Unknown Quantities #09

Finitudes

FINITUDES

UNKNOWN
QUANTITIES
#09

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EDITORS' NOTE

T he choice of pluralising "finitude" illustrates a will to refer to different boundaries and states of limitation that we all have experienced in many ways.

The Covid-19 pandemic engenders a sense of uncertainty and reminds us of the finite nature of human life. This forced break from our routine life made us re-evaluate our relationship with the natural world, as much as it helped humanity to acknowledge and contemplate its own deficiencies and boundaries.

In this edition of Unknown Quantities (UQ), we asked our contributors to reflect on the current period and share their personal narratives and experiences. Some speculated about alternative futures, while some fell into a state of profound melancholy when reflecting on the past, and others tried to live in the moment. We believe that finitudes represent our contemporary existential condition. In response to these multiple states of limitation, UQ9 places an emphasis on cognitive fluidity, encouraging thoughts to flow freely through diverse explorations of societal relationships, as well as the human and physical environment.

Art and design can be a means of observing and reflecting upon social issues – a sincere form of communication through which we convey sentiments, generating knowledge that enriches the understanding of the present and impels the imagination of the future. Increasingly we begin to see the dynamic link between art and design and the various intersecting crises in every corner of our global society. How can we use art and design to reflect upon and open up discussion about these crises? What part can they play in coming out of them? Do they enrich, transform, restore and question our world? What does this interplay look like? What better ways of living can we imagine and design for ourselves?

Beyond the production of art using diverse media and the conceptual output of text, we have laid out a suggested reading of the issue without being too prescriptive. We invite the reader to start their journey at any junction they choose and to allow their multiple senses to evolve. Let the social role of art and design break open the finitude of these pages.

DESIGN & EDITORIAL

ALEX DE LA PEZA
DARIA MIRICOLA
DAISY PEARSON
MARTIN SIGLER
LINGFEI SONG
YOUN SONG LEE
MATT URPANI
JINGWEN WENG

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JINGWEN WENG

TOGETHER

WE HAVE

FORGED

LINKS

The Paper Ashtray

WEAVING CODE

How do you feel about burning the candle at both ends?

Be ready to be challenged on your presumptions about art and design.

AMANDINE DAVID
COMPUTATIONAL DESIGN:
METRIEK-SEBASTIAAN
LEENKNEGT
EXCEL DIGITAL LOOM:
KYLIE LE
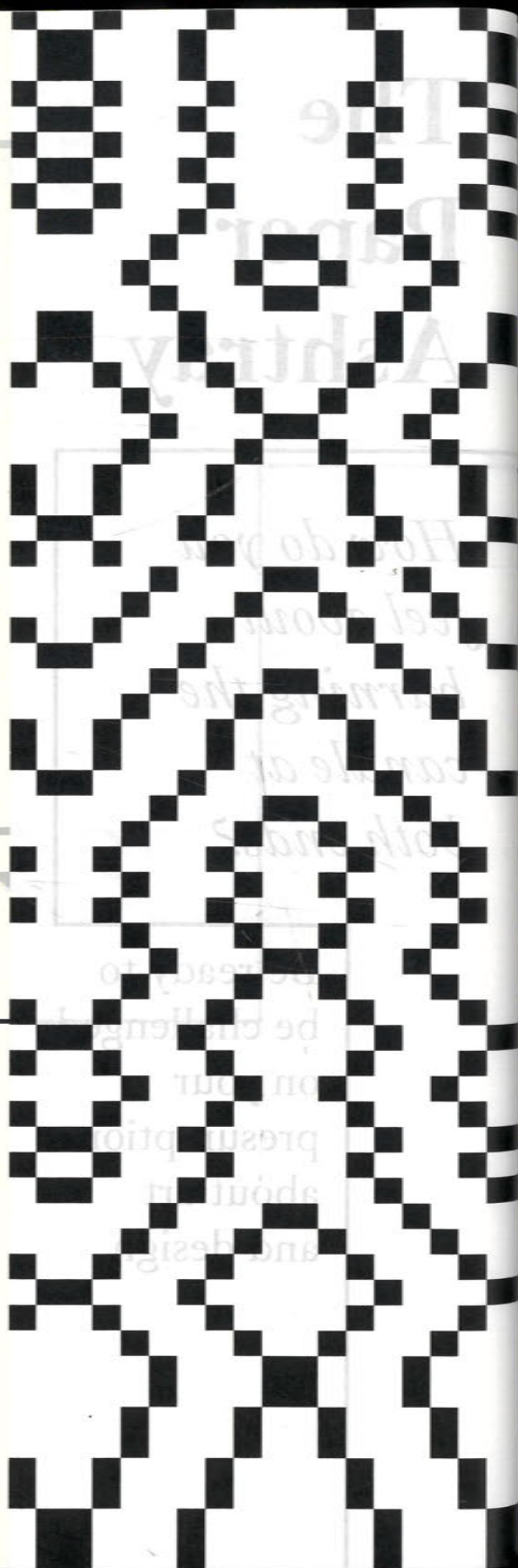
WEAVING CODE

Finitude

(n) A challenge to be overcome through connection

AMANDINE DAVID
COMPUTATIONAL DESIGN:
METRIEK-SEBASTIAAN
LEENKNEGT
EXCEL DIGITAL LOOM:
KYLIE LE

During an informal interview, Amandine David, a designer-researcher based in Brussels, confided that the craft technique particularly close to her heart is weaving. Indeed, her latest work shows a rather novel use of the practice. Using 3D printing, she creates woven baskets that reflect her ambition to explore the limits of craft in its traditional definition.

Weaving has a keen metaphorical significance, which is why we have used it as the skeleton of our publication. Together with Amandine, and thanks to an Excel sheet coded in partnership with Kylie Le, we created a collaborative pattern. This pattern is meant to be a metaphor for all the interconnections that were created during the composition of this magazine between us (UQ team) and all those who contributed to it from near and far.

Together we have forged links. We have created a network that is benevolent and which we believe seeks to move forward in the right direction in the face of the crises that we have encountered in recent years and which have put our lives to the test.

To contemplate this pattern is to contemplate the diversity, richness and optimism of the individuals who are building and weaving together possible futures. It is also an invitation to pursue and overcome the apparent finitude of this pattern in UQ.

Martin Sigler
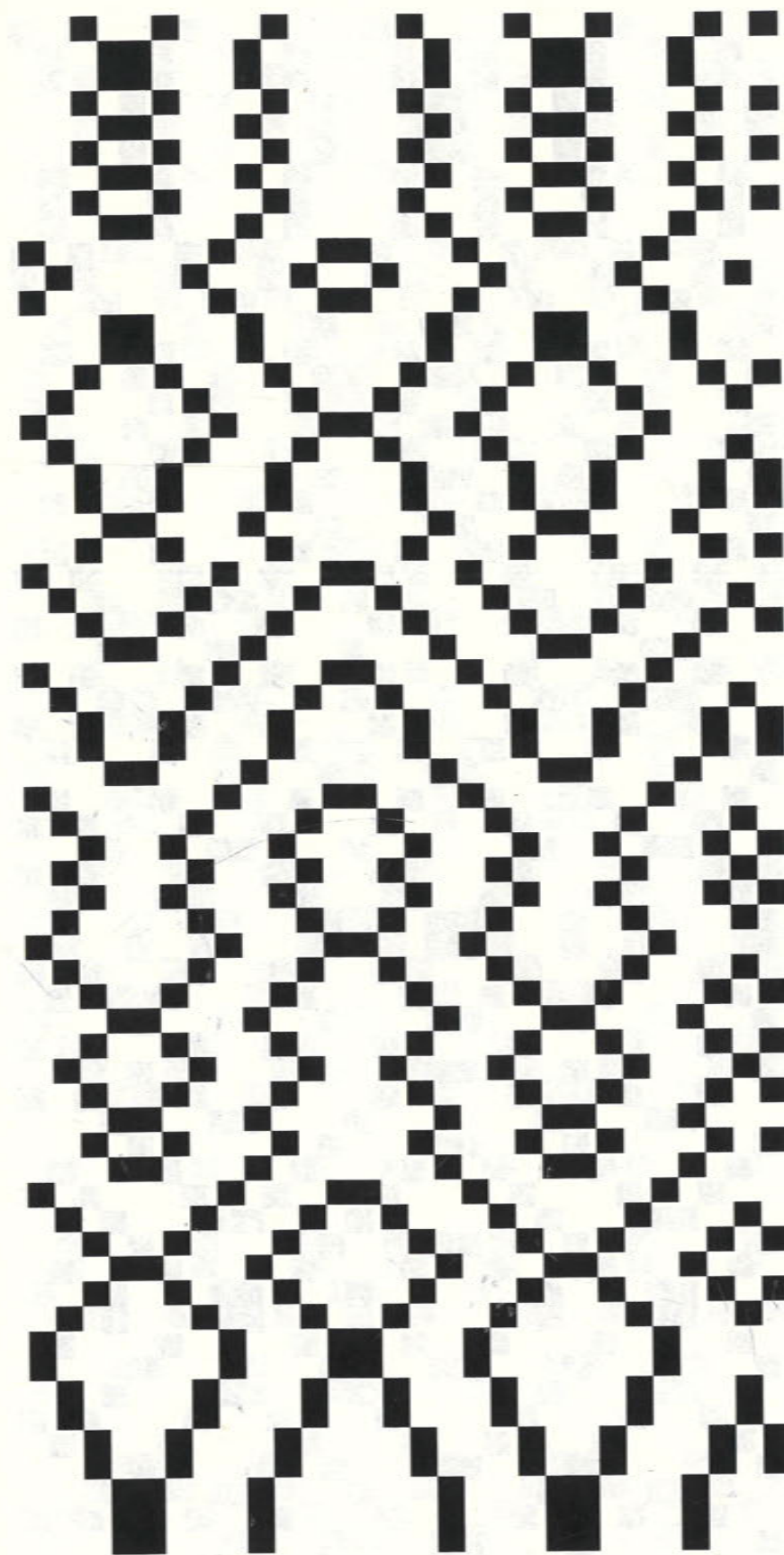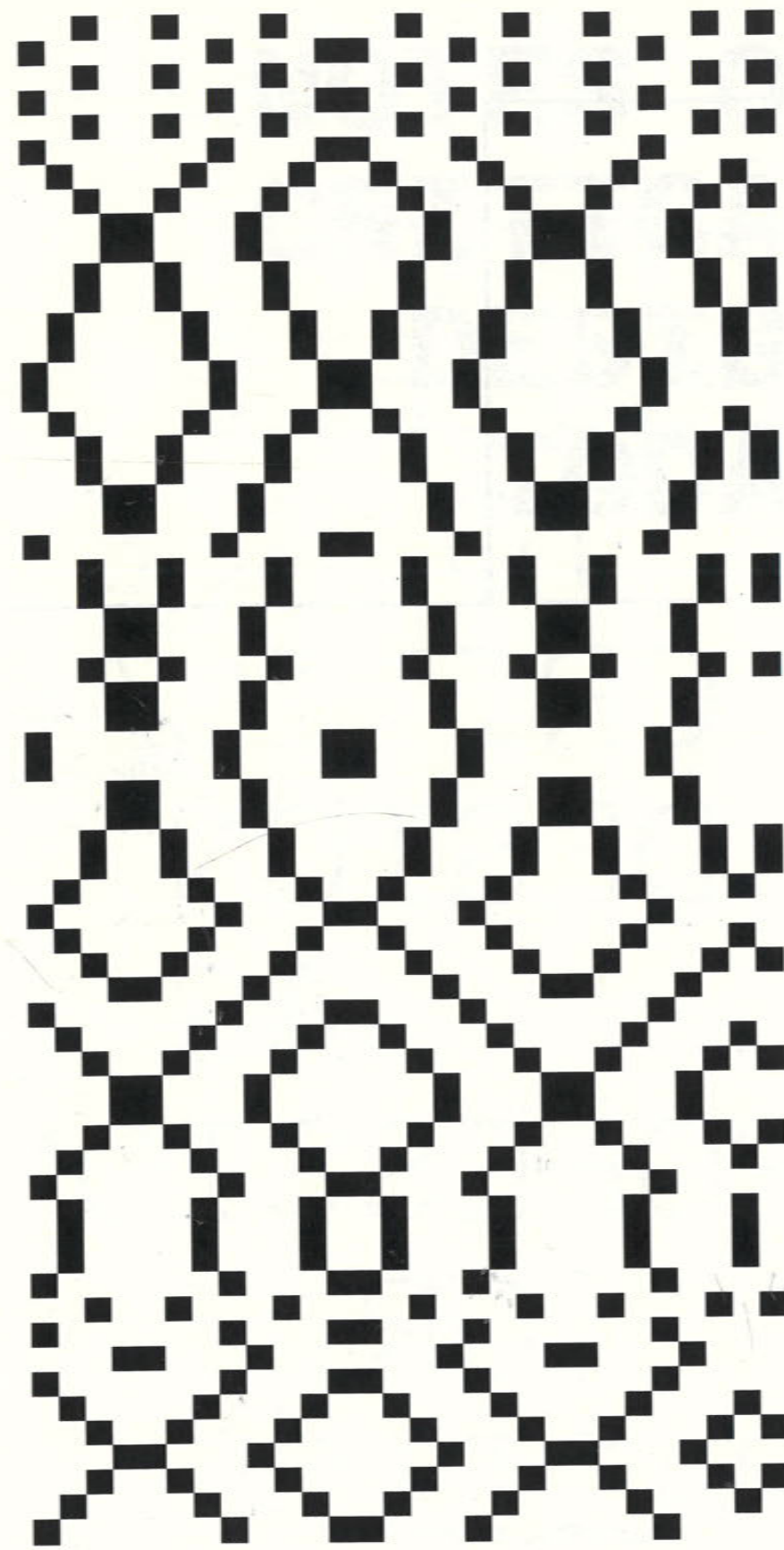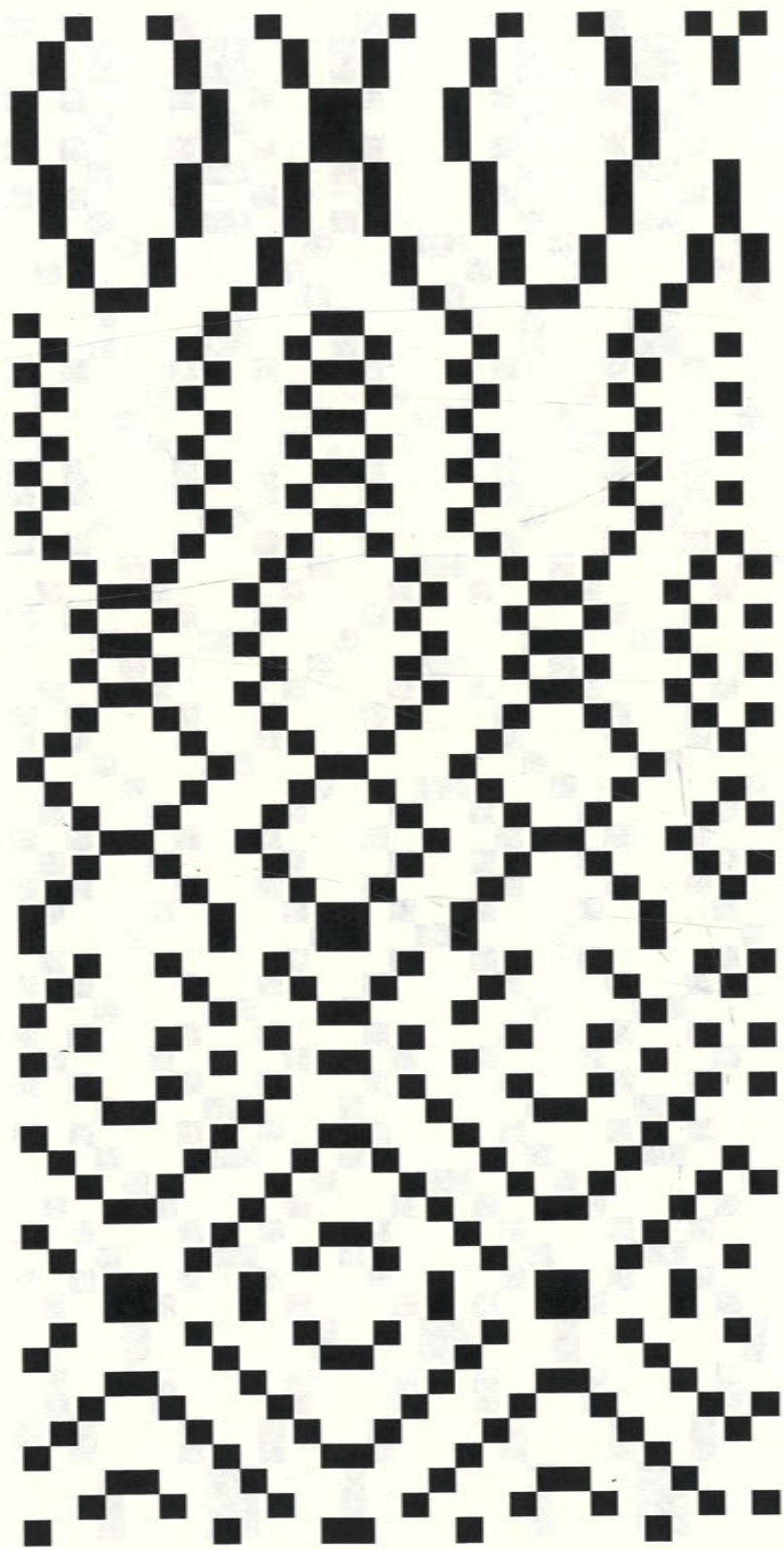
IT IS NO
LONGER
POSSIBLE
TO SEE
CRITICAL
DESIGN
AS A
PROFESSION
OR
PRACTICE

NOTES ON CRITICAL DESIGN TODAY

Finitude
(n) A categorisation

DARIA MIRICOLA

The expression "critical design" was clearly defined and deeply analysed for the first time in *Speculative Everything* a seminal book released by MIT Press in 2013. Written by designer Anthony Dunne and artist Fiona Raby – both professors at the Royal College of Art in London – *Speculative Everything* expresses a specific yet nailing thesis, namely, that design can be a vehicle to problematise our present, as well as a tool to bring new ideas to the stage.

We have been influenced by this thesis for years, to the point that we almost take it for granted. Every cultural operator moving in today's scenario is continuously required to analyse the shape of everyday things, to question and problematise our era. Staring at objects' silhouettes looking for cultural insights – as if they were imprinted like a watermark or laid like a layer of dust – is a daily exercise for us. However, at that time *critical design* functioned as a new idea in and of itself. In the early 2010s, when the book was published, as the praxis within the academic world dictated, the intellectual elite was caught in the same old and rather self-referential discussions, mainly digging up the way beauty and pragmatism relate to each other in a good – or bad, why not – design product. In this context, *Speculative Everything* pushed designers and researchers out of their comfort zone, introducing a new set of shibboleths and mantras to learn, as well as a fundamental axis shift from traditional design that solves problems to *critical design*, which uses design as a means and looks for problems to discuss. In the definition provided by Dunne and Raby, *critical design* is indeed a device that questions the cultural, social and ethical implications of emerging technologies. A form of design that can help us to define the most desirable futures, and avoid the least desirable.

