy, the ecstasy of Saint Therese cast in white marble by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1647–52), an encounter with god-cum-orgasm, a real treat.

A quiet judgment could be read of these religious behaviours if we look beyond the work’s construction as science fiction. Some public response to this work posed questions around the ethics of Shaw’s strategic removal of *Holy Ghost People*’s context and his revision of the film re-placing the congregation into a category of disability (albeit fictional). The answer to this question of Shaw’s

ethics, however, relies more on one's valuation of the sacred; in its acts of de- and re-contextualization, *Quickeners* commits no more heinous a crime than any meme.



I suspect it's the so-called neural disconnect that has long had Jeremy Shaw so focused on the speculative values of altered states, induced by drugs and otherwise. His 8-channel video work *DMT* (2004) documents the experience of three people (one of which is the artist himself) dosed up on dimethyltryptamine, the drug that the human brain releases when the body thinks it is going to die. In *Best Minds Part One* (2007), he slows down home video camera footage of straight edge punks as they mosh with abandon in their sobriety. In *Degenerative Imaging* (2015) he cuts a series of glow-in-the-dark vinyl replicas of 3D SPECT scans, which approximate the metabolism and blood flow of a brain after different kinds of substance use.

Anyone who has experienced moments of quickening struggles to recount the experience. The default effort usually involves a chain of interruptive short narratives between passionate expressions and head shaking, muttering "so crazy... so crazy..." It's a compounded problem: memory failure, disbelief, the difficulty of language.

Perhaps it's a blessing in disguise, having no choice but to keep something for yourself. There is something strangely somber about speaking of speechlessness—constructing an arrow to point to your condition in the attempt to excuse yourself from explication.

The look on a child's face when they're withholding a secret. Tears of joy shed with no witnesses borne. An eerie chain of coincidences that, to the subject, is infinitely more profound than the sum of its narrative parts.

In her essay *Notes Towards the Eroticism of Pedagogy*,

Frances Stark writes that someone once told her "you tend to excuse, rather than express." To this, she admits, "it's a brutal criticism, yes, but also somewhat of a positive description of even my most articulated accomplishments. To utter, 'I'm too sad to tell you,' is to excuse oneself from not telling whatever it is one could tell if only one weren't so incapacitated by the emotion accompanying the temporarily untellable; to title does so much more" (Stark 2008, 130-131).

But where several of Shaw's projects in the past attempt to relay the unspeakable, they have often fallen in the realm of stylized documentary, alluding to unseen depth but failing to penetrate observation. Any one act completed by an individual in "real life" is a more engaged method toward thinking through transcendence. Language is fluid, new materialism uncovers objecthood (in this case, artworks) as fluid, and experiences of transcendence are certainly fluid. How do you erect an ice sculpture from boiling water? The effort is noble given the virtual impenetrability of the topic, but what function does this work serve? Who is it for?

Is it a punk intervention into a contemporary art world allergic to

sentimentality? Are we uninterested in—or unwilling to admit desire for—experiences that might bear the watermark of religious (read: outdated, naïf, world-fearing) or new age exploration of self? Are these works a way of saying *try this*? Or is Shaw acting on behalf of those already seeking thresholds, at once destigmatizing and corroborating the potential of those choices in the exhibition space, thus linking transcendent experience to *intellectualized* reflection (and therefore greater perceived value)?

Much like looking up a word to make sure you're using it properly, Shaw has often turned to science in his practice, using its tools and modalities to relay the ineffable. *Degenerative Imaging (In the Dark)* (2015) is one example, providing an approximation of the physical effects of substance use as well as natural processes (dementia and the unaffected brain are included in the series). In another earlier series, he uses fingerprint technology to look at the effects of different kinds of music on the body. Each incarnation in this series is titled after the song he was listening to while he stamped his thumb, *Transcendental Capacity (The Chemical Brothers – One)* (2012) being one such example. The resulting images are mostly black negative space with fingerprints that have left behind colourful, spectral progressions beyond the skin. At the end of the day, though, how does looking at a mood ring teach you anything about your mood?