It is worth noting that *critical design*'s concern for bettering the future keeps a consistency with the mindset of the publishers that made its diffusion possible. In addition, both the authors and MIT Press work on generating social changes through cultural operations. MIT publishing house considers elevating knowledge to inform and empower a programmatic goal. Envisioning design as a means capable of addressing social issues relevant for the future, we can consider *Speculative Everything* to apply MIT's paradigm. In a sense, the two visions share a common matrix, a common philanthropic tradition.

Of course, *critical design*'s social vocation is accompanied by a virtuous neglect for financial purposes and market needs, together with widespread opposition to a consumer-driven kind of production. *Critical design* cannot be understood, to paraphrase journalist Carlo Antonelli in a recent *032c* article about street fashion, as a materialist whim disconnected from real world challenges, or as a kind of design suitable for creating innovative, sexy and best-selling products. This is not its role. On the contrary, it aims to challenge the role of products and consumptions in our daily lives and, more generally, to question the world we live in. If anything, critical design focusses on a broader social context. It relates to humans rather than customers. In an era in which both the political right and left heavily accuse production and consumption in a hyper-globalised landscape, this producing-to-raise-awareness-about-production drive can also create unpleasant drifts. Distinguishing between honestly pushing for a reconfiguration of an opaque and almost inscrutable economic system from smart-ass marketing moves could become at least tricky if it wasn't for a fundamental distinction, namely that product design is massively on sale, whereas the *critical design* object is often neither sold nor mass-produced.

If while lurking on the internet one checks Dunne and Raby's website, one would spy an attitude that takes distance from every other design brand; it doesn't matter how conceptual or conscious the latter is. Collections made by the duo are meaningfully termed projects and are commissioned by art institutions. There is neither shop page, nor goods to buy or wish for, but photographs of unique pieces displayed in art spaces and accompanied by critical texts; artefacts that live in a future scenario, fuelled by current trends, to trigger debate and critical reflection.

"DESIGN CAN BE A VEHICLE TO PROBLEMATISE OUR PRESENT, AS WELL AS A TOOL TO BRING NEW IDEAS TO THE STAGE"

With all likelihood, we are witnessing the rise of a new type of designer who winks at the artist's figure but in a completely different way from the classical narration of super-star designers that eventually acquired an artist status because of their work's overall cultural impact and relevance. When it comes to critical designers, we must distinguish them from groundbreaking yet purely straight ones that may be celebrated because of their distinctive and intellectually sophisticated practice.

When we talk about British *critical design* and similar currents – albeit with different approaches and mentalities – such as Dutch conceptual design and Italian Radical Design, the main goal is to graft a profound reflection into the cultural and collective body on the things that populate our daily life.

But automatically this critical impulse, together with the links to art institutions, the economic carelessness, and the production that is limited to a few pieces, puts *critical design* in an ambiguous position due to the overlap that is created between its role and that of art in the early 21st century.

To understand this specific, ongoing drive, we will now look at some examples of figures, works and institutions that, even if not identical, show proximity with Dunne and Raby's practice. For the record, this is not an attempt to categorise for the sake of it. Coming from a perspective that considers differentiating and compartmentalising an unhealthy practice – at least when it comes to the notion of human making and expression *tout court* – the second part of this article aims

"WHAT DISTINGUISHES CRITICAL DESIGN PROJECTS MADE BY ACTUAL DESIGNERS FROM ARTISTS WHO EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH DESIGN IS, IF YOU LIKE, THE DEGREE OF FIDELITY TO THE DESIGN MODUS OPERANDI THAT IS INVOLVED IN THE MAKING PROCESS"

to be received more like an exploration of a given panorama, encouraging rather than denying its kaleidoscopic nature.

It should also be noted that the ground-breaking experiments in *critical design* that have taken place in the last 20 years, although not considered pure art, have undoubtedly influenced a generation of artists for whom playing with all kinds of language, verbal and formal, is the order of the day in the process of creating meaning. As the two authors of *Speculative Everything* defined design as a means, these artists use the language of design as their favourite medium. Let's think of the lascivious and futuristic seats made by Swedish artist Anna Uddenberg, or the advertising campaigns informed by a spiritualist aesthetic by German and Mongolian-Chinese Timur si Qin, or the drink bars designed by Eurasian collective Slavs & Tatars. They are not design products elevated to works of art but works of art disguised as design objects. What distinguishes *critical design* projects made by actual designers from artists who express themselves through design is, if you like, the degree of fidelity to the design *modus operandi* that is involved in the making process. According to the lecturer and design researcher at Central Saint Martins Matt Malpass, *critical design* is in fact always required to comply with all phases of research and the rules of projecting, thus differentiating itself from the processes of artistic creation which are by nature free, spontaneous, anti-dogmatic and devoid of the need to provide justifications or respond to conventional standards of discipline.

An excellent example to explain this difference in concrete terms is the work of the Dutch graphic designer

duo Metahaven. Founded in 2007 by Vinca Kruk and Daniel van der Velden, Metahaven is a leading name in the field of *critical design* or *speculative design*. The group's critical practice focusses on communication technologies, particularly how, thanks to them, our daily existence is crossed by many parallel and often contradicting narratives. A flux of information that, flowing on digital networks, affects the material reality of our daily experience, moulding our idea of truth. Using mainly videos and publications as their favoured means of expression, the darkly satirical duo's projects explore probable, plausible, possible and preferable futures.

But coming back to the distinction between *critical design* and visual arts, it should be noted that the projects developed by Vinca Kruk and Daniel van der Velden are not staging or imaginative exercises, fictional devices to configure a critical commentary. On the contrary, each of them is characterised by a real and applied involvement with the topic they are presenting to the audience; in other words, each of them acts in political and social events. There is one example that demonstrates Metahaven's different kind of engagement with the deep structures forming the socio-cultural environment around us: a rebranding commission that Metahaven undertook for the non-profit organisation Wikileaks.

Launched by journalist, programmer and political activist Julian Assange in 2006, the controversial platform Wikileaks is famous for publishing government or corporate documents from sources masked by anonymity. As Metahaven affirmed in an interview with *The Verge* in 2013, the collaboration was meant to represent certain aspects of the website – such as Wikileaks' existing in a grey area between the two notions of transparency and opacity – throughout their visual presence on the internet. What distinguishes this *critical design* work from pure art is that, even though it was never completed because of a series of diplomatic issues, this project's *modus operandi* guided both the steps of research and those of the elaboration of visual materials. In this rebranding commission, moreover, we can witness the duo's ability to express meaning through the formal qualities and the visual component of the objects. Metahaven is among the best known and most successful examples of *critical design*. Then there is a series of other projects, institutions, and artists who, although not conventionally labelled as critical designers and not moving within that sphere, carried out projects that seem to conjure it. For example, let's try to think of the work of many net artists who, starting from the 80s, used the language of IT coding and development for generating disclosure or boycotting several kinds of oppositions. Some of them went as far as hacktivism actions or cyber-terrorist attacks – such as DDoS raids and doxing – while some others, more simply and specifically, existed in the shape of cyber-utopian platforms bringing a high degree of political participation. There is a vast number of these kinds of works, and many of them now look like abandoned websites that echo the radical left's communitarian dreams taking place between

the meshes of the web. To name a few of them: *StarryNight*, an email discussion list developed by artist Mark Tribe in 1996, designed as a constellation of visual hypertexts and conceived as a virtual space for the exchange of ideas; *Arcangel Surfware*, a "non-aspirational lifestyle brand" created by artist Cory Arcangel, presenting a collection of designed objects allowing a better experience of the internet, such as the pretty ironic *Scanner Painting Frequent Flyer Neck Pillow* (2019). Many others can be found on Net Art Anthology's website, the archival project tracing the history of internet art from the 1980s to the 2010s, launched by Rhizome in 2016 together with an eponymous online exhibition.

Going ahead with discussing examples of *critical design* applied to clothing brands, another example that can be mentioned is the project carried out between the 1990s and the 2000s in the field of fashion design by the New York-based collective Bernadette Corporation. Propelled by the same artistic matrix that gave birth to the seminal collective ART CLUB2000 – established by the legendary downtown gallerist Colin de Land as a critique of commodification both within the art world and *tout-court* – the collections of Bernadette Corporation were, in all likelihood, a way to investigate the concept of individualism in the era of conformity, digital marketing, the cult of personality, and of the rise of big corporations. Not surprisingly, the focus in the fashion world – that nods to a West-Coast-like hipster aesthetic, a trademark of brands such as American Apparel and GAP – has not exclusively concerned the design aspect but also that of advertising, fashion editorials, and fashion journalism. It constantly uses a mimetic approach yet introduces a critical, playful and rather subtle perspective on the way in which the various languages of fashion are used to favour specific commercial strategies and to foster contemporary and proto-capitalist hip-mythologies.

Finally, we will now look at some recent examples of design biennials. In 2019 and 2020, the 26th edition of the Biennale of Design took place in Ljubljana. The programmatic objective of this edition, entitled "Common Knowledge" and curated by designer Thomas Geisler, was to address the issue of the information crisis, with a pro-active approach aimed at exploring ways to face the problem of knowledge in the current scenario dominated by the notion of post-truth. The biennial was divided into sections with exhibitions dealing with sub-themes arising from the main one, including falsification in science, manipulation of the news, and responsible spending.

Also, in 2020 the 33rd edition of the graphic design biennial in Ljubljana, called "The Crack Up – Crack Down", curated by the aforementioned art collective Slavs and Tatars, took place. The particularly original theme explored through the lens of graphic communication was, in this case, that of satire understood in its relationship with politics and propaganda. If the exhibition showed the work of purely contemporary artists, the catalogue produced by the collective demonstrated much more extensive and centuries-spanning research,

with written contributions that ranged from the analysis of cult Bosnian satire to an examination of the political potential of modern internet memes.

The exhibition reflected how graphic design could become a subversive political tool and speak for the people and to the people through satire. On the one hand, it proved that this happened many times in the course of history and in particular during moments of heavy political repression. On the other hand, it encouraged attention to how satire is today a prominent protagonist in the era of social networks and digital communication, and therefore it deserves to be considered a powerful and sophisticated communication tool.

This article began with a description of *critical design* as it is in its purest manifestations. It then switched to other examples, more distant from the canonical definition, showing us a state of the art of critical design that makes it a transversal discipline for the benefit of many and different artistic and creative practices. Rather than limiting itself to a name-dropping of the most exemplary phenomena, this article focusses on detecting the presence of *critical design* about ten years after its official date of birth and in fields where its presence is not explicitly declared. The last two examples in particular – which not surprisingly are also the most recent – demonstrate how it is no longer possible to see *critical design* as a profession or practice but as an essential way of thinking in facing this era. It is a lens to scrutinise the world around us and ask ourselves questions about it. It is a rapidly and overwhelmingly expanding attitude to which everyone in the field of cultural studies must pay attention and, if they have not yet done so, include in their cultural toolkit.

IT IS
TRASH

BUT

TREASURE

TO

ME

TR(E)ASH
(URE)

Finitude
(n) Obsolescence

JUST PROJECT

Just Project is a design studio based in Seoul. We favour, collect and study garbage seriously as a material. "Design" can be recognised as a concept that should not exist because it is in contact with mass production in terms of environmental protection, which is particularly why Just Project believes that design can play an important role in environmental issues. The studio is trying to suggest attitudes and methods toward environmental issues as pleasantly as possible, as a social role for the designer.

The word "trash" is used to refer to things that have become obsolete and thrown away after use, or to describe people or situations with bad behaviour. In environmental issues, "rubbish" is recognised as a big problem that even denies human existence.

Our studio's identity is to introduce the word "trash" as a "new taste, new material" rather than starting from a sense of alarm or guilt. The studio's slogan is "It is Trash, but Treasure to me". This is expressed in various ways, such as creating products and content, planning campaigns and exhibitions, and collaborating with various companies and institutions.

The usual process of product manufacturing is to select an item and determine the material; however, Just Project focusses on studying the properties of the material first and then proceeds with finding the most appropriate product that can reveal its strengths. This confines the process of the work occasionally, but it is the biggest factor that excites us.

져스트프로젝트는 쓰레기를 편애하고 수집하며 소재로써 진지하게 연구하는 디자인 스튜디오입니다. '디자인'은 환경보호의 측면에서 대량생산과 맞닿아 있기 때문에 존재하지 말아야 할 개념으로 인식할 수 있습니다. 우리는 오히려 그렇기 때문에 디자인이 환경문제안에서의 역할이 중요할 수 있다고 판단하고, '디자이너'라는 사회적 역할로 환경문제에 대한 태도와 방식을 가급적이면 유쾌하게 제안하고자 노력하고 있습니다.

'쓰레기'라는 단어는 지금까지 쓸모가 없어져 버려진 것, 사용 후 버려진 것을 지칭하거나 행실이 나쁜 사람이나 상황을 표현할 때 사용해오고 있습니다. 환경문제 안에서 '쓰레기'는 인간 실존까지 부정하게 만들만큼 큰 문제로 인식되고 있습니다.

우리는 '쓰레기'라는 단어를 경각심이나 죄책감에서 출발하기보다는 '새로운 취향, 새로운 소재'로 소개하는 것이 우리 스튜디오의 정체성이며 ,"It is trash, but treasure to me."라는 스튜디오의 슬로건을 제품을 만들거나 컨텐츠를 제작하고, 캠페인, 전시를 기획하거나 다양한 기업, 기관과의 협업 등 다양한 방식으로 표현하고 있습니다.

일반적인 제품 제작의 과정은 아이템을 정하고 소재를 결정하지만, 우리의 작업은 소재(쓰레기)를 먼저 발견하면 그 소재의 물성과 가장 알맞는 공정을 연구하고 소재의 장점을 드러낼 수 있는 아이템을 고민하는 순서로 진행됩니다. 이것은 작업의 제한이기도 하지만 우리를 설레게 하는 가장 큰 요소입니다.

I was foil (2014)

A product made by collecting food packaging such as cookies (plastic), ramen (plastic), and coffee (vinyl), which are commonly found in everyday life.
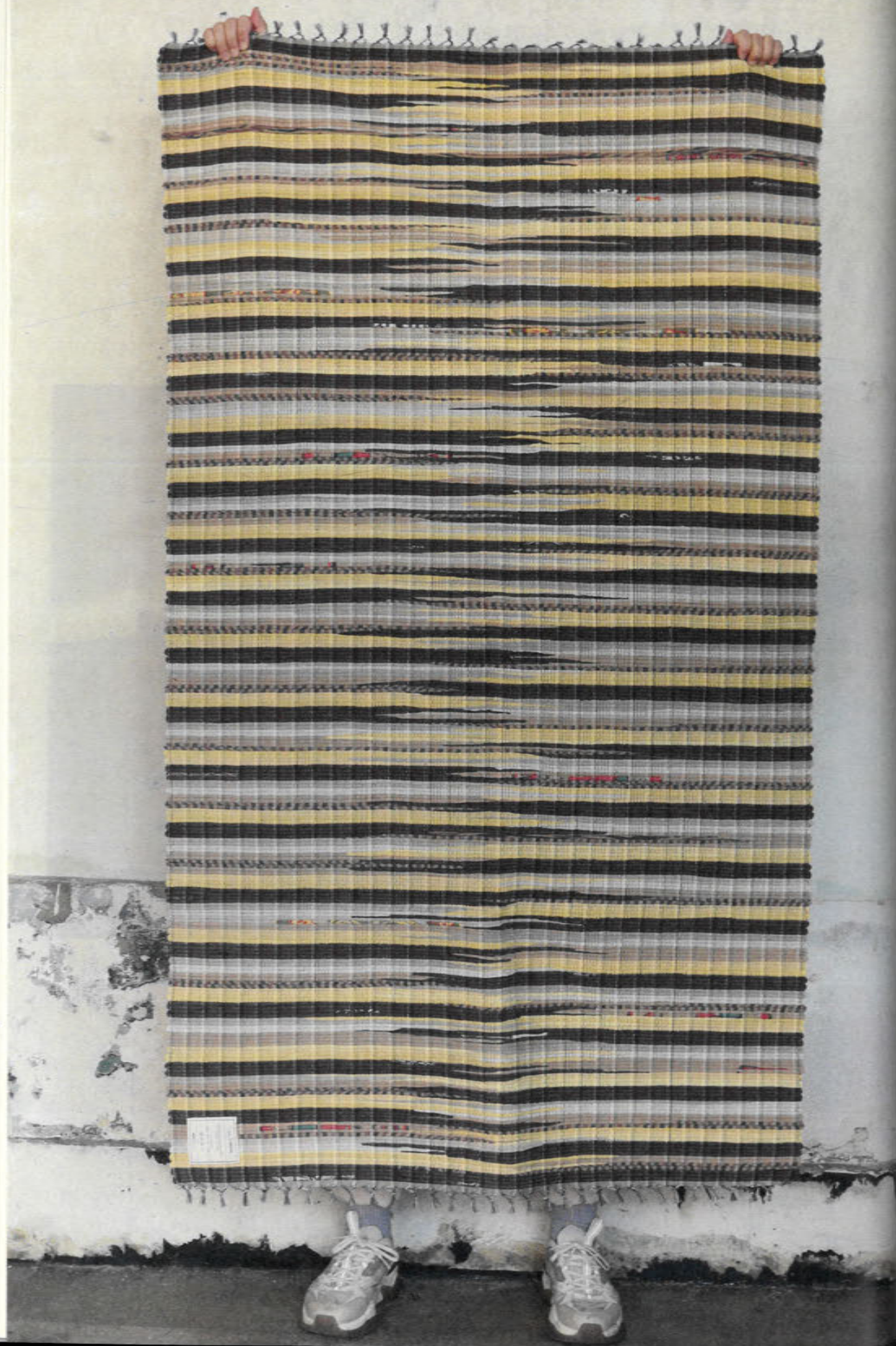*A pattern was created by excluding the information transfer function of the design element printed on the packaging material and instead working only with its shape and colour.*
Invited to the 2019 International Typography Biennale.

일상에서 흔하게 만날 수 있는 과자비닐, 라면비닐, 커퍼비닐등의 식품 포장지를 수거하여 제작한 제품.
포장재에 인쇄된 디자인요소의 정보 전달 기능을 배제하고 도형과 색으로만 인식하여 패턴을 만든 작업.
2019 국제타이포그래피 비엔날레 초청.

In the initial days of the studio, which formed in 2014, many people did not sympathise with current environmental concerns. Our work has been criticised at times, and there has been controversy over whether it is a solution to environmental problems. Whenever there is such a situation, we solidify the identity of our work and we try to express our message in more diverse ways. Feedback about our work such as "Can this kind of garbage be a material?", "I bought this because I liked it, but found out that the material was garbage!", and "Trash can also be beautiful" makes us happy.

We will continue to try to introduce garbage as a general material rather than a special material and establish it as a new taste. We hope our work will become a new trend for many people and inspire curiosity about everything that is made, consumed and discarded.

2014년에 시작한 스튜디오 초반에는 지금과 같은 환경이슈에 대해 많은 사람들이 공감하지 않았습니다. 우리 작업은 때로 비난받기도 하고, 환경 문제의 솔루션이 되느냐에 대한 논란도 있어왔습니다. 그러한 상황이 있을 때마다 우리는 우리 작업의 정체성을 공고히 하고, 우리의 메세지를 더욱 다양한 방식으로 표현하고자 노력했습니다. 우리 작업에 대해 '이런 쓰레기도 소재가 될 수 있다고?', '마음에 들어서 샀는데 알고보니 소재가 쓰레기였네!', '쓰레기도 아름다울 수 있네.' 라는 피드백은 우리를 행복하게 합니다.

우리는 앞으로도 쓰레기를 특별한 소재가 아닌 일반적인 소재로 소개하고, 새로운 취향으로 자리잡게 하기 위해 노력할 것입니다. 우리의 작업은 많은 사람들에게 새로운 취향이 되고, 만들고 소비하고 폐기되는 모든 것에 호기심을 가지게 되길 바랍니다.

English translation by Youn Song Lee.

I was T-shirts (2015)

A product made using a weaving method by collecting discarded old T-shirts, combining the colours of each T-shirt to create a new pattern.

버려진 헌 티셔츠를 수거하여 직조방식으로 제작한 제품.
각 티셔츠의 색상을 조합하여 새로운 패턴으로 만든 작업.

Borderless square (2020)

A work made by collecting sample fabrics, scrap fabrics and Velcro that are discarded during the production stage.
2021 PG4 Seoul Summit commemorative exhibition invitation.

생산단계에서
폐기되는 샘플용 원단,
자투리 원단과 벨크로를
수거하여 만든 작업
2021 PG4 서울정상회의
개최 기념 시 초청

I was Plastic block (2017)

Work created by collecting waste plastics.
Invited to 2017 Gwangju Design Biennale.

폐 플라스틱을 수거하여 만든 작업
2017년 광주디자인비엔날레 초청

SONIFYING THE
ARCANE
INTERACTIONS
BETWEEN
MYCORRHIZAL
FUNGI, TREES
AND LOCAL
RESIDENTS OF
A COMMUNITY
GARDEN SOON
TO BE
DEMOLISHED

The Fossilised Shell

THE FALLEN BIRCH SINGS UNDER A WHISPER:

Is it possible to give a voice to the green matter?

Do you hear the earth calling for your attention?

A HETEROPHONIC [EXP]LORATION OF THE [SPEC]IFIC SOCIOECOLOGY OF TIDEMILL GARDEN, DEPTFORD

ABOUTFACE

THE FALLEN BIRCH SINGS UNDER A WHISPER:

A HETEROPHONIC EXPLORATION OF THE INTERSPECIFIC SOCIOECOLOGY OF TIDEMILL GARDEN, DEPTFORD

Finitude

(n) The ecological and
cultural impact of
demolition

This project aims to create conceptual sonic art that evokes the complex interaction between mycorrhizal fungi, trees and local residents who are fighting against proposed plans to demolish a garden that has been a community-maintained, cultural hub for over 20 years.

Inspired by foresting expert Peter Wohlleben's controversial book, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, the project applies an anthropomorphic perspective of the natural ecology of Tidemill Garden in order to challenge the current ecological impact assessment that supports its demolition.

The project aims to:

- establish Tidemill Garden's hypogean (subterranean) and epigeal (above ground) socioecology: ecophysiological, environmental and political. Articulating sonic parallels between the interactions and behaviours of trees, fungi and local residents
- explore sonification – a variety of experimental techniques and conceptually motivated decisions – to evoke a visceral interpretation of the socioecology of Tidemill Garden
- utilise compositional methodology to evoke feelings and themes, as opposed to communicating identification of the source
- frame the local political climate surrounding the garden: scrutinise the plans and decisions made by Lewisham Council to remove 58 healthy trees and the subsequent loss of a popular communal green space
- contextualise the ecological impact of Tidemill Gardens' demolition, using this to influence the musical feeling and tone
- explore the conceptual use of heterophony – the simultaneous variation of a melodic line with multiple voices – as a representation of the key ecological elements of the garden.

By utilising conceptualisation and an investigative approach, *The fallen birch sings under a whisper* aims to evoke feelings of conservation and interspecific solidarity. Through the application of current ecological analysis and supporting theory, the project serves as a protest to the demolition of Tidemill Garden, proposing a shift in ecological consciousness of the imperceptible, clandestine and arcane.

TIDEMILL GARDEN'S EPIGEAL SOCIOECOLOGY: SAVE TIDEMILL ACTIVIST GROUP

Tidemill is a community-run public wildlife garden, designed and developed in the 1990s by the teachers, parents and children of Tidemill School. The garden has long been associated with developing ecological awareness and multicultural empathy in a diverse, working-class demographic.

Residents have long carefully and proudly maintained the garden for over 20 years, which is then reciprocated as the green space provides the local community with air purification, mental wellbeing and a home for divergent wildlife species.

In 2018 planning permission was approved to demolish the site, justified by Lewisham Council as a means to satisfy the increasing demand for social housing. However, groups of activists including the Save Tidemill group challenged this "affordability lie", as the proposed new homes have been declared as London Living Rent, which is 63% higher in cost than the existing council tenancy. This alienates the most impoverished members of the community while driving local gentrification. The plans require the garden to be destroyed, which includes the felling of 74 healthy trees; Lewisham Council has stated that the approved plans cannot be amended to save the garden.

Initially, a series of discussions took place between Lewisham Council, developers Peabody, and local campaigners collectively known as the Save Reginald Save Tidemill Group (STSRG), to negotiate and explore a compromise. The group submitted a series of counter-proposals including a pre-demolished and vacant alternative site in New Cross, described by London Assembly Member Len Duvall as "being able to deliver the same number of units and save the community gardens". All were rejected, and destruction of the garden was to go ahead. In a final attempt to save the garden, members of the local community and STSRG initiated a short occupation to persuade new dialogue with Lewisham Council but were consequently forcibly evicted. Since October 2018 the site has employed 24-hour security around the now closed Tidemill Garden; activists have estimated that eviction and security costs now have exceeded £1m of taxpayer's money.

Shortly after the occupation, I attended a meeting with the STSRG to gain a more in-depth understanding about their feelings, propose my project and obtain some feedback. The community cares greatly about the value of this garden for mental and physical wellbeing, as well as for social integration of all cultures and classes.

This framing of activism, solidarity and empathy will be represented creatively as one of the heterophonic melodies.

TIDEMILL GARDEN'S HYPOGEAN SOCIOECOLOGY 1: THE WOOD WIDE WEB

Trees are social creatures that mother their young, talk to each other, experience pain, remember things and have sex with each other, a bestselling author has said (Mark Brown on Peter Wohlleben's The Hidden Life of Trees, *the* Guardian, *May 31 2017).*

At the centre of a forest's ecological community, trees access a subterranean network of roots in collaboration with fungal networks, reaching far across the forest. Wohlleben characterises this as like "fibre-optic internet cables", exchanging information via electrical signals and sharing equal resources, an interspecific symbiosis pertaining to ecological health and wellbeing, characterised as the Wood Wide Web.

The term "Wood Wide Web" was first used in *Nature* by Dr S Simard to describe the underground hyphael networks created by mycorrhizal fungi, creating pathways to share nutrients between "donor" and "receiver" plants of varying species.

The mycorrhizal fungi (mycelium) within Tidemill Garden's established community of 74 trees and other flora will be conceptually interpreted as the main heterophonic melody due to its perceived altruistic role in being the brain and heart of the garden, allowing trees not connected via roots to communicate and disseminate food. The mycelium affects the epigeal ecology by supporting all biological health, including humans through climate benefits and mental wellbeing. The postmedia artist Saša Spačal characterises this as a form of an arcane mycohuman symbiosis.

TIDEMILL GARDEN'S EPIGEAL SOCIOECOLOGY 2: 74 SEMI-MATURE TREES

One remarkable claim in *The Hidden Life of Trees* is that forests, like humans, create friendships and maintain social hierarchy. Wohlleben exemplifies this through the identification of ancient tree stumps still alive in his forest. Several hundred-year-old tree "elders" that were felled have been kept alive through the redistribution of sugars from neighbouring trees; living tree-cells can only stay alive if fed with sugars obtained by photosynthesis. It's impossible for a canopy-less stump to sustain itself with no leaves and it is quickly broken down by forest organisms.

However, this is only possible in undisturbed forests where trees have time to establish and develop these mycorrhizal bonds. Tidemill Garden's community of trees has been established for decades, allowing beneficial mycorrhizal networks to develop and support the growth of tall trees with vital canopy cover.

A tree's ability to provide air purification and urban cooling is correlated with canopy size, so the loss of canopy size is more of a relevant qualification of the loss of environmental impact. Approximately 2.4m tons of carbon are absorbed by London's trees, with an estimated value of £147m.

THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF TIDEMILL GARDENS' DEMOLITION

The official tree removal plan states that 58 trees and groups of bushes are to be removed from Tidemill Garden. These include Silver Birch, Norway Maple, Wild Cherry, Indian Bean Tree, Hornbeam and Apple. Lewisham Council states that 36 trees are to be removed and replaced with new "semi-mature" trees, between 2.5-3m in height. However, in the Tidemill Tree survey, 46 of the 58 trees being removed exceed 3m in height, with 17 trees well over 10m; the removal of much taller and more mature trees will cause a substantial reduction in ecological benefit due to canopy loss, while the less mature replacements slowly grow.

Canopy cover is described in the extensive urban tree study, *Valuing London's Urban Forest*, as "the driving force behind tree

benefits". The replacement of new, less mature trees appears ill-informed, as to fully replace the canopy cover of just one mature tree "would require the planting of hundreds of trees in the vicinity of the original".

The Tidemill development plans propose a newly constructed green space, yet there has been no consideration in the impact assessment for the disruption to a subterranean mycorrhizal network, vital to the biological health of the flora and local residents. Newly planted trees take decades to establish these fungal networks.

Helgason et al's *Ploughing Up the Wood Wide Web?* provides evidence that 90% of all land plants share a connection with mycorrhizal fungi, making them vital for ecological diversity so that they must be considered when assessing the overall wellbeing of natural habitats; the disruption of soil must be a factor in the assessment of ecological health.

The findings in *Valuing London's Urban Forest*, conducted by the Forestry Commission and Greater London Authority, provide evidence of a substantial environmental and ecological impact generated by the demolition of Tidemill Garden. Sixteen out of the 36 trees due to be removed are in the top 50 species importance ranking, including five semi-mature Silver Birch trees that rank as the third most important for our health and wellbeing. Even two Norwegian Maple trees, with the highest species amenity value of £1,182, are due to be removed. This raises concerns about Lewisham Council's thoroughness in assessing the overall impact of the destruction of the garden and provides some evidence to the claims that developer Peabody is operating with questionable integrity.

CONTEXTUAL SUMMARY

Following a period of investigation and research, the key themes and feelings surrounding Tidemill Garden may now be considered for creative interpretation: mycorrhizal fungal network or Wood Wide Web; trees' socially interactive behaviour; the interspecific symbiosis between trees, plants and humans demonstrated though the maintenance of the garden; the ecological impact of the demolition of Tidemill Garden; the subsequent activism to save it. To facilitate lucidity and strong acoustic communication of a complex socio-political ecology, additional strategies and contextual theory will be explored prior to composition.

METHODOLOGY, COMPOSITIONAL STRATEGIES AND CONTEXTUAL THEORY

Mycohuman relationships are based on the entanglement of mycorrhizal extensions that transgress both fungi and humans as species, thus forming an extensive rhizomatic network so vast that it encompasses several planes of existence: material, immaterial, organic, technological, social and planetary – Saša Spačal.

To compositionally represent the mycorrhizal fungal network, the first step was to develop a technique to grow mycelium, the fungal hyphae that form the body of these networks. Once successful colonisation was achieved, I could then identify methodologies to measure the mycelia's electrical communications.

Artist and researcher Saša Spačal's practice explores the "environment-culture continuum". Along with collaborators, she has worked extensively to research and produce sonification of communicative fungal networks, exemplified in *Mycophone_unison* (2013) which uses live mycelium and human touch to activate a bio-musical installation. Spačal's work has since become a prominent contextual influence on this project.

With limited understanding of effective mycelia sonification methodology, I decided to contact Spačal for advice, and she provided me with vital insight: "Maybe already the fact that mushrooms are working as variable resistors will give you some ideas what to do".

Following Spačal's advice, a simple ohmmeter was built in Arduino to measure the variable resistance of the organism, which interestingly changed when handling the mycelium. Spačal explored this in the *Mycophone_unison*'s interaction with human touch.

Following a series of experimentations and refinement, I conducted a variety of tests measuring the electrical resistance of mycelium. Initially I encountered a challenge with the sensitivity of Arduino's readings, but a stable reading was achieved following the replacement of different resistors.

The sonification was first achieved in max/msp using objects, Coll, that use the numerical data from Arduino in a list format and assign a note to be played through Midi sound based on the values. This gave me the primary melody in Midi format, so it could be translated heterophonically: naturally (Mycelium); variation 1 (trees); variation 2, to be re-composed with acoustic guitar (humans).

The patch was then developed and refined into a Max4Live instrument, which enabled me to experiment with the choice of sound source to be triggered by the communications. To aid conceptual depth, I decided to use the recorded sounds of a variety of leaves taken from Tidemill Garden between May and October 2018.

The recordings were then processed in order to be able to work tonally. This was achieved by applying granular synthesis to the leaf recordings, then adjusting the grain size to tune the sound to a root note. This gave the mycelium-generated communications a conceptual voice that could be played like a keyboard.

The decision not to work in frequency and to translate into a musical scale was made to reflect the harmonic symbiosis between three elements of Tidemill Garden: Wood Wide Web, trees and humans. The atonal experiments did not evoke this theme. The creative decision to embrace harmonic content would also facilitate a key conceptual methodology – heterophony – the simultaneous variation of a melodic line with multiple voices.

By interpreting all prior research I deduced that heterophonic melody could creatively represent the independent-interdependent behaviour of the three residents of Tidemill Garden: the fungal network, the trees, and humans. All operate with an autonomous agenda, but for the collective harmony. This was achieved by first obtaining the main melody derived by the mycelium sonification, then these musical notes were revised for two subsequent melodies to represent three main elements of the garden's ecology:

- Main Melody – Wood Wide Web: mycelium sonification using tuned sound of leaves. [Ecophysiological communication]
- Melodic variation 1 – Trees: slowed, tuned Tidemill Garden field recordings/externally processed leaf recordings [Theoretical communication]
- Melodic variation 2 – Humans: acoustic guitar composition. [Evocative communication]

SLOWLY DOES IT

Wohllleben states that trees also omit an ultrasonic "scream" when their roots are deprived of water. Milbern and Ritman's 1988 study *Acoustic Emissions from Plants* explores this ecophysiological reaction. Categorised as "ultrasonic acoustic emissions" (UAE), the experiments were successful in recording UAE sounds in acacia trees using piezo transducers.

This research framed my experimentation with contact microphone recordings of the fresh and dried Tidemill Garden leaves, along with early morning mid-side stereo recordings of the garden. As these UAE sounds are beyond human hearing, the recordings were slowed to bring ultrasonic sound into the audible range. These slowed recordings were used to create pad-like drones that could be harmonically tuned and rearranged. This developed into the second heterophony melody to represent the trees of Tidemill Garden.

In *trees: Pinus sylvestris* (2015), sonification artist Marcus Maeder in collaboration with the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research, explored the UAE of a tree in the Swiss Alps, sonifying the ecophysiological process using physical acoustics and DIY sensors in combination with a data sonification of trunk and branch diameters.

Influenced by this work, a recording of Tidemill Garden was captured just as the sun was rising in an attempt to record waking wildlife. The field recording was then slowed up to five times to capture any potential UAE. This strategy uncovered some interesting results: slowed haunting sounds likely to be from birds and potentially some bats but also some unidentifiable patterns of sound. To create some tonal variety, recordings were additionally externally processed into an analogue filter and made to self-oscillate and feedback, generating much-needed low frequency patterns, which could be controlled with synced low-frequency oscillator.

Finally, to represent the human element of Tidemill Garden and the third heterophonic melody, a variation of the melodic line was composed using an acoustic guitar, chosen to reflect our utilisation of natural resources (wood of the guitar), and the human predisposition to make mistakes. Conceptually, I decided to record a one-take improvised segment using the same notes of the main melody. As per project aims, the composition attempted to musically evoke notions of activism, loss and the determination to save the garden, revising the same musical notes established by the mycelium readings.

To communicate the ecological impact in the composition, I experimented with the cross-synthesis of slowed down guitar and recordings of the leaves taken from Tidemill Garden. The most evocative output was the combination of a burning leaf stem with the slowed-down guitar melody. The stalk released steam and this combined with the slowed sound of the guitar to resemble gasps of breath, quite poignantly related to the impending loss of air purification once the trees have been removed.

THE NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION OF TIDEMILL GARDEN'S SOCIOECOLOGY

REFLECTION AND PROGRESSION

"Musical instruments refine the sounds of nature into a powerful form of human expression" – Barry Truax.

The sonification of mycelium explores the literal ecophysiological activity of Tidemill Garden, but to creatively communicate Tidemill Garden's complex socioecology the project required some additional strategy: what critical theory could be applied to assist with the non-verbal lucid communication of symbiosis? How could the evocation of harmony and activism be represented?

In *Acoustic Communication* (2001), Truax asserts that through the organisation of sound, meaning can be deduced and that there is a continuum of three systems of acoustic communication.

Truax asserts that music is a form of acoustic communication within a continuum, which is humanly contrived, but based on abstractions of nature. Natural soundscapes sonically unfold with orderly patterns while human soundscapes are characterised by patterns of form and disorder. Our brains are in a continual state of identification of these patterns.

This raises a challenge to combine nature sounds and organised musical sounds to convince the listener of a conceptual "virtual ecology". Sounds of cars and birdsong alongside the sonified mycohuman networks may distract from the project's less literal and more visceral intentions. For this reason, I decided to manipulate the field recordings taken from Tidemill Garden to reduce any clearly identifiable reference to natural sounds, and to move the acoustic communication away from the "soundscape" in the continuum and towards music in order to create a more expressionist perspective of the socioecology.

A primary aim was for the project to "evoke feelings of conservation and interspecific solidarity", but after reviewing the first draft composition, the aesthetical representation of the trees, soon to be felled, wasn't evocative in the work. The aim of creating conservational provocation was pivotal to the successful communication of the socioecology of Tidemill Garden.