In an assessment of the non-mimetic, Casmier and Matthews reference Kant, writing, “A sense of the sublime occurs in the tension produced by our ability to conceive of, but not ‘present,’ an idea (Casmier and Matthews 1999, 168). The non-mimetic foregrounds this struggle, with a constant reminder that the ‘unpresentable exists’” (168). This offers one way to reflect on much of Shaw's oeuvre as his work points to these experiences without attempting overt translation, categorization, or truth claims. He seems more interested in suggesting that any number of things have the potential to warp and reform reality, so it might as well be you. Sometimes I imagine him as a peddler who opens both sides of his trench coat to reveal an endless array of wares, tools, tricks—the amusement park ride operator, the uncle who pulls a dollar from behind your ear, the friend with a baggie at the party.

Non-mimetic artwork “involve[s] its beholder, overcomes alienating conventions and human banality, undermines hegemonies, and invokes creativity, the sublime, presence and spirituality” (Casmier and Matthews 1999, 168).



What does this all suggest about the human desire to escape the self (and human communities) without dying? The *Holy Ghost People* were apparently stigmatized by those in their community who do not attend the service, believing them to be delusional, derided. Attitudes like this persist between people who actively seek thresholds and people who do not. Even in the bible, on the first instance of people speaking in tongues at Pentecost, onlookers ridiculed the apostles affected and accused them of being drunk. Interestingly, George Went Hensley, who has been variously disputed as the “progenitor and popularizer of Appalachian religious snake handling” had four wives and *was* apparently drunk all the time (Hood 2008), but I digress.

In capitalism, the body that matters is the one who is able to respond at any given moment: mentally, physically, emotionally. It is the body that can answer the phone at all hours, always ready for duty and willingly subject to randomized drug testing from their employer. These are the bodies that get jobs. These jobs are the ones everyone asks about. To seek thresholds is seen as disabling the body from its function in the ultimate role as a player in the movement of capital.

Even when it comes to sex, one escape not yet prodded by Shaw, this militant, hypodermic adherence to the bleak capitalist reality stands. According to a recent study published in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, millennials in their early 20s are half as sexually active as their Gen X counterparts were at the same age (Batchelor Warnke 2016). Melissa Batchelor Warnke sees “A culture of overwork and an obsession with career status, a fear of becoming emotionally involved and losing control, an online-dating milieu that privileges physical appearance above all, anxieties surrounding consent, and an uptick in the use of libido-busting antidepressants” (Batchelor

Warnke 2016). While the value of sex itself varies vastly for different people, Batchelor Warnke is astute in assessing this decline in sexual relations as a symptom of this generation's priorities and self-evaluation in relation to current economic conditions.



The volume of the ambient score rises, layered with sounds proven to provoke discomfort and anxiety in human listeners. The tape is slowed down and quickeners are highlighted in electrifying neon blues and purples as their bodies flutter to different edges of the space. The blurry quality of the image thickens with uncertainty as a young girl with a twitching torso reaches for the serpent, all attention drawn to its unpredictable body.

*Quickeners'* multifaceted narrative inflames and makes personal the *ad nauseam* threats on our inner lives caused by the technosocial, accelerationist, capitalist diminuendo that compromises the way we access joy and each other, perhaps pointing to transcendence as an outlying apparatus toward deterritorialisation.

Beyond observing, Shaw transmutes the contents of the scenes of *Quickeners* into form, an attempted induction no stranger than many emergent treatments available today: crystal sound baths (meditate while the healer strikes and strokes a variety of bowls cast from crystals crushed to dust), electromagnetic radiation therapy (body wrapped in copper taffeta), or pranic energy healing (your jewelry sits in saltwater while the healer pulls at the air above different areas on your body, cutting imaginary excesses like rope and throwing them into a plastic bucket of water).

Effects may vary. Ω

*These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all...*

(from Mark verses 17-18).