Reflecting upon this, I decided to develop a visual element to add conceptual lucidity and to make the themes more prominent. I explored this using an image of Tidemill Garden's leaves collected between May and October. The leaves are introduced along with a natural soundscape of Tidemill Park as a framing, but quickly moves into a pixellated, interconnected hypogean network. Through this technique I identified that I could create a visual-heterophonic variation. Following the early tests, it really contributed to increasing evocation and conservational provocation.

Many challenges arose as I have no experience with the software Processing, but through perseverance and many revisions, I achieved a short film which was animated live to the composition, evoking an audio-visual representation of the complex socioecological hypogean and epigeal interactivity. A future development of this project would be to adapt this into a site-specific audio-visual installation, projected onto Tidemill Gardens' white fencing used to segregate the garden prior to demolition. However, to achieve this I would need to resolve some of the challenges relating to resolution. The project could also be adapted into a sound sculpture and be installed at any other green space threatened with demolition.

I would also like to build upon my experience on this project by exploring mycelium sonification methodology further through the form of bio-installation – "The Mushroom Piano", a 24-hour live streamed generative composition, manipulated by human touch.

Reflecting upon my experiences obtained in this project over the last 12 months, I believe it is becoming more of a necessity for artists to pursue creative works and methods of communication to inspire ecological change. My research has highlighted an ever-increasing commodification of public services, where ephemeral legacy, profit and industry growth is prioritised over physical and mental wellbeing.

Tidemill Garden transcends demographics and culture and is the nucleus at the centre of independent-interdependent interactivity for over 20 years, facilitating life in the hypogean and epigeal, yet the garden has been closed to the public since October 2018 and is likely to be permanently demolished. The official council tree reports obtained for this study highlight ambiguity in the number of trees being removed, a lack of understanding on the subject of loss of canopy cover, no assessment of hypogean disruption, and does not reference more current arboricultural studies such as *i-tree*, which calculates amenity value of established trees and greenspace. Many of Tidemill Garden's trees are listed as the most value species in London. This raises a question about the choice of site when it's so ecologically and politically disruptive. A proposed theory may be Deptford's lucrative real estate being more desirable to the developer, who is selling 41 homes privately on the new development.

This project will be proposed to Lewisham Council as a creative evocation to re-evaluate the true environmental impact of the loss of a vital community garden, and to reconsider planning revisions that facilitate Tidemill Garden's conservation, while satisfying the requirement for new social housing.

*This is an edited version of AboutFace's *Sound Agendas* essay.

THE VIRTUAL AND VEGETAL SHARE THE SPACE OF A DIALECTICAL TENSION

WEEDS BEFORE THE MEADOW

Finitude

(n) The line between the virtual and the vegetal

PATRYK STARZYKOWSKI

In the ontological sense the virtual and vegetal are not so much mutually exclusive or at odds with each other because they are connected by the concept of essences of processes. I borrow this thought construct freely from Manuel DeLanda's 2002 analysis of Deleuzian multiplicities. The virtual and vegetal share the space of a dialectical tension: virtual being seen as not alive and vegetal, although being alive, not being seen. We could think of the vegetal having regenerative power or being the conduit of the life force. In this alignment, the virtual world would be the inseparable shadow of the vegetal and mineral worlds from which it emerged and keeps unfolding... The virtual matter is born through apomixis and uses the mineral and botanical worlds as its substrate. My research explores these hybrid territories: working with the vegetal and the virtual with a focus on weeds, modes of artwork rewilding and plant blind spot

"IN THIS ALIGNMENT, THE VIRTUAL WORLD WOULD BE THE INSEPARABLE SHADOW OF THE VEGETAL AND MINERAL WORLDS FROM WHICH IT EMERGED"

healing. "Weeds" dominions are VR/AR sculptures representing various weeds' assemblages set in urban and peri-urban cityscapes. This work is a continuation of my research on weeds' assemblages as queer ecological operating models and the weeds' phenomenon in the vegetal world.

Weeds are the vegetal emerging from disruption often mediated by, or as a direct result of, human activity like urbanisation, crop yield improvement, etc. The notion of weeds is polemical and contextual since their qualities and raison d'être belong to the observer. If you read the biblical parable of the weeds you can see that they had it rough from the get-go. One could argue that weeds are the vegetal native to a process or a state of disturbance rather than an actual ecosystem, trapped in power structures established by the violence of agrarian cultures. The determination of what a weed is, and what a beautiful, useful or "worthy" plant is, rests entirely upon the observer's discretion.

I travelled through various cities scanning weeds' assemblages and building VR sculptures using gestures combined with eye movement, as well as body movement in space. The sculptures are a translation and, as an experience, they will exist in a public domain that can be copied by anyone working with VR technology. In a similar way, access to these VR sculptures, placed in unexpected locations (but also intentional, like churchyards for example), is defined by the social, financial and cultural conditioning of the observer. If you do not own an up-to-date mobile device you simply can't access them. It could be argued that these limitations are reminiscent of, or contribute to, plant blindness.

LiDAR 3D scanning is a technology often deployed to represent precision and accuracy in measurements. Here I subverted its intended use, with an aim to deconstruct the perception of an idealised level of reality in which the vegetal exists on only one plane. If weeds are a contextual language device, then perhaps they constitute a virtual side of the vegetal?

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the original, 15th-century meaning of "the virtual" is "being something in essence or effect, though not actually or in fact", probably via a sense of "capable of producing a certain effect".

Could the virtual be the innate quality of the originating world from which we emerged? In that sense, can we consider the notion of weeds being a virtual form of the vegetal? 3D scanning is a negative space made of data points, building a world accessible simultaneously from different points of entry. They are not rooted but they are connected. One of weeds' qualities as defined in 1974 by HG Baker is their ability to attain "freedom from its range of abiotic variations".

The result is a form of a digital landscape made of plants that don't exist, created with a set of given parameters with multiple entry points. The exuberance of their forms is generated and translated from a distance between data-points measurements and between the matrix of the device and the surface. That distance is material and experiential. It has data-weight. That data-weight is its materiality with the affective powers of software. These affective powers are translated from a dance around the weeds I encountered and a wondering eye around them. The use of the word "dominions" is intentional here since weeds have been associated with pejorative qualities. They can be noxious and imposing, and so are VR sculptures representing "weediness": the ability to pop up in unexpected places.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH SPECULATION COMES FROM MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY OF DESIGN

The Fluid Clock

How far can you swim away from the finitude of human knowing?

Will time be the ultimate answer to everything?

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK SELF

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH TIME IS MANIFOLD BECAUSE...

Finitude

(n) The state of nowness

AN INTERVIEW
WITH JACK SELF

Jack Self is an architect based in London. He is director of the cultural institute and architectural practice REAL *and is the editor-in-chief of* Real Review. *Martin Sigler interviewed him for UQ9.*

Martin Sigler

One of your last exhibitions, *Face Value*, in Vienna last May and June, personified the idea of a time bank where you are given a coin whose value is a person hour. I guess that's exactly what we are doing now and thank you for giving me an hour of your time. In an interview for *artisall*, you mentioned that the last ten years of your life had been planned and that you knew exactly where you wanted to be now. So, what is your perception of time? Is it linked to productivity? Do you ever feel that you are wasting time or running out of time?

Jack Self

My relationship with time is manifold because there is not just one type of time. If I am relaxing on the beach and have the whole day to do nothing, I am in a certain type of time. The one I enjoy the most is being in the sea and looking at the horizon, I feel that I am very much on this planet. The blue sky and the blue sea have remained stable for so long, it is like an eternal postcard of our world.

But I am not sure that time exists in the universe. The physicist Carlo Rovelli has done a lot of work into atemporal physics in the 1980s. He shows that if you can rewrite the primary calculations of contemporary physics without the dimension of time then, unlike gravity or unlike the speed of light, maybe time doesn't exist as a force in the universe. It might just be that it is a human perception of change in which case the way that the universe understands itself will be very different from the way that humans understand time. The consequence of this for me is the idea of the multiplicity and the pluralism of times in which the time of the historian, the time of indigenous knowledge, the time of the astrophysicist, the time of the architect, the time of the athlete are all different conceptions and measures of time and all different experiences of time which are not united. They exist as separate distinct forms.

The reason why I began to imagine a ten-year plan was a product of the type of life that I experienced in my early 20s. I was kind of depressed at this idea of constant unpredictability in all areas of my life. I had no money, and I had no access to money. I had very little security and I felt that I was being under constant pressure to react immediately, at every scale. The idea of creating a ten-year plan for me was a type of resistance to this experience of time. But it was more symbolic than it was literal. I didn't think it could be done because the world doesn't have a level of stability which allows you to have that type of agency.

My instinct is to say: I don't believe that ownership exists, so I don't believe in private property, and I also don't believe that humans have any intrinsic inequalities between them and therefore I don't want to live in a society which creates hierar-

chies or structures based on gender, based on race or class or wealth. So, how can I use my life as a project of time, how can I use this time as a way of achieving those beliefs? I began to see that planning for the future was very helpful in terms of helping me to advance goals I had which, since 2011, have been to find ways to build egalitarian affordable and inclusive housing in the Anglo world. (Cooperative models of ownership exist in many other parts of Europe, but they do not exist in the Anglo world in the same way.) Also, I'm very concerned about the ecological impact of architecture and housing.

MS

I think that what lies behind this idea of a ten-year plan is the idea of discipline. Athletes, before competing in a major event, would prepare for it years beforehand. I imagine that you actually disciplined yourself over the last ten years to overcome your difficulties and advance your goals. It's also related to a very capitalist way of living time: managing it for better productivity.

JS

That's absolutely true. This structure of capitalist time comes from a religious history. Broadly, what happened was that, in the Middle Ages, a lot of monks were concerned that Jesus had not come back to earth as they were expecting. The reason for that was maybe that the conditions were not right. They thought that the problem was that they only worshipped God in the church and started to think that maybe everything we do is an act of God. In religious terms, the service in the church is called the liturgy. So, they came up with the idea of a perpetual liturgy. Suddenly, everything you do became important: the way you make a meal, the way that you farm a field, etc. They then started to realise that some days they could do more than others. For example, some days they could write three pages of a book and then, the next day, they could write only one page. They didn't have a stable model of time to measure their productivity, so they started introducing clocks and bells to the monasteries to create an order and a rhythm of time independent from the natural world. The clock would go at 5am every morning in summer and winter, even if the light was different. This idea of universal time generated the notion of productivity and led to the division of labour where they would make more things for God if they split the work. In the 16th century, Henry VIII destroyed all the monasteries in Britain, and suddenly all of these monks and nuns didn't know what to do in society, so they did the only thing they knew how to do; they started what they called companies. Companies of brothers or companies of sisters which became the basis for capitalism.

Our entire concept of time and productivity, what Max Weber called the Protestant work ethic, is based on the belief that it is good to work hard, do the most that you can, have discipline, and have dedication. This conception is deeply rooted in the Anglo mentality and explains, at least to me, why capitalism is an Anglo invention.

MS   I wasn't aware of the genesis of capitalistic time! What comes to my mind now is the idea of speculation (the development of theories and conjectures without solid evidence). Is speculation an important part of your work? And how do you deal with it? Especially when things don't turn out the way you imagined.

JS   My relationship with speculation comes from my understanding of the history of design. When I studied architecture, I began to discover that a lot of things I thought of as normal had been invented. For example, the corridor was created in England in the early 1500s when one aristocrat decided to separate the servants from the rest of his rooms. Before that, all the rooms were joined by aligned doors (Palace of Versailles, for example). The idea that the corridor was an invention for me was like, "that's insane."

Basically, every object around me has been invented. But the idea that someone had to invent the space itself and the structure of the world around us gave me a lot of hope that other things are waiting to be created. It can happen that someone will invent another world. If you imagine that the future is open in that way, then the question becomes: well, why not me? Why can't I be involved in making this future?

So, speculation for me is significant because it's not just about a kind of fantasy for another world; it is about imagining the direction the world can take now. I am very interested in science fiction because science fiction often talks about prolongations of our present, so they often take the present day and then speculate about a future connected to it. There is a real difference between speculation, which is literally a vision of the future, and fantasy, which is a kind of imaginary world.

MS   Next question is probably very broad, but how do you see the future? In terms of your practice and what you plan to build, I suppose you need to understand how the world is now and expectations of how it will be...

JS   When I look at every object, I see that time is embedded within it, and that it has different possibilities of existing. For example, I'm now looking at a table that is probably 150 years old, and on top of it, there is a bowl that is perhaps five years old. Now, that bowl probably has a lifespan of another 20 years, so the time of that object is about 25 years. But the table is in pretty good condition, so it probably has another 150 years inside it. So, you're looking at two objects which are connected now but have very different futures.

When I look at society, I look at institutions, practices, and even mentalities and try to think about how long they will last; for example, changing prevalent mentality around attitudes towards homosexuality. The concept that being gay was not wrong really began probably in the early 20th century, but it

took 50/60 years before that could even be said openly. Then it took perhaps 50/60 years for the British government to make it legal for gay people to get married. So, we're talking, in the end, about 100/110 years of struggle to achieve one thing. That's also true for democracy which in Britain took at least 150 years to be properly established, for women getting the vote which again was a 70/80-year struggle, etc. I think that the time scale of certain institutions and mentalities also has an impact on what you can change in the future. Some things can change very rapidly and unexpectedly because of errors or accidents. For example, attitudes towards the Arab world changed extremely rapidly after 9/11. In the Anglo world, probably an ecological 9/11 will change everyone's attitude in a different way. We had the opportunity for that with the pandemic, and it hasn't seemed to have done enough to change people's minds.

I can see all these different institutions, mentalities, political positions as a kind of timed object which has existed for a certain period and may have a future. The question being how can I direct, shape, or change that path? What is actually open for me as a space? How do I occupy that space to advance the things that I think are important?

MS   Looking at issues as objects with a lifespan is a very original way to envisage the notion of time and speculation. It gives a lot of hope because it makes us feel that we have an impact on the future.

JS   I am very close now to my objective. I hope that the housing company I started will change our relationship with the idea of ownership and our concept of inclusivity in society, contributing to a type of construction that minimises our impact on the planet. I am pursuing social equality and communitarian ownership, which has to do with how people control their own lives, the places where they live, and their communities. The company's structure is becoming more and more collaborative and less dependent on one individual. For example, the people who live in our buildings become owners of the company and vote on the company's direction. I think we will be successful because this is not an individual project; there are too many people committed to seeing it succeed.

MS   I feel like all the ideas you highlighted are things people started to think after what they experienced in the past years. Many people now want a different kind of future and this is probably why what you want to achieve resonates with them.

JS   That's true, but I should also say that the principles of an equal society in which people have communitarian or collaborative ownership go back thousands of years. In America in the 18th century, there were a lot of utopian communes founded by religious groups. In Europe, we have a lot of different models of communitarian housing and egalitarian societies. It's good that

these ideas find space now, but actually, they have been relevant for probably 50 or 60 years.

MS   Following on "ownership", I wonder if you also avoid having emotional connections with material objects.

JS   I do have objects which have an emotional value for me, like my wedding ring. On the other hand, if I lose it, it's not the end of the world. The marriage isn't in the ring; it is just a symbol of it. I don't feel nostalgia really for anything.

There are different categories of ownership. The first category of ownership is use. For example, something which has very short longevity, like a glass of water consumed in the act of drinking it. The second is the category of usufruct which means the right to use something. For example, we all own the streets because they belong to the state. We all have the right to them, but none of us have absolute control over them. The third category is possession. Your grandmother gives you an object like a piece of jewellery, you wear it for 50 or 60 years, and then you give it to your grandchild. So you don't own it indefinitely; you pass it to someone else.

Then, there is a form of ownership that I don't like called dominion. It's the highest form of ownership possible, the right to dominate and destroy. It seems to me that capitalist society is mainly based on dominion. If I own an important painting and I decide to destroy it, no one can say anything. That, for me, is a very problematic form of ownership, firstly because it's exclusive, secondly because I don't think that humans should have a right to destroy anything.

MS   How does this idea of ownership come into your architecture practice? People that are going to live in your houses would own those flats?

JS   They pay quite affordable rents and have certain rights. They could stay for one or 20 years, paying a controlled rent so they will never be subject to gentrification or difficulties associated with market changes.

The people who live in our buildings will also become shareholders in the company, which is part of a strategy of transition that, over time, will shift the majority control from me, my co-founder, and the chief executive to those people.

The idea is to build a whole network. Because you are part of the same company, you might live in a London building for 20 years, and be connected to the other possible buildings around the world. This global community of people living in buildings will decide about the company's future, how the buildings are managed, what types of people can live there, and what types of behaviour are acceptable.

Our relationship with time shifted from thinking about present needs to thinking about the requirements and obligations of the future. We're getting close to designing buildings that don't damage the planet and don't have high operational costs. It's cheaper to live there, but it also has less impact on the earth.

MS   You've talked about a network of buildings in many parts of the world, and (in another interview) about the idea that if you don't live in a country for more than a few months, then you don't necessarily need to pay tax in that country. Do you think you encourage a kind of nomadic lifestyle?

JS   In the last 30 years, we have seen a short-term rapid travel model, with people moving between countries multiple times for short periods. The rise of inexpensive air tickets allows people to spend a weekend in Amsterdam or do a two-week holiday in Spain or Greece.

I believe that travel will still exist in the future, but we will travel less and for longer periods, as before the invention of railways. Instead of flying five or six times per year, we'll just fly once per year, for more extended periods of nine or six months. I'm very interested in that future of mobility, in what that means for citizenship and residency, what that means for the future of the nation-state.

MS   Recently I have been thinking a lot about refugees, and I feel like in the near future we would also need to host climate refugees.

JS   The Climate Crisis is not recognised yet as a valid reason for mass migration, but you know when the daytime temperature in Cairo becomes 50 degrees, it will not be possible to live there, nor will it be possible to live in large parts of the world. Those people will have to go somewhere.

Hannah Arendt explained that being a refugee means that you are forced to leave your home because you are not wanted there, but you can't choose where to go. You live between two worlds; you can't go back to the world where you came from, and you may not feel that you want to be part of the world that they've joined. Certain governments, such as in the United States, talk a lot about assimilation and integration of refugees. The truth is a lot of refugees don't want to be where they are. They don't want to integrate or assimilate, they want to go back home, but they can't.

MS   The last question relates to the work of Adolf Loos, one of the inspirations for your exhibition *Face Value*. There is a famous essay he wrote named *Ornament and Crime*. Do you think we can still afford ornaments in the era where resources are more and more scarce?

JS   Interesting question. Ornament usually is an expression of sur-
plus, but it's also an expression of priority. You find ornament
even in the most simple wood carvings.

I think the desire to communicate through ornament is quite
central to the human experience. I wouldn't say it's a matter of
being able to afford ornaments, the question is what is the orna-
ment doing and what's the priority we put on it.

If you decide to put the date of a building's completion on the
outside of it, this is an ornament, but it is quite important for
cultural communication.

I also think that the human need to create narratives is really
deep-seated in our species. We will always want to tell each
other stories, and we will always want to use those stories to
explain the world around us. In that sense, an ornament, or
better, decoration, is just part of the human spirit. That's why I
think Adolf Loos is wrong about the complete elimination
of ornaments.

However, I'm interested in ornaments in a different way. For
example, I find that someone's ability to use pieces of clothing
to transform themselves and their relationship with the world is
very poetic and powerful.

The problem with the ornament of buildings is that they're
used to sell a building for more money. Another problem is that
they're designed to go out of date. You have to spend thousands
of dollars to change them because of the ephemerality of taste
and fashion. I'm interested in thinking about an architectural
ornament that might have great longevity and feel relevant and
contemporary in 100 years. I would like to not be part of an
industry that just changes interiors because of fashion.

Off the record, Jack Self gave an anecdote about a project he
did in France that I guess can be a metaphor of his relationship
with time, his hope for the future and his poetic mind. Here
it is: "I worked on a house in France where the client wanted
to have an alley of oak trees. The original idea was to buy
40-year-old oak trees from the Netherlands and transport them
to France to plant them. We convinced the client to plant the
oak trees now in the knowledge that the landscape design that
they saw in the image would not be completed for probably 50
to 100 years. So, they would never see these big trees but their
grandchildren would see them."

THE ROOM
BECAME
A   PLACE
WHERE I
COULD
COMPARE
HER
"PRESENCE/
ABSENCE"

HOSPITAL ROOM

Finitude
(n) Mortality

SHIMIZU KEN

I spent a lot of time in a hospital located in the mountains in Japan, partly because my grandmother had been hospitalised. In November 2016, she passed away peacefully: she was 107 years old at the time. On the day of her death, I was in her empty hospital room, thinking about life and existence. The room became a place where I could compare her "presence/absence" and where I felt time was stretched. I seemed to be in between the past and the present. When I saw my grandmother's image in a photograph of her personal belongings left in the room, I had a strange sensation that her presence was transported to the other side of the space within a photograph. I recognise that this is a different meaning from the representation or absence with which the image of photographs is often described. Since that day, I look at places and photographs that remind me of the past from a different perspective. They give me a vision that life and death stand next to each other, superimposed and connected through a transparent membrane. It makes me think that death is always beside me.

Since the pandemic has happened, everyday life separated by screens seems to symbolise a world where life and death are divided. The coronavirus has certainly brought people closer to death. Death is always treated as a peripheral and abhorrent subject. Even in Japan, people are afraid of death and try to stay as far away from the virus as possible. It is deeply sad that it has spread so quickly, and that countless people have died of infection around the world. However, it becomes an important opportunity for a whole generation to think about life and death, and I have also changed my perception of hospitals and medical treatment since the pandemic began. As well as the importance of modern medical treatment, attending to those who are suffering is part of human history and is an action that our ancestors have done since ancient times. I believe that a place where life and death, and the present and the past are connected is an intermediate space where multiple times intersect. It is a place where we can gain a great awareness of and influence on the views on life and death. I imagine that there will be a mature richness to be found when we move towards a world where the values of life and death are in balance and circulation, as opposed to a world where the desire for life has become so enormous.

English translation by the author.

山の中にある病院で私は沢山の時間を過ごしました。この病院には私の祖母が入院していたのも一つの理由です。2016年11月彼女は静かにこの世を去りました。(彼女は107歳まで生きました。)彼女が亡くなった日、私は誰もいない病室で人生や存在について考えていました。その部屋は祖母の「いる/いない」を比べられる場所でした。時間が引き延ばされ、私は過去と現在の間にいるようでした。部屋に残された身の回り品の写真に写る祖母の姿を見ている時、私は彼女の存在が写真の中の「向こう側」の空間へうつろうような不思議な感覚を覚えました。それは写真が徴す「表象」や「不在」とは別の在り方だと思います。その日以来、私は部屋のように過去を想起させる場所、そして写真を別の視点で見るようになりました。そこでは生と死が透明な膜越しに隣り合い、重なり合い、つながり合うような場所であり、死はいつも私のすぐそばにあると考えさせてくれます。

パンデミック以来、スクリーン/screenで隔てられた日常は生と死が分断された世界を象徴しているようです。コロナウィルスは確実に人と死の距離を近づけました。いつの時代でも死は周辺へ追いやられ忌み嫌われる対象です。私が住む日本でも多くの人が死を恐れ、出来る限りウィルス(=死の媒介者)から遠ざかろうとします。あまりに急速に広がり、感染して亡くなる方がいるのは残念なことです。しかし全世代が生死について考える重要な機会となっていますし、私自身もパンデミック以前/以後で、生命を扱う病院や医療への見方が変わりました。現代医療の重要性もさることながら、人を治療するという行為は古い時代から私たちの祖先がしてきたことであり人類の歴史の一部です。生と死、そして現在と過去がつながる場は複数の時間が交差する中間的な空間だと考え、人の死生観への大きな気付きや影響を与える場となります。生への欲望があまりに巨大化した世界とは対照的に、生と死の価値が均衡し循環する世界へ私たちが向かう時、そこには成熟した豊かさがあると私は想像します。

LANG WAS
NO LONGER
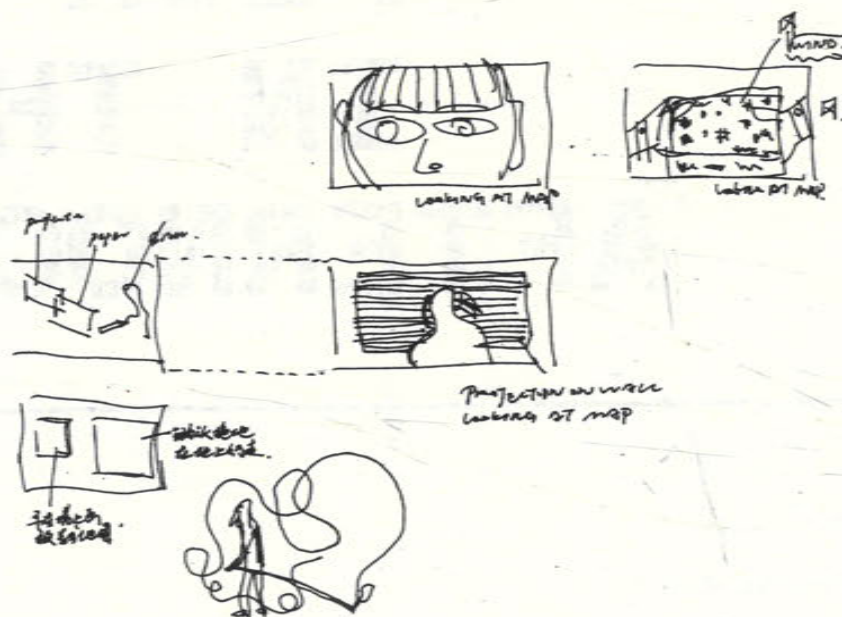CONCERNED
ABOUT HOW
SHE LOOKED

ON

SCREEN

HUNT IN THE MORNING, FISH IN THE AFTERNOON
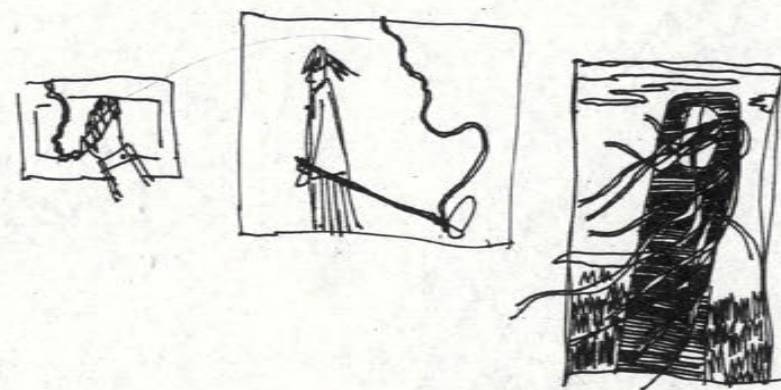
Finitude
(n) The containment
of time

YUXUAN SHI

A week after, Lang purchases two brand-new machines: a made-in-China computer designed in the US and a knitting machine shipped from Scotland. She used to sit in front of the working table, turning on the music very loud not to hear the environmental noise. Now, Lang knows how to be present in the moment and embrace the silence. Half of the table is used for having meals, the other is used for drawing. Opposite the table is the sofa, where she always takes her five-minute nap after lunch. She can sleep till late at night and is awakened by a severe migraine when overwhelmed with work. Lang, a room with necessities, two machines, a year. A week before leaving, she chose to do nothing. Lang was no longer concerned about how she looked on screen, nor did she check the integrity of that piece of fabric lying on the machine. Suggestions out of nowhere once impacted her design... not anymore.


After seven days, she is asked to work. Lang, machines, a room. She remembers the drowned schoolkid ten years ago. With the consternation from his friends and the concealed false pity from adults. The fact of the unsolved question is never revealed. Lang is convinced by the decision she made at the time. Along with the liquid water becoming a solid land little by little, the harrowing memory was vanishing. The changing lake metaphorised everyone's agreement. The shovel truck was about to dump when the whistle blew. Students stopped as they passed by the lake and added to the number of onlookers. One in the crowd crossed the fence to the front of the truck, unzipped his backpack, reached in and took out a handful of mud in his bare hand. He threw it into the lake. More and more people dumped the mud hidden in their dirty bags into the lake. The shovel was waiting. Some said that the driver was asked to leave the truck by the lake for the night. Some were told that he was sitting in the cab all night with Lang by his side. Until dawn. The crowd dispersed with their muddied fingers. Lang wakes up from the sofa and leaves the room.

English translation by Jingwen Weng.
*Photographs and drawings by Yuxuan Shi.*

一周后,朗购置了两台新机器。一台美国设计,中国组装的电脑,与一台从苏格兰运来的针织机。
曾经她工作时需要把音乐打开,声音调到最大,尽可能盖过身边一切的环境音。现在不同了,她无需再一遍遍陷入他者制造出的情境或氛围中,她学会了与当下为伴,一个自我与自我相拥的时刻。一半桌子用于吃饭,另一半用来绘图。桌子对面是沙发,她每天午睡的地方,有时是饭后的五分钟,过度劳累时则能从旁晚睡到清晨,直至被偏头痛叫醒。朗,一个房间与必要的家具,两台机器。时间就这样过了一年。
在离开前的一周,她选择放下手中的工作,她不再担心屏幕中自己的形象是否得体,不再一遍遍在针织机上重复检查面料的完整性,不再把由电脑中不知何处传来的建议加入自己的设计,也不再用扫描需要被触摸的作品。朗,机器,一个房间。这七天,她任由工作选择自己。

她想起了十年前在学校溺水的孩子,背后是成堆的问题,面前是同龄人的惊愕,与成年人一句句的惋惜。朗认为她当年的决定是对的,填湖的方案大家也一致同意,当水变成陆地,消失的景象自动会清扫记忆的栖息地。
铲土车刚要开始倾倒,哨声响了,学生们路过湖边时都停了下来,围观的人越来越多。人群中有人跨过围栏,越到铲土车前,他拉开背包拉链,赤手捧了把泥土,转身抛入湖中,之后,跨过围栏的人越来越多,每个人的包大小不一,款式不同,但都脏脏的。每个人都向湖中或多或少倾倒了。
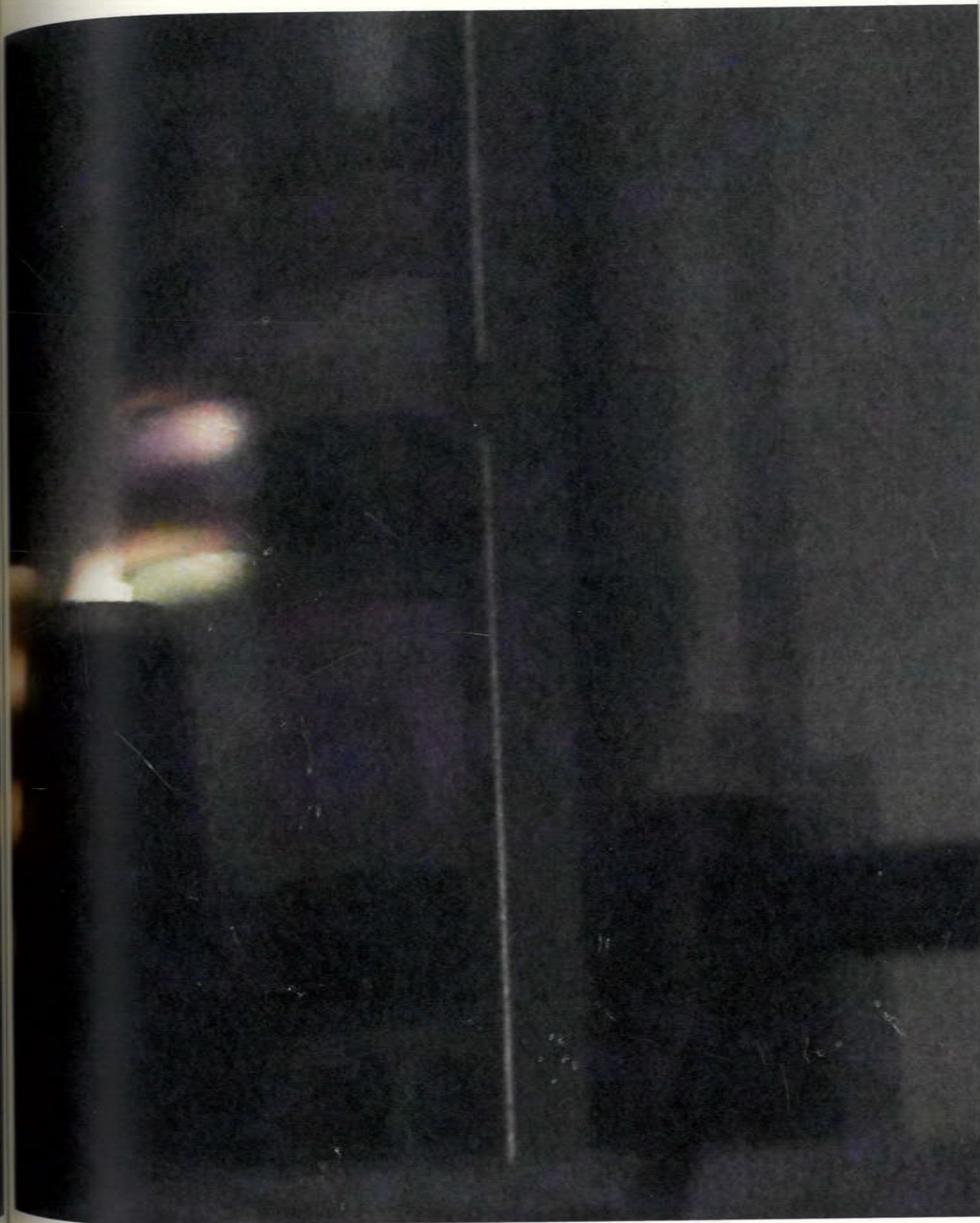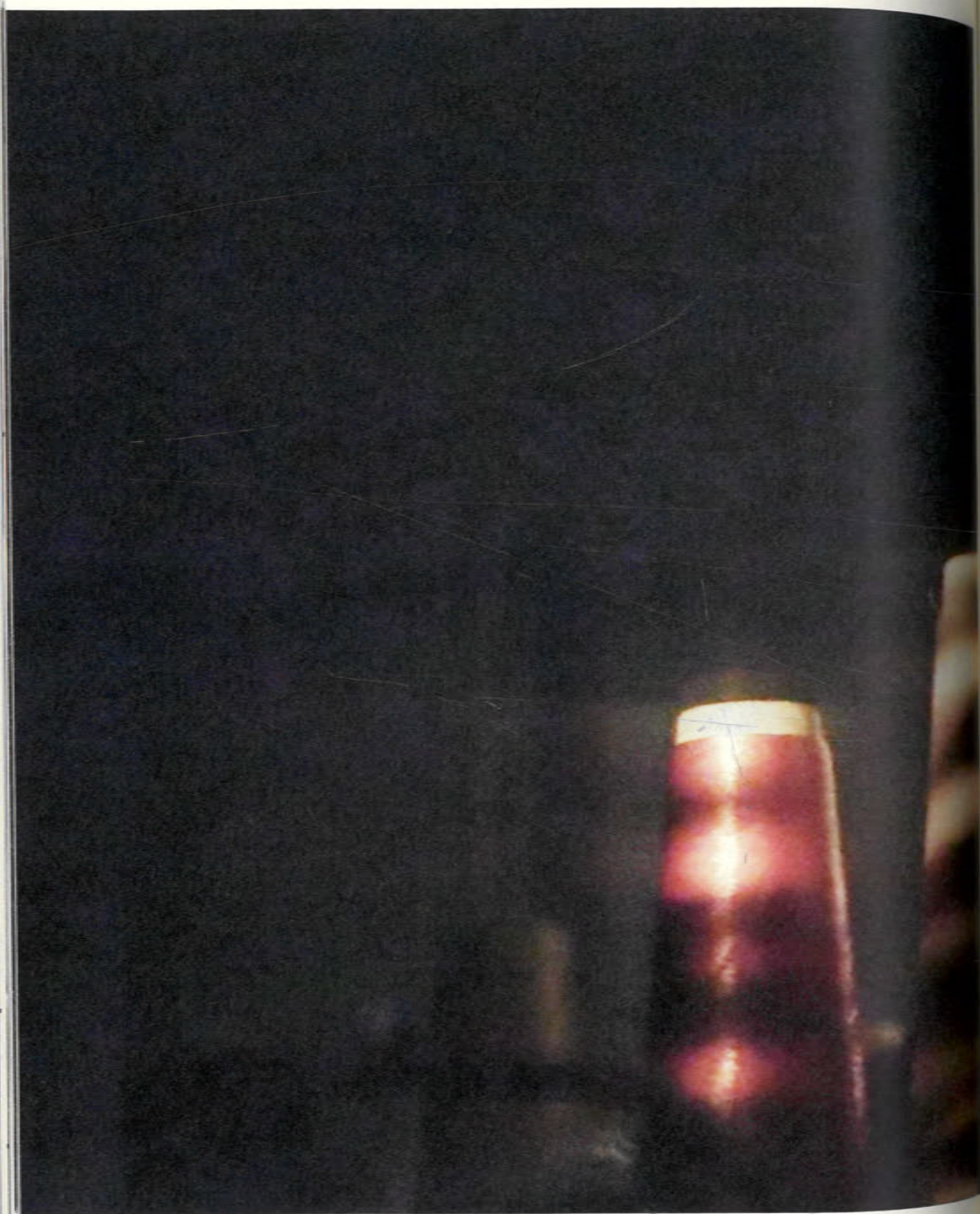铲土车静候在一旁,有人说司机被朗叫走了,只留下了停转的车在湖边一夜,有人说司机与朗在驾驶室里坐了一整晚,直至天亮。人群的指尖夹杂着泥土离开。朗从沙发上醒来,离开停摆的房间。