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## J A C L Y N B R U N E A U

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# AFTER LONDON: or Apparitions of nested time

ALEX BORKOWSKI

The event occurred on December 12, 2015. I had been living in London for three years. My work visa was nearing its expiration date and my employer had agreed to sponsor me for a new one. On this day, I had just sat down to eat lunch at my desk when I received an email informing me of the failure of my application. Stricken, I immediately left the office. It was an unusually bright winter's day and I felt overly visible to the people milling about the streets of Islington. I walked quickly, trying not to cry, failing. I stopped in a small public square, surrounded on all sides by black wrought iron fencing and tall white-trimmed Victorian houses. The park contained a circular path, oak trees, a gazebo and some low stone steps upon which I sat. In this setting I experienced a series of simultaneous and contradictory visions, which the following text describes. Twenty minutes or so passed before I left the park, returned to my desk and the soup that had only just gone cold. In that time, it was as if the planes of space and time that formed the horizon lines of past and future were folded in and under themselves, surrounding me in irregular geometries like those of a crumpled piece of paper.

It would be several months before I would ultimately lose my leave to remain in the United Kingdom in March, 2016. Although this moment held fast in my memory as the definitive marker of the end, I dismissed these revelations as simply the side effects of personal grief. However, given recent events and the newly precarious status of the three million European nationals living in the U.K., I wonder whether such experience might be prescient. There is no return; perhaps all that is left is to convert this event into an affirmative split, to commit to the belief that "happening is when appearing is the same thing as disappearing" (Badiou 2005). It is under these auspices that I wish to note the following exchanges between my body and various non-human elements:

# 1

My body became massive, fleshy and excessive. In the weeks prior, I had experienced a series of nightmares that precisely mimicked the mundane details of my life; I would go about my daily routine but I would be ceaselessly screaming. Acquaintances, or their dreamt counterparts, turned their backs to dissuade my vocal assaults, but I continued to emit a wrenching, bodily howl for what felt like hours. And here it was made manifest: the city whirred on whilst I cried, expanding in the still park, flesh falling off bones like shit (Artaud 1976, 571). This feeling of somatic crisis was perhaps due to the antithetical nature of my position to the disembodied Home Office, who spoke to me only through no-reply emails and a call centre that charged £1.50 per minute to speak to an anonymous agent. Their verdict in denying my visa application was that I was too cumbersome, not liquid enough to participate in the ebb and flow of the globalized world.

In *After London*, an early work of post-apocalyptic fiction written in 1885 by Richard Jeffries, Great Britain falls victim to a reversal of magnetic currents caused by “the passage of an enormous dark body through space” (Jeffries [1885] 1975, 27). In addition to a general increased inclination towards “wickedness,” this astronomical anomaly results in a fatal shift in the tides. When, at a later date, I heard a friendly voice over the telephone—belonging to a man named Kenneth, who had called my employer to discuss my appeal—I was rendered speechless by the uncanny-ness of speaking to a human surrogate for an entity that had been as obscure and dispassionate as Jeffries’ dark magnetic force in the skies.

# 2

My body shrank. My sternum inverted. I was aware of the smallness of my skeleton compared to all that surrounded me - finer than the branches of the trees, flimsier than the ironwork fence. I felt insectile, suddenly subjected to the high pitch of miniature things. I saw myself at a distance from above, one of many insignificant beings under the glazed eye of one of nearly as many recording devices. In 2013, the British Security Industry Authority estimated that there were 5.9 million CCTV cameras in the U.K. —one for every 11 people (Barrett 2013). The result is a proliferation of an incalculable number of images, the vast majority of which will go unseen by human eyes until such rare occasions when they prominently intervene. I once called the police after witnessing an incident on a quiet street while walking home at night. I was never called for questioning since, in all likelihood, they had the means to see it too. After the significance of my testimony was usurped, I went about my life waiting for this nebulous and inaccessible world of fleeting images to spring to action—awaiting the ominous advent of a more sound, more real, albeit immaterial version of myself to supersede.

# 3

The houses that surrounded the square became lighter. The even forms of the bricks, windows and doors were unchanged, but their material heft had evaporated; they perched on the pavement like pieces of a paper diorama that might at any moment tip and land silently in undamaged wholes. The previous autumn, the South London Gallery was subsumed in *In-Between*: Thomas Hirschhorn's frenetic sculpture of false walls assembled with packing tape, shards of cracked Styrofoam tumbling from the ceiling, and piles of rubble lovingly composed of painted cardboard bricks. Within the material fray, a quote from Antonio Gramsci's prison notebooks was scrawled on a banner: "Destruction is difficult; indeed it is as difficult as creation." The astonishing intricacy and awesome scale of Hirschhorn's work created a triumphant, euphoric portrait of disaster that seemed to speak to a widespread contemporary craving for collapse. There is a gleeful tenor to the nihilistic language of accelerationist theory (Avanessian and McKay 2014, 4) that is not dissimilar to the spectacle of mainstream disaster movies (indeed Hollywood has provided cinema audiences at least six separate high definition visions of the destruction of London's great landmarks in the last five years). However, the presence of Gramsci's weighty words suggests that Hirschhorn in fact explores something far more complex. Discussing the exhibition, the artist disclosed his lack of concern for the art object as it came to be exhibited: "My idea is not to make something impressive [...] my idea is to work a lot" (Hirschhorn 2015). At once affirmative and ambivalent towards precarity, *In-Between* wavers between the lightness of its materials and the immense labour required to assemble and ultimately disassemble its components—operating, as promised, in-between a slow struggle to revise hegemonic systems and a burning desire to accelerate them into precipitating their own ruination (Reed 2014, 523).

# 4

I became aware of the base materials of my surroundings within an expanded view of time: the lichen on the trees, for instance, a species that had born witness to the extinction of so many others; or the refined steps and porticos of Portland stone, formed in Jurassic era but in essence no different than the sediment that builds up in an electric kettle and deposits hard flakes of lime scale in cups of tea. Millions of years compressed and I saw myself and the pretty square submerged in a warm sea, calcifying, boiled. Again, I think of Jeffries' vision of England gone wild following the redistribution of the earth's water. He provides a detailed account of the filling of the ports with sediment and the altered flows of the Thames and the Severn, which ultimately form a giant lake over the entirety of the south west U.K. The passage of time sees London abandoned and submerged to become a stagnant, putrid swamp: "There exhales from this oozy mass so fatal a vapour that no animal can endure it [...] for all the rottenness of a thousand years and of many hundred millions of human beings is there festering under the stagnant water" (Jeffries [1885] 1975, 68-69). This speculative future now feels like an eerie premonition. A change of landscape is immanent: the burning of fossil fuels, the increasingly rapid melting rate of the polar ice caps (the residue of long dead organisms; geological time collapses again). Ω

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## ALEX BORKOWSKI

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# The Wreck of Hope

*Visual Activism in the Time of Mass Extinction*

Activist artists who are concerned with animal welfare work to expand the political and ethical engagements of their audiences, colleagues, and themselves, mobilizing discourse around the urgent issues of the 21st century to redefine what activist art means today. Often the interests of animal-focused art-makers intersect with those who devote their practice to related areas; the 'expanded field' of animal studies in art extends to gender, capitalism, the environment, and climate change.

For example, in April 2016 the Cape Farewell collective produced a print, video, and interactive project titled *The Milking Parlour* which dealt with the general evils—to the planet and to the cows—of industrialized dairy farming. Cape Farewell, founded in 2001 by sculptor-photographer David Buckland, has as its main focus the representation, research, and political organization of Arctic environmentalism. Though Buckland has ostensibly aligned himself with the “rebel creativity” movement, which is part of the alter-globalization struggle for a world of economic equality, environmental sustainability, and social justice,





Cape Farewell's most recognizable manifestation is its series of artists' expeditions to the 80th parallel and beyond. The collective has transported, among others, Jarvis Cocker, Anthony Gormley, and Laurie Anderson on schooner *The Noorderlicht*, paradoxically using the shipping lanes now opened by climate change. These artists' politics of aesthetics and ecologies are hopeful and relentlessly energetic, operating from the position that both climate change and the resulting deaths of particular animal species is something that is stoppable, even reversible. Activism's visuality is inextricable here from archived forms of mediagenic documentation (objects, photographs, videos, and texts) which in turn easily become reified.