THEY FEED OFF A

PLETHORA

OF
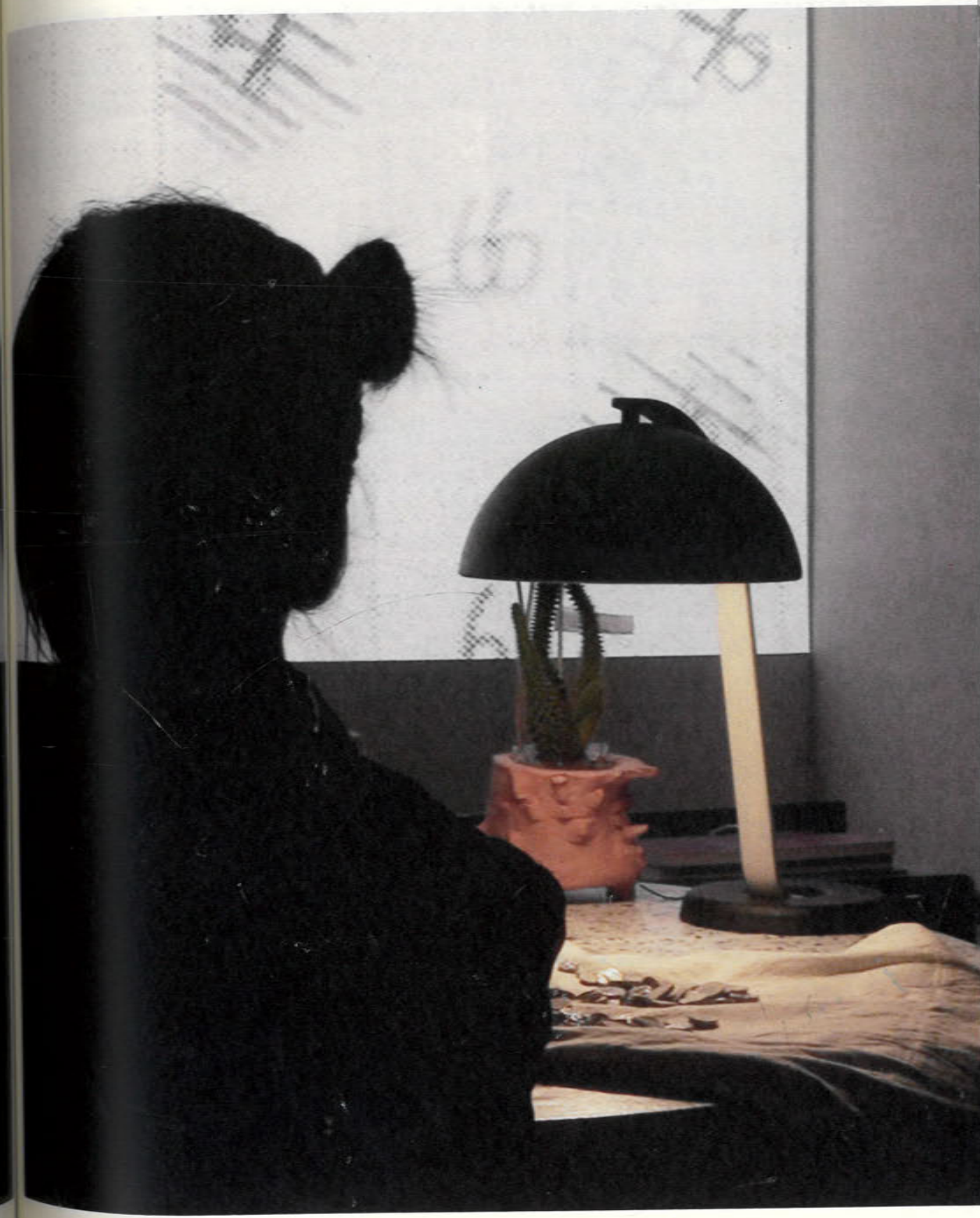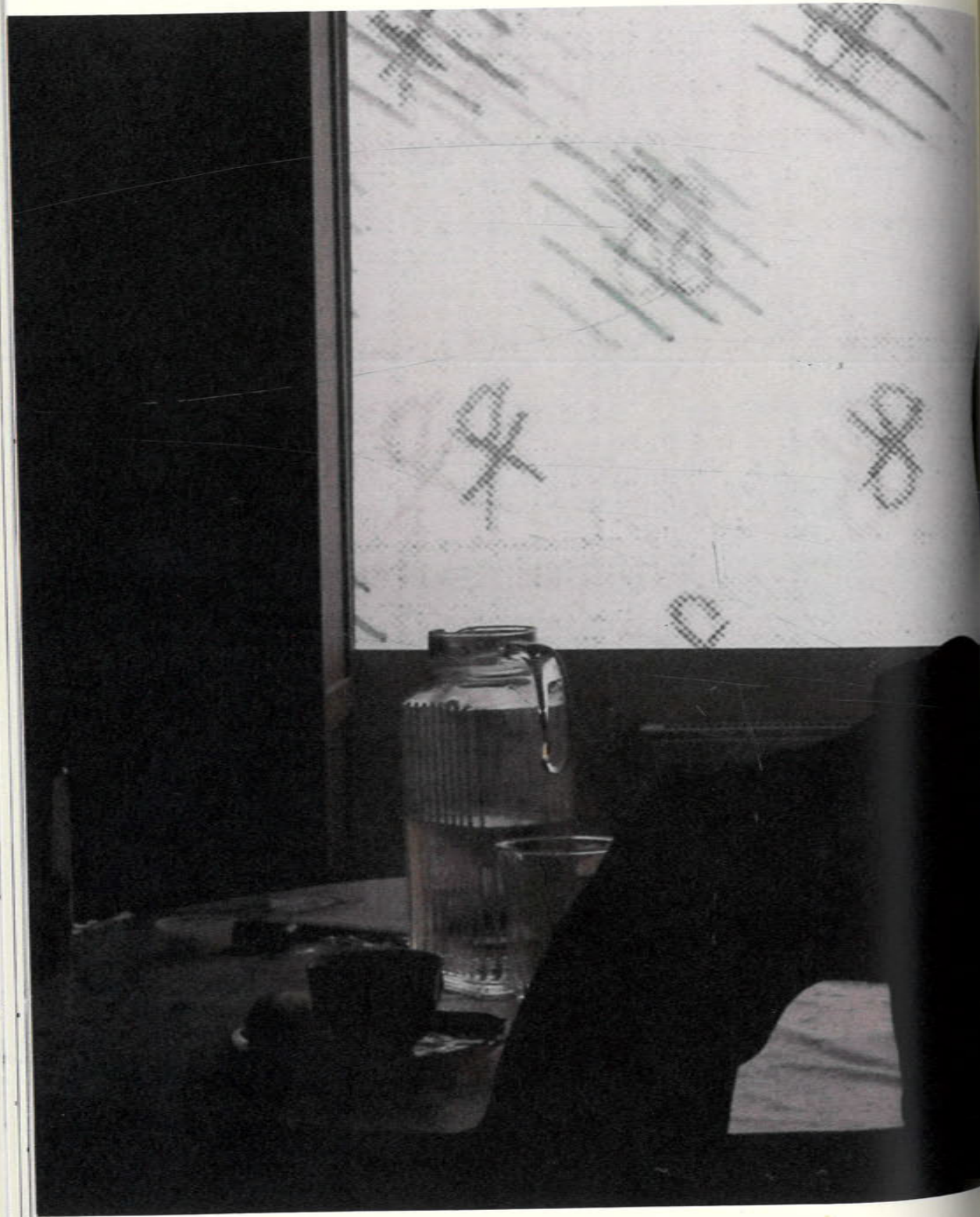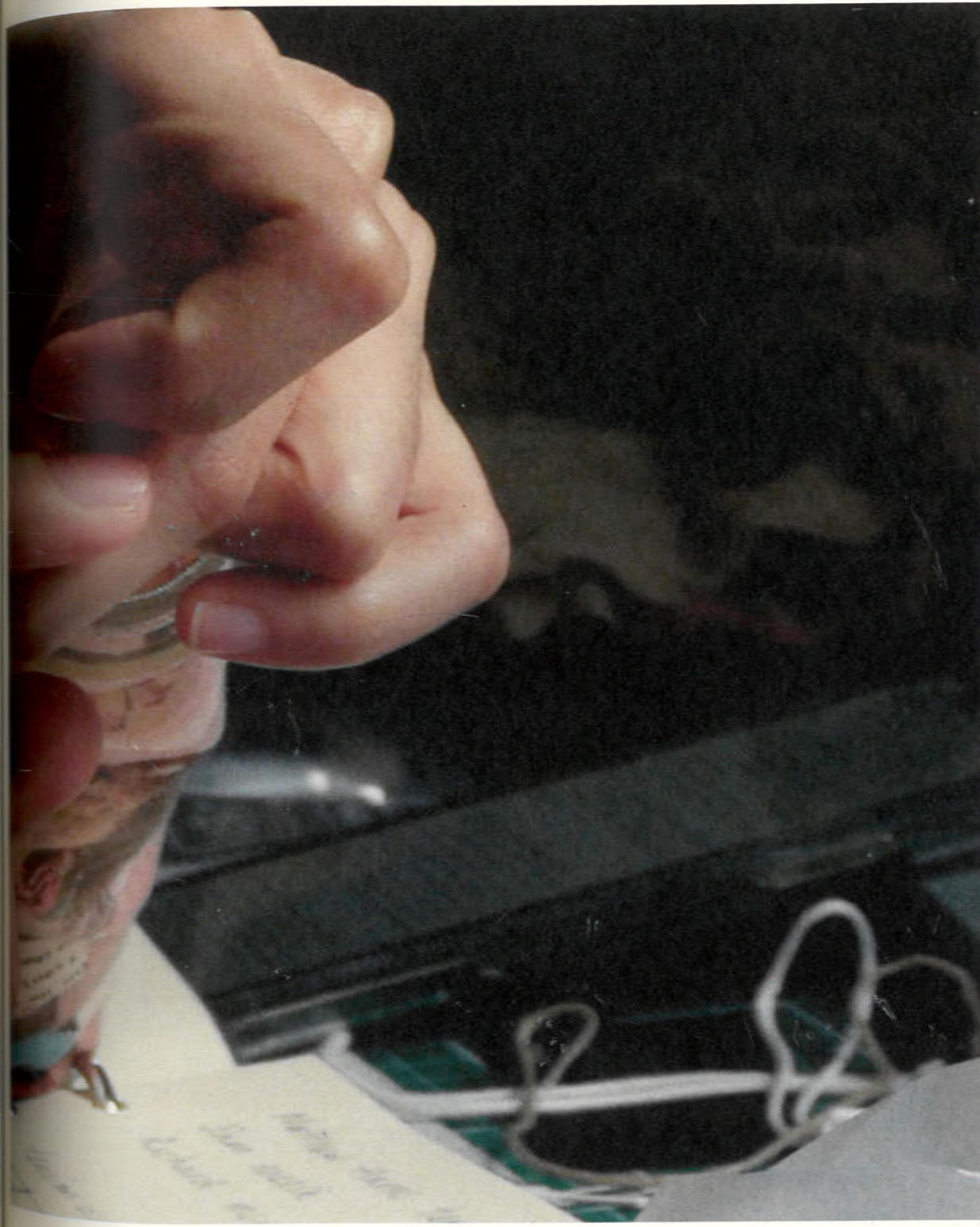
HUMAN CONNECTIONS

The Awakening Lens

ATIVE ECTION FILM D TV

Do you feel the distance of your gaze towards the unobserved?

Let's sneak into the lives of others.

JONNY FLINT

THEY FEEL PLETH OF HUMA CONNECT

CREATIVE CONNECTION IN FILM AND TV

Finitude

(n) The bounds
of reality

JONNY FLINT

When I am asked to define the role of a cinematographer, I tend to lean into the fact that it is an intriguing mix of the technical and the creative. Fundamentally both of those elements pertain to an understanding of lenses, cameras and lighting. The key difference, however, is knowing how each of those elements function, and knowing how they feel... I realise this could become very pretentious very quickly, and I am okay with that.

The majority of my work as a cinematographer is within fiction. Eventually I hope this will mean feature films and high-end TV drama, but during the nascency of a career you are shooting short films and establishing relationships with new directors. This is in the hope that one of these directors might then progress on to bigger projects and bring you along for the ride. What many people do not necessarily realise is that I am one of the director's closest creative confidants, and our relationship is often compared to that of a marriage/civil partnership. You have the initial courting period where you dis-cover one another's tastes, methods, and sensibilities. If there is compatibility, then you might work together on a project. From there the collaboration might crash and burn, it might flourish for a lifetime, or it might do a mercurial mix of both.

What I fervently love about fiction projects is that you are engaging in the act of storytelling, more specifically visual storytelling, the origins of which apparently date as far back as 30,000 years ago. In many respects I have always put my passion for storytelling before my passion for cinematogra-phy. By that I mean if there ever comes a day where I am no longer able to tell a narrative through my work as a cinema-tographer then I will find another profession that can accom-modate that purpose. That is not to belittle my other work in commercials/content and music promos, as these are productive playgrounds for the aforementioned technical elements of the job. However ultimately, working with a story is, for me at least, the vehicle that leads to creative stimulation and job satisfaction.

Within my professional world you are con-stantly, and oftentimes very quickly, having to make a myriad of technical decisions. These include, but are not limited to, the framing/composition of the shot (examples being wide, mid, close-up), the angle of the shot, the focal length of the lens, the f-stop of the aperture on the lens, how big or shallow your depth of field is, and the quality, direction and colour of the light that is illuminating your subject. A buzz word among narrative cinematographers is motivation and this is what I find so invig-orating about working with a story: the fact that every technical decision I make needs to be motivated by the emotional content present within the script. It is this "cinematic language" that a cinematographer must have an articulate understanding of in order to allow the audience into the world that they and the director are trying to create. If there are discrepancies or inconsistencies along the way then the audience can very quickly begin to distrust the filmmakers, and their focus on the story can wane and dissipate.

If you imagine the director as the epicentre of the film, then they feed off a plethora of human connections in order to bring their vision to life. The best projects I have worked on are when the director allows these connections to flow openly, allowing for a kind of osmotic energy on-set where ideas can be presented and considered without fear of a creative hierarchy. These are the kind of environments that I flourish in, and so I am always striving to play my part in creating this on every project I attach myself to. If nothing else, though, there should always at least be a creative synergy triad between the director, the cinematographer, and the actors/actresses. I often operate the camera as well, so I find it imperative that I am able to follow the action and emotion almost in real time. This is only possible when I have had the relevant discourse with the director beforehand, which instils a confidence and assurance that what it is I am doing is congruous with the world of the film. What I mean to say is that the creative conversation that should happen in pre-production then allows for creativity to happen during the filming, because everyone is then on the same page. Without this process you are left in the wilderness trying to guess what direction to go in.

I can talk about a recent short film I worked on earlier this year (2021) called *Mummy's Present*.

The log-line for the film reads: "A 12-year-old boy gives his critically-ill mother a unique birthday present: the opportunity to speak to a time-traveller from the future. Revealing the future to someone who will not be around to see it, this is a raucous and heartbreaking story about facing what is to come."

Specific to the cinematography, the director and I decided early on that to begin with we wanted different energies for the boy and his mum – for the son, more frantic and chaotic, and for the mum, more static and stable. These two energies would then slowly drift together and become one by the end.

I spoke earlier about how a salient aspect of my job is understanding how things function and how they feel, so with that in mind I decided to have the camera handheld (ie, on my shoulder) for the son, enabling me to be more instinctual with the sporadic movement of his character. For the mum, the camera would be on a tripod, allowing for smoother movements that I felt would accommodate the sombre nature of her character. This filming philosophy then laid the groundwork that would help inform lens choice, composition, lighting, and everything in-between. It is this level of connection to the story that I depend on in every fiction project that I shoot, and it fuels the kind of creativity that I absolutely love.

MUMMY'S PRESENT
Lighting diagram 1

X   = Practical on dimmer

▬   = Blackout (on inside)
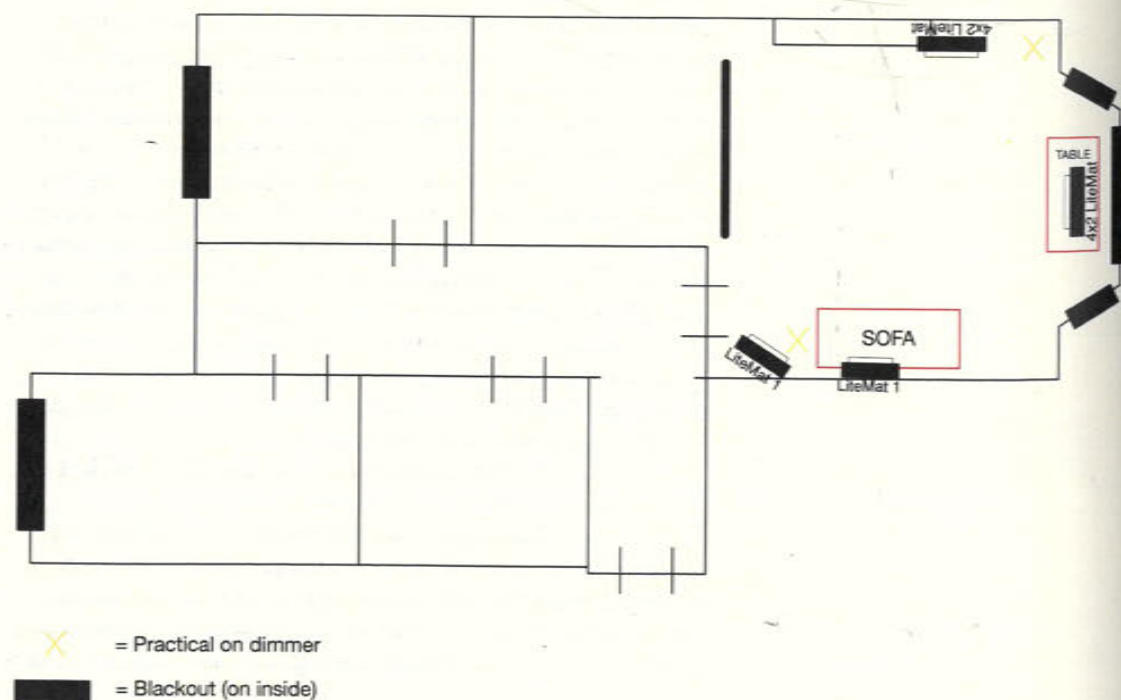
Working on a documentary
in Kenya (2018)
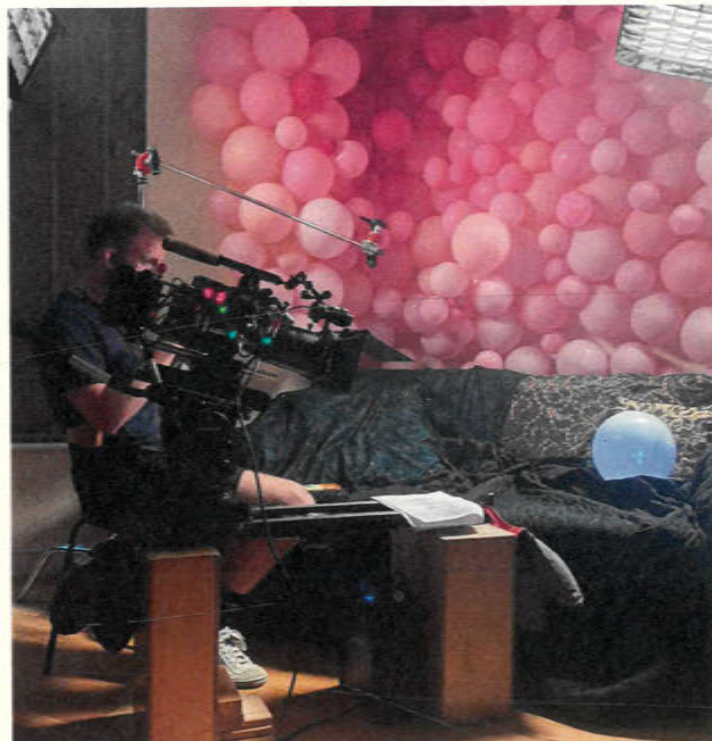
Mummy's Present, on set (2021)

Short film in London (2020)

TARAN [V.O] (CONT'D)
Mum always used to make me eat
broccoli - she said junk food will
kill us. But now she don't care.
And I get to eat whatever I like!
It's SO sick!