Examining the limitations of this type of visual activism framed against, for example, a jaunty tale of *encountering a polar bear* versus the persisting reality of the decimation of the remaining polar bear population by starvation, exhaustion, and drowning made me wonder if *any* form of artistic expression can cope with *irreversibility*—acknowledging that that things have gone too far; that the planet is lost.

Concurrent to these thoughts I discovered *The Wreck of Hope* (2014), a calmly apocalyptic installation by Australian-Kiwi sculptor Michele Beevors. Beevors is also a professor, a Columbia University School of the Arts graduate by way of Sydney, overseeing the sculpture program at the Otago Polytechnic Dunedin School of the Arts in New Zealand.

*The Wreck of Hope* was an exhibition held at the Forrester Gallery in Oamaru, New Zealand in February 2015. The sculptural sequence featured life-size, anatomically structured skeletons made of individually hand-knitted bones assembled joint by joint. The plinths of the sculptures consist of tires, inflatable rafts, coolers, and milk crates, festooned with charm-bracelet-sized tools or fast-food children's meal toys, suggesting both a shipwreck and the tons of garbage the ocean is awash in.

This was an activist artist rejecting masculine positivity. The sixth mass extinction cannot be protested away. Attention must be turned to a more contemplative form of action: of mourning and acknowledging the finality of an entire species gone from the world. *The Wreck of Hope* suggests that resignation and acceptance are *also* be forms of resistance.

By removing the resistance to the problem, and the transfer of human intersubjective properties to the sensuous world of commodity objects (which courts the very betrayal of activist engagement) the cycle of reification is disrupted. This allows for a direct emotional interaction with the art and, in thought, the animals it represents. Beevors offers a provocative proposal to think through, considering in the process what is productive and useful about visual representation in today's precarious environmental context. Beevors also identifies numerous potential dangers that demand critical attention, even as our species, along with the others, winds down. Meanwhile, her work helps us reexamine what we think about socially engaged art.

I interviewed Beevors in July 2016, as she was preparing the figures from the *The Wreck of Hope* along with some new skeletons for an exhibition in Vienna in 2017.

**\*JMC\*** You teach sculpture and consider yourself a sculptor, but *The Wreck of Hope* seems to share elements with both conceptual global-scale installation and, I would argue, performance. Is sculpture, or installation, or something else the correct terminology for *The Wreck of Hope*?

**\*MB\*** For me, making anything always begins thinking through the object, and the relations between objects. It extends out towards installation, craft, etc. from the object.

**\*JMC\*** The title is important. Can you describe the connection between your work and the Caspar David Frie-



drich painting, *The Wreck of Hope?* (Potter 2007, 58) What kind of associations might be drawn between these works, directly or intuitively?

**\*MB\*** It turns out I'm really very interested in that period of history from 1776 to now. In less than 300 years we have gone from being relatively ignorant of the undiscovered to the position we find ourselves in now, leaving no stone unturned. History tells us about huge discoveries made in the name of science exploration; the relation between science and art was very important, but these discoveries rode on the back of plunder and exploitation. It might seem trite but I grew up in a period where the most popular form of entertainment was the disaster movie. I have thought the image of nature fighting back was inevitable as in the Friedrich painting, but now I am convinced otherwise.

**\*JMC\*** I remember a lecture you gave in which you said you believe, as I do, that it's too late for the animals; humans seem determined to destroy all of them along with ourselves. In the same talk, while discussing the grief we feel over the sixth mass extinction, you talked more generally about how, paradoxically, when we begin to let go of our grief, we also become farther away from who we are grieving, which is another sort of sadness. How do mourning and acceptance register as activism, or do they?



**\*MB\*** I think I was talking about finding comfort in personal grief. My work *The Wreck of Hope* echoes this personal grief, but the inevitability of the sixth extinction causes sadness mixed with panic. At least that's how I see it, because the worst hasn't yet happened, even though this is a very leaky ship. The sadness and rage comes from knowing that there will be no elephants and polar bears; they will enter the realm of dinosaurs, slightly out of reach for future generations. There will be no one left to mourn for us, once we have destroyed the planet.

Homo sapiens put a lot of faith in science to resurrect things we've already destroyed. I was just reading about efforts in America to resurrect the Passenger pigeon, for example. I think that there has been a shift in attitudes to animal welfare in Western countries, to abandon factory farmed chickens because consumers are not buying those eggs. England and Australia have moved to abandon fox hunting, and greyhound racing. I think things are changing only too slowly, much too slowly.

**\*JMC\*** *The Wreck of Hope* was a very popular installation in the Forrester Gallery which, rejecting the white cube as art space, was both somewhat nautical and a bit ecclesiastical. The work was shown in a sequence of rooms, evoking a kind of ritual experience. People were also able to get very close to each skeleton. Tell me a little bit about how the site and installation worked.

**\*MB\*** It's funny how these things happen. A colleague of mine, Peter Cleverley, knew someone who worked there and I was asked by the curator, Alice Lake Hammond, and the director, Jane McKnight, to do the show. The work was already in progress as I had been knitting various pieces of it for nine years at that time. It simply seemed correct as those big Corinthian columns and high ornate ceilings harked back for me to [the idea of] the museum. The building had been originally commissioned by the Bank of New South Wales.

**\*JMC\*** One of the skeletal figures is that of a human, who has a name, "Carl," and even a presence outside

the world of *The Wreck of Hope*. Other prominent anatomical reconstructions are the skeletons of a horse, a turtle, a snake, and a dolphin. Was there ever a question of what animals you might include? What drew you specifically to these animals? Are you making more for your upcoming show in Vienna, or do you have plans to create more—and if so, what type of animals and why?

**\*MB\*** I remember quite early on as a student thirty years ago coming up with the idea of knitting skeletons, but I put it aside because I wasn't really ready for the labour involved with it, and other things happened. I began the [figure of the skeleton] as a portrait of [Kiwi writer and artist] Carl A. Mears but it became prophetic. When my father became ill my relationship with him was siphoned through relationships with animals: horses, dogs, mice, guinea pigs, chickens, turtles, cats and budgerigars. So in the beginning I was looking at these animals as pets, and then I went to the museum in Sydney where I grew up. They have had in the past a large collection of comparative anatomy on display in black display cases, and I remember it distinctly from my childhood, and then from art school in the 1980s. They have a famous horse and rider display which I had seen many times, but never really looked at closely, as well as dolphins and kangaroos among the "exotic" animals from other places.

It occurred to me only recently that the animals that I have represented are the survivors, they are not on the endangered species list (far from it) but they are doomed nonetheless. For about ten years I have been chipping away at a list of works: skeletons of a mob of kangaroo, an emu, a crocodile, a flock of cockatoo. These are some of the new works...

**\*JMC\*** *The Wreck of Hope* took tremendous time and effort to plan, design and produce by knitting the forms; merging through the contact of human and nonhuman form is realized in fiber. The audience is denied that same experience since their impression, compared to yours, is fleeting, and they cannot touch the work. How does this create an opportunity for a potentially gendered reception? For me, your utilization of touch, the tactile dimension, intersects with the visual, and cannot be emphasized enough. The senses mix to create an altogether other interface and encounter.

**\*MB\*** I don't really mind if people touch the work, soft sculpture almost demands it. I like the thought of the work being discoloured over time as people touch it, or collecting dust as an explicit reminder of our influence over everything.