TARAN impersonates his ultra glam sister, 17, via FaceSwap.

TARAN [V.O] (CONT'D)
My sister's never home. She says if
"Mum's not gonna be here anymore,
why should I?" When I asked her
where Mum's going, she said "Go
fuck yourself, Taran. You thicko".
So I broke her hair straighteners.
I hate my sister. Curly bitch.

FaceSwap again, this time DAD's face on TARAN who is
pretending to cry. Big tears, big baby.

TARAN [V.O] (CONT'D)
Dad won't tell me about Mum. He
keeps crying. He don't even go work
anymore. I had to step over him
yesterday, and his bum was showing.
I used to think he was so scary.
Now he's just like a baby!

Pictures of PINKY in happier times: she was magnetic. Free.

TARAN [V.O] (CONT'D)
Mum loved birthdays. We'd always
have big parties and she'd dance so
much. She used to be SO funny, but
now she just shouts and sleeps.
Man... I wish Mum was fun again.

3. Out of the phone now. A sleek camera. A bulging balloon
wall spreads down the ceiling. PINKY nudges TARAN.

PINKY [IN HINDI]
Pass me that water...

PINKY slowly gulps water with tablets. TARAN meanwhile
reviews KEITH's dodgy website on his phone.

TARAN [V.O]
So this year, I got Mum the bestest
birthday present ever! She'll love
it. I found a time traveller from
the future!
(MORE)

WE PERFORMED
SONGS
AND
PLAYS,
AS
A
WAY TO
VOICE
COLLECTIVE
EXPERIENCES
OF LOSS AND
SUFFERING

# TELLING OUR COVID STORIES: *BUDHAN PODCAST*

Finitude
(n) Finite reality

ALICE TILCHE, WITH
ATISH INDREKAR
ANISH GARANGE
SONAL BAXI

Budhan Podcast is a video-podcast series which began during India's first national lockdown in 2020, aimed at documenting the short and long-term impact of Covid-19 among India's most precarious indigenous and nomadic groups through arts-based methods.

India counts for more than a hundred million Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs). This social category enlists communities that were "notified" as "criminals" during the British colonial rule in India under the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act. Despite their de-notification in 1952, following India's independence in 1947, the stigma of criminality continues to be associated with these groups. It negatively affects their ability to access basic state provisions such as education to food and health services, as well as depriving them of citizenship rights and entitlements. As precarious workers at the margins of India's informal economy (manual labourers, migrant workers, street performers, sex workers), the DNTs are among the communities most severely affected by the health and economic consequences of the pandemic.

In May 2020, a group of seven artists belonging to the Budhan Theatre Group[1] and the Chhara DNT community of Ahmedabad (Gujarat), began an extensive project of documenting the lockdown and post-lockdown experiences of DNT groups. They produced a series of video podcasts in indigenous languages, disseminated through community social media platforms. The episodes address the health, socio-cultural and politico-economic dimensions of the pandemic through multiple art forms that include monologues, songs and poetry. They cover topics ranging from health and safety measures, changes in death and marriage rituals, precarious livelihoods, the lives of children and the transformation of the domestic sphere.
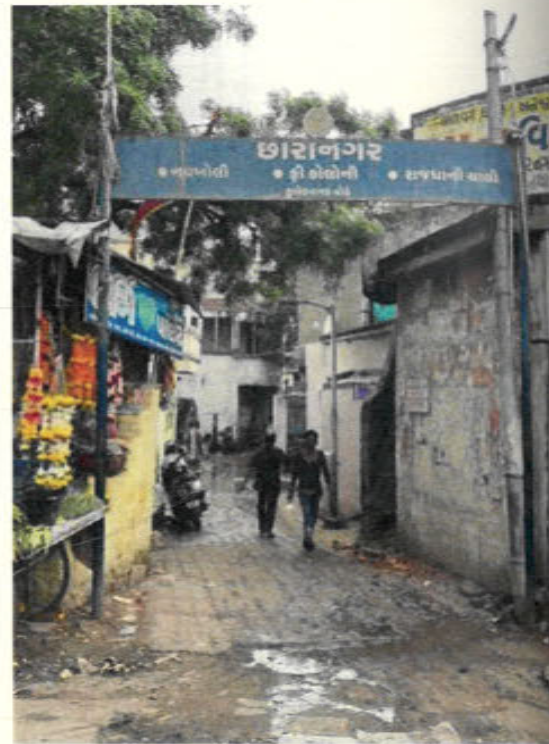
Entrance of Chharanagar
(Photo Credit: Ankita Jain)

All episodes were directed, enacted and produced by artists from the Chhara community and the Budhan Theatre team. Season One is an intimate portrayal of the experiences of the Chhara community itself during the first pandemic wave. The beginning of the series, filmed in the early days of the pandemic, relies heavily on performances to deliver information, but also to process loss and suffering. Season Two was filmed in-between pandemic waves and focusses on the experiences of other DNT communities through a mixture of performances and documentary styles. The podcasts document the realities of marginalised groups otherwise overlooked in national reporting. For the makers, the series was also an opportunity to experiment with filmmaking and editing, and to create new artistic forms by translating performances onto the screen.

Ruchika and Sanjay working with Audio Device
(Photo Credit: Ankita Jain)

[1]Budhan is a grassroots theatre group engaged in raising awareness of the plight of India's DNTs, especially the Chhara community of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Under the leadership of activist, theatre director and award-winning filmmaker Dakxin Bajranje Chhara, Budhan has been tapping into the talents of Chhara youth to produce street plays, intimate and experimental theatre, as well as documentary films on issues of culture, rights and development.

TRANSLATING THEATRE

By Atish Indrekar, Artistic Director at Budhan Theatre

In March 2020, after India's Prime Minister announced the first national lockdown, I saw thousands of migrant workers walking back home from their places of work, situated thousands of kilometres away in urban and semi-urban locations. Many labourers migrate from other regions of India to Gujarat for work and vice versa, and they walked back home. That night I could not sleep, my mind filled with images of men and women walking, carrying their children and baggage on their shoulders. Some years earlier, Budhan Theatre had recorded the stories of migrant workers and shared them widely through audio podcasts. The morning after that sleepless night, our theatre group met at the Chharanagar Library[2] and decided to do something similar with the stories of Covid.

After securing funding for the project, we began working on community awareness videos aimed at telling the unheard voices of our communities through our theatre art, but also at providing information in local languages in a context of growing fear and misinformation around the pandemic.

The making of the first podcast episode in May 2020 was a challenge. By then the virus had reached Chharanagar, the first deaths were being recorded and the neighbourhood was gripped with fear. Community members had become so scared that they were terrified to get tested. Our group was also not technically experienced at that point of time as so far theatre had been our primary domain of expression. While a couple of our members were experienced filmmakers, many of us had never held a camera in our hands.

In the first episodes, restricted by lockdown measures, we held telephonic and zoom interviews with members of our community living in various parts of India. We interviewed experts such as doctors and medical specialists so that people could take correct preventive and curative measures. We also performed songs and plays, as a way to voice collective experiences of loss and suffering.

During the making of the video podcasts we came to know and understand the situation of other DNT groups in other parts of the country, and their struggles during the pandemic. This was an opportunity to get to know other groups connected to our own community of the Chharas as well, and to promote our community's Bhantu language. Documenting the struggles of our various communities was also a way to counter mainstream narratives that not only exclude us, but construe us as criminals. We also learnt many new aspects of documentation, and how to translate our theatre practice to the screen, learning new ways of projecting our voice through social media and creative filmmaking.

***

Covid cases were rising in our neighbourhood but also in Ahmedabad and so were the incidences of death. The Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, one of the largest in Asia, had long queues of people waiting to take the bodies of their deceased family members. On occasions, the wrong body would be given over in all the confusion. Witnessing this horror, I remembered the story, 'Murdon kaa Gaon' (The Village of the Dead) by Dr Dharamveer Bharati that I had read during my theatre studies. I could relate the deaths happening in the hospital with the narrative of the story.

We decided to perform the story in our fifth podcast. We translated the story into our Bhantu language, and adapted it to our current times. We discussed whether we should perform the story or narrate it and opted for the story-telling format. We chose an intimate setting, sitting in a circle, with candles around the actors and no electricity. The story is one of thresholds, of the fine line that exists between life and death, between animals and humans, between humans and slaves; we adapted it to draw parallels between corona patients and humanity, a story told in scantly lit darkness.

Online zoom meeting, Anish talking to Pardhi Tribe members.
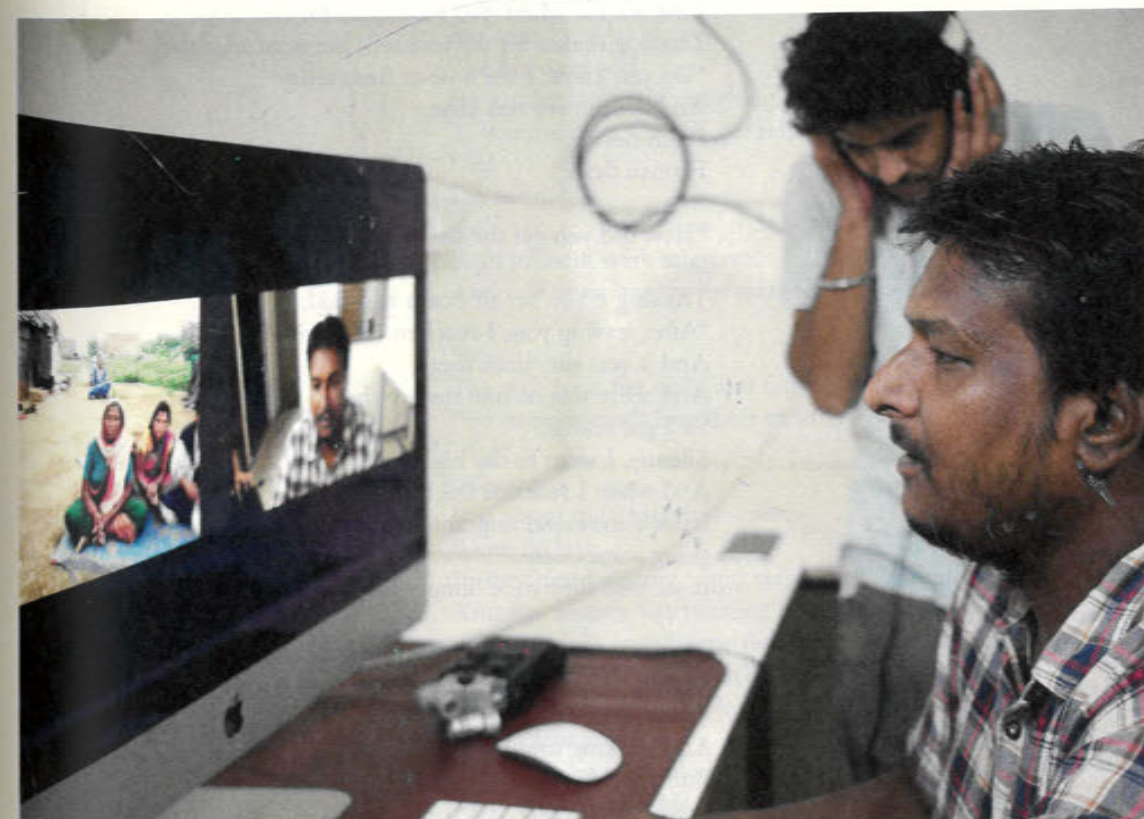*(Photo Credit: Ankita Jain)*

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[2] *Budhan Theatre functions out of Chharanagar, a former DNT settlement colony where the Chhara community, once listed as a Criminal Tribe under the CTA, was kept under bondage for use as labour in the railways and mills of Ahmedabad city. Chharanagar was set up as a community library by Budhan Theatre in 1998, and has since evolved as a hub of educational and theatre activities.*

MURDON KAA GAON
(*THE VILLAGE OF THE DEAD*)

By Dr Dharamveer Bharati

Near Ahmedabad's civil hospital,
In a small dilapidated house,
A dog lives with her wife and their children.
After two days the dog returns to his home.
After seeing him, the wife says:
"Oh! Look at your face, it's glowing.
First tell me where you have been for two days?"
The dog shakes his tail and tells her with a laugh:
"Do you know, I ate human flesh today
And the human was alive.
Fresh flesh.
Human flesh!"

"How did you get the flesh of a living human?"

The dog made her sit down and said:
"After leaving you, I reached the Civil Hospital.
And it was very dark there.
And there was no one there either.
So I got scared.
Silently, I went to the highway.
And when I reached the highway
I saw a thousand migrants with their children on their backs
going somewhere.
It seemed they were hungry for many days.

They were walking like machines '*dhak dhak dhak dhak*'
It seemed like millions of people were carrying Jesus's cross on
their shoulders
And walking towards their death.
But what do we do about it? We are animals.
Leave all this talk.

I reached the corner of the road.
There was tall grass.
And in front of it, there were tall bungalows.
There was a small hut in front of the bungalows.
An old man was sitting there.
The old man seemed very hungry.

And suddenly the voice of a boy came from the hut.

I think he was asking for water.
He may have been thirsty.
He was asking for water again and again.
The old man suddenly got up
but he couldn't walk.

With the support of the wall, he reached the water.
He took the water and tried to give it to the boy.
Suddenly, the old man's leg broke
And since his leg broke, the water spilled on the boy.
After the water spilled, the boy asked again for
'Water, Water, Water.'

Maybe he needed more water.
He was very thirsty, and he wanted water.

'Why don't you die?
You will get relief if you die.
Die soon.'
The old man said.
He suddenly started coughing.
'If you die then you will get relief.
Die!
Die soon.'

Both of them were migrants.
And had been hungry for many days."

"Stop, stop."
The wife took her child and fed her milk.
"So humans don't love their children?"

"They do.
It is about the capacity to love.
Some do love.
In the front building, a girl refused to drink milk
And her mother was running behind her to feed her milk.
'Hey, Mama's angel come fast and drink milk
It's just one small glass, drink it.'
'No mom, I won't have it.
I don't like milk.'
People living in shacks are not capable of loving.
They are just helpless.

From there I went to the wall
And I saw that there was a human lying down.
I went to the human.
He may have been dead.
So first I moved around him.
It was very dark and the lights from across the building were
also off.
It was a good chance
So this is what I did:
I reached for the dead body.
And bit him on his shoulder.

And after biting it, the dead body started agonising.

I got scared
He may not have been dead.
He was alive.
So I moved away from him.
I think the dead body wanted to say something but he could
not.
And he was trying to change his position again and again.
But perhaps because of his weakness he could not change his
position.
I went closer and started eating his flesh.
He shouted again, but this time I snatched his flesh.
And snatched him too, so the human became unconscious.
I ate his flesh the whole night and then slept there.

But in the morning someone from the front building spilled
some cold water.
And the water spilled on this human.
The human started agonising again.
Maybe he wanted to say something.
But he could not say it.

It was already morning.
The sunlight was shattering on the human's wounds.
And ants were roaming all around his wounds.
Maybe the ants were drinking his blood.
But he could not do anything about it because he was weak.
Suddenly, he started licking his own blood from the ground."

"What? He licked his own blood?"
"Yes, his own blood.
Do you know? This human was thirsty for three days and three
nights."
"But do humans drink their own blood too?"

"This is nothing,
This is the speciality of humans.
Humans first drink others' blood and eat their flesh.
And if they do not get other's flesh, then humans drink their

own blood.
We animals are better than these humans.
Someone has said that humans are superior to animals.

After sometime a businessman passed by.
After seeing the living dead body, he wore his mask.
And then shouted:
'These corona dead people are everywhere.
They do not even die in a corner side so we can pass by
Oh God, when will this corona go and our business will start?'
Then I came to know that this human had coronavirus.

That was the reason no one was coming near him.

No one was touching him
And if some family member dies then no one from the family
even touches the dead body.
And in civil hospitals workers burn the dead body in a machine.
God knows when this human will die.
And when the workers of the civil hospital will burn him.
While watching this human, a question ran through my head:
Is this human dead because of corona or hunger?

Simultaneously a window from the front opened.
And someone said:
'Let it be
The dog is licking the beggar's wounds.
Because of that, his wounds will get better sooner.
Let him lick.'

It was already day time.
People started coming and going.
On having a chance, I took out that human's heart.
And left.
But I couldn't run further.
Because of fat in the human flesh.
I always used to wonder why these businessmen have fat tum-
mies. Perhaps they eat human flesh throughout their life."

"So tell me fast, where did you put that piece of flesh?
Even I want to eat it."

The dog slowly indicated and said,
That he had hidden the piece of flesh under the leaf.
His wife ran and took out the piece of flesh.
And started eating it.
But suddenly she came back.
"Human flesh? This is not human flesh.
They cheated you."

"What happened?"
"It is neither hot nor tasty.
And I am saying that human flesh cannot be this fat."

"No, he was a human.
Would I not recognize humans?
He was a very hungry migrant from this village."
"He was a very hungry migrant.
That is why I am saying that he was not a human."