One of the main ideas in my work since I left art school has been the relationship of materials to the formal and conceptual problems of both sculpture and gender, in other words, what to make and what to make it out of. There is an act of love and gift-giving associated with knitting, of shared information passed down through the hands of women, so anyone who has ever picked up a knitting needle or watched someone else knit must understand this gift in terms of labour, because it takes time to do, a lot of time. One stitch at a time.

My understanding of gift-giving has been informed by [the French sociologist] Marcel Mauss and his idea of reciprocity as *aggressive*. I think that we as human beings have never really understood the implications of gift-giving in Mauss' terms, because we think we can go on just taking whatever we want. That's what we have learned from capitalism.

**\*JMC\*** Through its use of animal forms, its title, and its use of fiber and touches of humor, *The Wreck of Hope* could be taken to reference, or perhaps comment upon, two seminal works besides the Friedrich in the canon of German art: Kurt Schwitters' 1937 *Merzbau* and Joseph Beuys' *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974). Were these conscious decisions? What becomes possible, or is closed off for you, by the type of associations people come up with, especially if these associations are outside of your original intentions?

**\*MB\*** I am completely happy for the work to be understood through the lens of art history. In fact that [relationship] is important, and the titles signal this connection: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* by Rembrandt [corresponding to Beevors' *The Anatomy Lesson*], the amazing works of George Stubbs on horse anatomy [corresponding to Beevors' *After Stubbs*], but



also *Merzbau* by Schwitters and Louise Nevelson's shadow boxes. I believe that the model of the artist as an ignorant savant stumbling through the present and responding to stimuli is one way of working, but I know too much about the history of sculpture to say that I wasn't influenced this way or that way. It is interesting to me to think about the relationship of Beuys to the coyote and in relation to my work *After Stubbs*. On one level the Beuys work is about the relations of power. This power isn't so much reversed in *After Stubbs* as it is equalized. Death being the great equalizer.

**\*JMC\*** In a stern critique of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Donna Haraway talks about the relationship of aging to understanding the process of "becoming animal" (Haraway 2008, 30). Thinking about the challenge and fatigue of forcing your fingers and hands into the repetitive and difficult contortions required to use these rough fibers to make the knitted forms, do you see a relationship between the perils

of gender, aging, “becoming animal,” and extinction?

**\*MB\*** That is really an interesting question. I think that one of my biggest motivations to make this work was turning forty and becoming invisible overnight. I’m sure a lot of women feel this way. I think there are analogies between this feeling of invisibility and becoming animal. In Australia this would be called “letting yourself go” or “becoming feral.”

**\*JMC\*** In the context of contemporary art are there particular, even unique, things that you believe directly address extinction outside of the normal, positivist, activist canon can reveal?

**\*MB\*** One of the problems facing contemporary art is that artists sometimes see the rise of the Anthropocene as yet another good topic to make art about—but I see art a little differently and more as an agitation on the level of culture, like a tiny pebble in your shoe which at some point is going to cause a huge blood blister to form. Ten years ago, there was no one making work here [in the Antipodes] that had anything to do with animals or gender. Now you can’t go three feet without stumbling over a more politicized student. More power to the pebble.

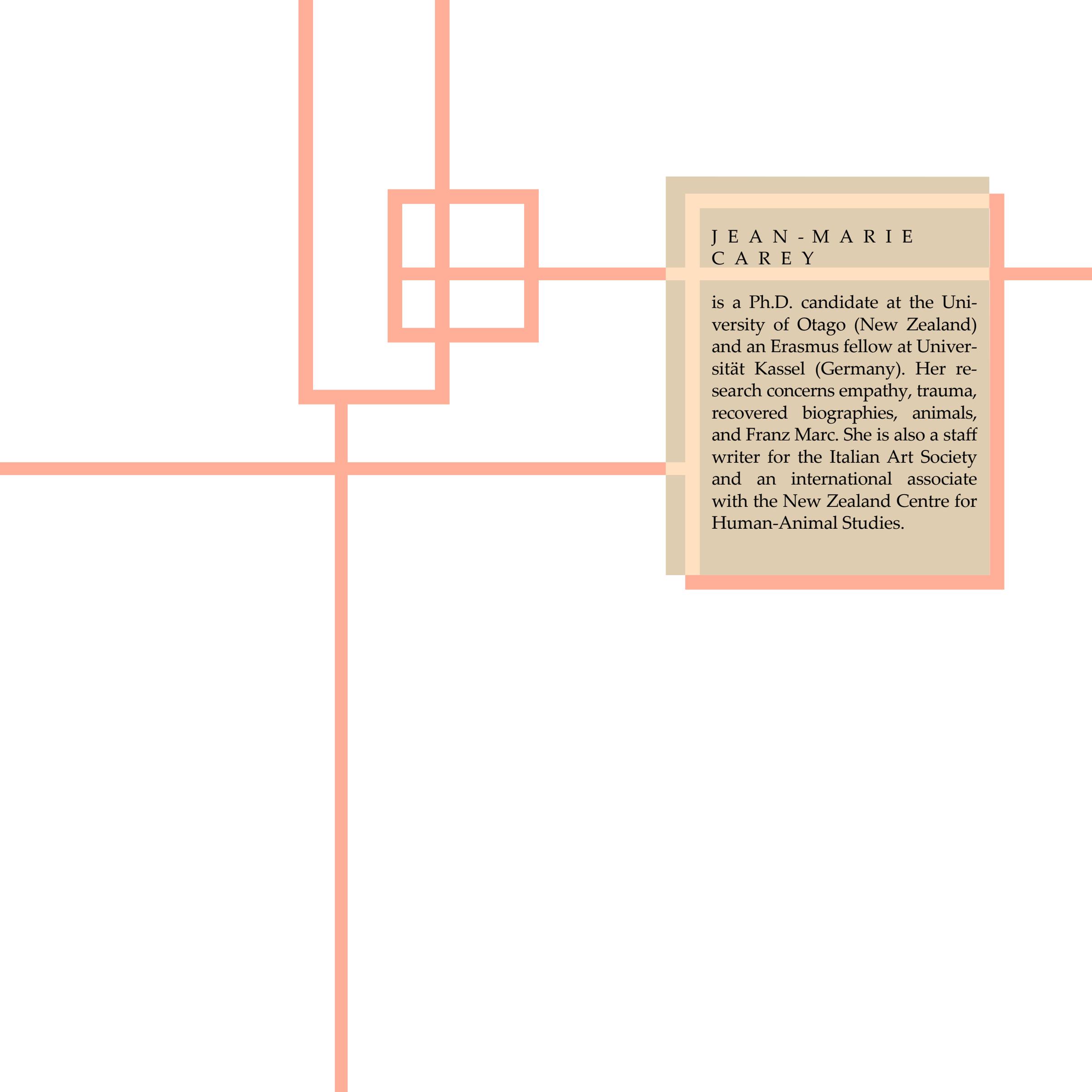
The other side of it is that here in New Zealand we have this idea that we are largely green, everything is close, and grass roots organizations flourish, because the government resources don’t stretch very far so local communities are helping out. That’s how Adrian [Hall, Beevors’ husband] and I became involved in with local conservation.

**\*JMC\*** To what extent, if any, does *The Wreck of Hope* function as a redemptive act in relation to the catastrophe we are now fully immersed in?

**\*MB\*** One of the few things I’m good at is making things. This for me is redemptive, in that it’s a working-through the issues and hypocrisies that I face every day. It’s the pebble in my shoe, too. Ω

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The image features a complex abstract graphic design composed of thick orange lines. A vertical line runs down the left side, intersecting a horizontal line that spans across the middle. To the right of this intersection, there is a grid of four squares. Further to the right, there are several overlapping rectangular blocks in shades of beige and light orange, which serve as a background for the text. The overall aesthetic is minimalist and geometric.

J E A N - M A R I E  
C A R E Y

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