"What do you mean?"
"Are they human?
Dying of hunger.
Being destroyed in slavery.
They are not humans."

The dog got ashamed.
And put his head down
Because he ate the flesh of a hungry, slave migrant.
Corona patients and hungry slaves are not humans.

TRANSLATING EMOTIONS THROUGH MUSIC

By Anish Garange, Music Director at Budhan Theatre

I am a musician and composer. My main role in the podcast project was to create background scores, and compose songs in the Bhantu the language of our Chhara community.

In the early days of the project, which also corresponded with India's first lockdown, I experienced a lot of difficulties composing the songs as we could go to a recording studio and had to rehearse while maintaining physical distance. We created a makeshift recording studio with blankets that served both as sound-proofing and distancing devices. As we went along making the podcast episodes, and I got all the needed equipment like good mikes, sound cards and headphones, I learnt new aspects of music production and post-production.

The first song we recorded was a Hindi song, 'Corona's Destruction' written by Arvind Indrekar, a poet in Chharanagar, which I translated in our Bhantu language. My friends, Jayendra, Yash and Mohit, helped me to compose the music for the song and Azim and Parthiv, both belonging to the young Chhara generation, sang it.

When I see the destruction caused by Covid-19
I was reminded of the knife dripping with blood
I can see death with just the blink of my eyes

Eyes soak up the tears of sadness
The destruction of corona has reached every
beautiful place in the world.
Say, rest in peace, people are dying in every house.
All the corpses have become ancestors
They are being laid to rest.

Only sadness is pouring out of our eyes
Hindu temples, mosques or gurudwaras (Sikh temple)
They all are empty now.

To keep living,
We should keep a strong heart
This time shall pass,
This destruction shall end.

The second song 'Doobta Suraj' (Setting Sun) that we composed was from Amit Mohan, a young poet from the state of Maharashtra, and was sung by Yash Tamanche. The song contains a mix of Bhantu and Marathi languages and opens Episode 3, about the transformation in death and mourning rituals during corona. Through the song, and in the episode, we learn about the impossibility of mourning the dead physically and collectively, and about the pain of crying for their loss, all alone. We also learnt about the enduring force of some community traditions in the face of adversity.

The sun is going to set,
And there will be a new sunrise.
We lose our breath
But we have to keep a strong heart.

These days will also go away
Just do not give up.
The happy days will return.
Just know it.

Shooting in session with Sandhi De-notified Tribe, Ruchika Kodekar.
(Photo Credit: Ankita Jain)

The sun is going to set
And there will be a new sunrise,
A new sunrise
We became broken,
Our children are without food too
It breaks a mother's heart not having food to feed her children.
There is a fire in a mother's affection
All the rituals are being left incomplete
Even marriages are empty now
The family, which was there in our ups and down,
Now, they do not even attend the funeral.

The sun is going to set
And there will be a new sunrise
A new sunrise

The sun is going to set
And there will be a new sunrise
Hands and legs are shivering,
But we all have to keep going.

If we stay united then,
We will win this war.
The world has seen our strength,
After having seen it, the world will be surprised.

The sun is going to set
And there will be a new sunrise
A new sunrise.

     We recorded two more songs in Season One, a rap song telling our community history of criminality and slavery, and a devotional song sung by and dedicated to women struggling during the crisis. All of these songs were a way to visualise and channelise our unexpressed strong emotions, the pain and loss, during the crisis. They were also a way to entertain our community in a time of crisis.

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Chetna singing song at Budhan
Theatre's home-made studio
(Photo Credit: Ankita Jain)

I LET THE ROSES I RECEIVED ON VALENTINE'S DAY WILT AND DIE

Finitude

(n) The line between emotional stability and uncertainty

YUJUN TAN

1

I returned home to restart painting. I chose to stay in a cubicle joined to my bedroom instead of a much bigger space on the second floor. My laptop, DIY tools and unorganised sundries clutter the cubicle. The lingering odour of oil paints is a health hazard, but it gives me peace of mind and brings a sense of security.

2

What is going on in the world? The tightened control, the retrogression... Women's oppression happening elsewhere around the globe becomes a blurry image due to our physical distance from the oppressed and an intentional disregard for the suffering of others. I do not associate myself with the feeling of indignation; it seems to me that those who show anger but render no assistance are hypocritical. I choose to remain silent, but silence also seems repellent.

3

Oil painting as an art medium is so antiquated. It goes against the spirit of modern society: oil paints, painting boards and brushes are bulky and difficult to carry around; oil paint dries slowly according to its own rules no matter how fast the artist can paint; it is impossible to remove oil paints from clothing, one can only put up with the permanent stains or throw the clothes away. I feel like I am living like those in the olden days when I paint, enduring how inconvenient and uncomfortable life was in the past. But ancient art media and old-fashioned items have helped me deal with loneliness and withstand this ever-changing world. In the end, all that is left is gratification.

1

回到家里创作，我舍弃二楼更大的空间，选择了和我卧室相连的小隔间，和我的电脑、手工工具以及混乱的杂物待在一起。
油画媒介的气味带来对身体有害的危险信号，以及使内心变得宁和的安全感。

2

关于世界的紧缩和倒退。
世界某一区域的女性受到的迫害，因为距离和刻意的忽略而变得模糊。我不愤怒，因为看似愤怒而无所行动的人在我看来是虚伪的，所以我选择沉默，但是好像沉默也很让人厌恶。

3

油画作为古老的绘画媒介，在很多方面已经违背了现代精神。它携带起来不方便，颜料、画板、笔刷又笨又重；它干起来很慢，画家可以很快完成一幅画，但它要按照自己的规矩慢慢干燥；如果蹭到了谁的衣服上那什么也救不了，除了忍耐就是把衣服丢了。使用油画时，我会觉得自己变成了过去时光里的人，忍受着各种不便。但最终老物件帮我抵挡了寂寞，对抗了极速变化的社会，只给内心留下满足。

Rose 1

English translation by Lingfei Song

4

I create sketches and drawings now and then with an iPad, secretly feeling ashamed of myself for this breach of tradition in exchange for convenience. I think I will adapt to digital drawing very soon; it is likewise traditional, though in the context of a digital world. Hockney started drawing with his iPad a long, long time ago. His soul is much younger than mine.

5

I used to think too much during the process of artwork creation, but now I try my best to prevent myself from overthinking. I try to be honest and let myself be guided by my own feelings. When I paint, I focus only on the image itself. The rest of the time I enjoy reading and looking into social affairs that catch my attention.

6

I let the roses I received on Valentine's Day wilt and die. I think the state of the wilted rose can better describe what I am currently exploring.

English translation by Lingfei Song

4

我现在也会用ipad做些草稿,图画,内心掩藏着一些背叛传统带来的羞耻感,但敌不过确实方便。我想我会很快适应这些,然后发现数码绘画在数码世界也是一种传统的东西。霍克尼很早很早就开始使用ipad作画了,他比我年轻多了。

5

我以前画画时想很多,现在在竭力遏止自己在过程中想太多,忠于内心的情绪。在创作时间之外我会阅读,会思考我感兴趣的社会事件,但创作时只想画面的事。

6

我把情人节收到的玫瑰放至干枯,我觉得这个状态更符合我现在想要的。

Rose 2

WE TAKE CARE,
WE
GIVE CARE,

AND IT
CAN BE
CONTAGIOUS,

IT CAN

SPREAD

The Restorative Cloth

CARE LABELS: TOOL FOR ~IVATING ~ICS OF CARE

To what extent can you weave protective relationships with others?

Do you realise that we receive care and provide care throughout our lives?

NORA HEIDORN

WE TAKE
WE
GIVE CA
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SPREA

CARE LABELS: *A TOOL FOR CULTIVATING A POLITICS OF CARE*

Finitude

(n) The state of having
personal boundaries

NORA HEIDORN

**Radical Health Care: Materials,
Methods and Activation**

*Feminist Health Care Research
Group (Julia Bonn and Inga
Zimprich), 2018-ongoing.*

*During the founding meeting of the Feminist
Health Care Research Group in 2015, Tashy Endres introduced
us to an exercise to help us better prepare for possible conflict in
the group. [...] We each wrote short care labels (like on clothing
tags: wash at 30 degrees, do not tumble dry): What can I do to
help myself in a situation of conflict? What can others do to help
me in situations of conflict? We discussed and introduced our care
instruction tags in the group.*

I learned about Care Labels from the publication *Practicing Radical Health Care* by the Feminist Health Care Research Group, a collective of artists-researchers in Berlin. Julia Bonn and Inga Zimprich included Care Labels among the methods for mutual care that are collected in their publication, which I had invited them to make for the exhibition *Sick and Desiring* in 2019. The comparison with clothing tags that convey washing instructions invites concreteness and clarity for the Care Labels. The nod to the labour of laundering resonates with the ways in which care work has been historically feminised, marginalised, and relegated to the domestic space.

In the course of 2020, it became apparent to me that we were experiencing a painful deficit in care in universities. I felt it at both London art schools in which I precariously work(ed), then participated in a countrywide strike, and then taught remotely as the pandemic crashed into our lives. I tried writing my own Care Label, just for myself, without sharing it with anyone. It felt surprisingly precious and empowering during this time, a reminder of boundaries to uphold. *I juggle multiple jobs and projects, please respect that I cannot always be available or work to last minute requests...*

"SUCH ADMISSIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND INDICATIONS OF BOUNDARIES BUILD TRUST AND CREATE A WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT IS POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS NEEDS IN THE FIRST PLACE"

I introduced this accessible and playful exercise to my students on BA Culture, Criticism and Curation at Central Saint Martins at the beginning of a group project on curating and care as a way to shape the way we would work together. *Write on paper: a gift tag, post-it note, or postcard. This is not a diary entry: write brief instructions addressed to your group.* The exercise is an opportunity for each group member to consider and communicate their needs and boundaries. *How do I want to be treated by the group? What do I need to be part of this project? What do I need to **enjoy** the work?* Making space for discussions about needs when working together – suddenly virtually and in an atmosphere permeated by the existential angst of the first months of the pandemic – was of urgent necessity.

Some of their Care Labels requested understanding for infrastructural barriers they faced in remote learning. Others said, in different ways, *I need more time to process, I need*

us to slow things down. Some seemed to say, *My life is falling apart. Please be gentle with me.* If anything, such admissions of vulnerability and indications of boundaries build trust and create a working environment in which it is possible to discuss needs in the first place.

I proposed writing Care Labels to a research group on care I participate in as part of my PhD programme at the Royal College of Art. When we each shared our label at our next meeting, one by one, it felt indulgent, even luxurious, to me. This sense that the activity was too minor to deserve so much of our precious workshop time reflects the extent to which I have absorbed our neoliberal ideology which fetishises productivity and marginalises care as something that should happen outside teaching environments or the workplace. To make the time and space for discussions of care in universities is itself an act of resistance to the neoliberalisation of our learning and teaching experiences.

Artist and writer Johanna Hedva imagines care as radically reciprocal: "I've always found solace in the fact that the words *caregiver* and *caretaker* mean the same thing. We take care, we give care, and it can be contagious, it can spread." Care Labels remind us of this reciprocity and can help us reimagine care as something that is shared in the processes of learning, teaching, researching, and making. However much we might foster practices of caring for each other in our teams and classrooms, this does not mean we should stop insisting on the institutions' responsibilities of care towards us. What if we addressed our Care Labels to our institutions?

By listening to others reading their Care Labels, I learned that care needs are as various as each of us. When circumstances drive us to demand care from our institutions, what then are the implications of our singularity? If institutions by default cannot meet each of us as individuals, is demanding care from institutions inherently contradictory?

I believe it is important to demand care, especially during this pandemic, even if it may primarily function as a form of institutional critique. Maria Puig De la Bellacasa writes, "we must take care of things in order to remain responsible for their becomings." Could writing Care Labels to our institutions be a way of not just demanding their care, but in fact also a way of caring *for* those institutions – by asking them to change, by supporting their *becomings*?

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"TO MAKE THE TIME AND SPACE FOR DISCUSSIONS OF CARE IN UNIVERSITIES IS ITSELF AN ACT OF RESISTANCE TO THE NEOLIBERALISATION OF OUR LEARNING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCES"

Phytogyne Garden

Juliana Cerqueira Leite and Zoë Claire Miller, 2019.

AN INTERVIEW *WITH* NORA HEIDORN

Finitude

(n) The state of having personal boundaries

JINGWEN WENG

Jingwen Weng At the beginning of your essay, you mention the Feminist Health Research Group. It seems that it is an essential resource in your entire curatorial research. This theme was also followed by workshops and public events. And it shows that you were mainly focussing on women's health rather than those different in genders or ages. What made you change your mind, or let's say, expand your subject to touch not only females but care for everyone?

Nora Heidorn Good question. One thing I want to do is to emphasise myself and the Women's Health Care Research Group. The artists that I was working with include the concerns and the politics around health care and not just of women, but also of people who are non-binary or trans, etc. It was not the primary concern for them to come out of feminist movements to do with reproductive rights and health care and the antipsychiatry movement. That started in the 70s and 80s, and they are interested in learning from all the works and political organisations. They were also thinking very much about how those ideas and discourses need to be updated. We have come beyond an essentialist, binary male and female model, and we now understand that there are lots of different genders and gender expressions. They want to include that in their work.

The word women or women's health is still useful to a certain extent. Within that, I'm thinking about Johanna Hedva's manifesto *Sick Woman Theory*, written in 2016. This is the text that was influential for my development of that project and the research that went into it. She argues that the sick woman could be anybody: a homeless person who doesn't have access to healthcare or a single mom whose income isn't even enough for her family. One of her examples was a black man who is injured by police during an arrest. This was before George Floyd's murder happened. She was thinking of the sick woman as more of a symbol of all the different people who are oppressed and where the health care system and the justice system intersect to determine who is considered normal and who is considered less than normal. Johanna

> "SICKNESS HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY FEMINISED AND ASSOCIATED MORE WITH FEMININE TRAITS OF BEING WEAK OR DEPENDENT"

is thinking of the sick woman as a symbol because sickness has been historically feminised and associated more with feminine traits of being weak or dependent, whereas masculinity has always been associated with strength and independence. Women's health care intersects with issues around race and health care. I was particularly interested in women's health because of the politics of reproduction. Women's bodies have historically been and continue to be controlled by institutions such as the law, the church, the Catholic Church in particular, and to a certain degree by medical authority.

JW Interesting! I never knew that the sick woman was regarded as a symbol. I feel like feminism is very necessary and is often neglected and deliberately avoided. Do you know that in London there is a vagina museum in Camden Town? It is the only museum in the world of the vagina. On their Twitter account, it says that this museum may have to close down because of the pandemic. Do you think that the closure of such a museum proves what you mentioned about the lack of care for women? It proves people's ignorance and lack of attention to this subject.

NH Yes, this has long been a marginalised subject and it still is. More attention and more public space, or public discourse are being dedicated to it.

In recent years, a couple of powerful memoirs by women have been published, in which they write about their own stories of struggles with motherhood and issues connected with racism or mental health for example. They make connections from their own experience to address wider societal issues. I feel like that is starting to happen. But it is still a marginal topic that a lot of people do not want to think about or consider.

I'm doing my PhD at the Royal College of Art, London. It is also in collaboration with an art collection which is called Birth Rites Collection, the only collection in the world dedicated to the subject of childbirth and the maternal. It was started by an artist in a very DIY way without having any funding and it has grown to be quite a significant collection at King's College London. I wish to bring these issues into public discourse again, especially among our generation of young women. These issues were all part of fierce debates in the 70s and 80s. There is a big disillusionment about what feminism or second-wave feminism achieved

The Shambles of Science

*Sarah Browne, 2019, 4K video, 27',
sound, production photograph by
Joshua Aylett*

and did not achieve. But there is also a return to some of the issues from a different, 21st-century, more intersectional perspective. It's an ongoing struggle, I guess.

JW   In your 2019 exhibition *Sick and Desiring*, I noticed that there was a video work on a puppy and an installation about herbs. I learnt that the first one represented the silent status of women in contemporary stress, and the other one regulated the female hormonal cycle. This reminds me of the notion of eco-feminism which examines the connection of women and nature; was it in your subconscious when choosing these works of art? How do you think about eco-feminism?

NH   I'm glad that this project acknowledged that human health can never be separated from the environment. These are interlinked systems. For example, Juliana Cerqueira Leite and Zoë Claire Miller's installation was a printed curtain depicting herbs that have been used as medicinal plants for hundreds of years in Scandinavia. They looked specifically at which plants were used to support women's health care needs: for contraception and abortion and that helped with lactation or PMS, menopause during labour. They proposed a sisterhood between women's bodies and plants. Of course, there are lots of plants that work with all kinds of bodies and genders in different ways, but I think they were referring to the heritage of women healers who were then persecuted as witches. Men and women midwives who also were pushed out of the profession when childbirth became a medical specialism, such as obstetrics and gynaecology. They wanted to celebrate and relearn some of this knowledge about plants that women had for centuries. Several works in that exhibition show a relationship to that idea. There is a print also about plants used in abortion and contraception as a form of resistance to the ways of slavery.

"HUMAN HEALTH CAN NEVER BE SEPARATED FROM THE ENVIRONMENT. THESE ARE INTERLINKED SYSTEMS"

Another work in the exhibition, Sarah Browne's *The Shambles of Science* is also interesting. She was interested in mediaeval anatomical drawings and texts where scientists were trying to understand the female reproductive system. She noticed that there were comparisons throughout history made between women and dogs in a way that could be considered problematic. Then she also found some

imagery of protests in London at the beginning of the 20th century. The suffragette movement and the animal rights movement merged to protest against the vivisection of animals in the university research labs at that time. The symbol of that became a brown dog who had been cut open alive to look at some glands in the neck so that the animal rights issue and the women's rights issue connected at that moment. And there are amazing historical images of protesting suffragettes who wear dog masks over their heads. The identification of the animal is interesting because it upsets the boundaries that put humans at the top of the pyramid and in control of all other life on the planet. I think humanity's identification with an animal is something that our culture is quite uncomfortable with.

That's something powerful I have been thinking about with some other works, for example by Carol Rama. She has an amazing series called *Lump*. During the early 90s, there was an infectious disease in Europe called mad cow disease. Millions of cows had to be slaughtered. It was caused by the way humans fed cows: these vegetarian animals were turned into cannibals because ground cow bones were mixed into their food to make them grow faster. Carol Rama, who was in her 80s or 90s, identified herself with these mad cows. She said, "I am the mad cow" because women had always been associated with "madness" like hysteria, and because cows are kept for milk and they get milked. She used imagery of the breasts to make a bodily connection between humans and cows, which are also mammals. Through several artists I collaborated with, I was happy to invite a lot of works thinking in this way about the human body, plants and animal bodies.

JW   You talked about demanding care, giving care and taking care, and this is the logical next step after learning to be empathetic. Care exists in relationships, and this relationship does not only link students, colleagues, and humans, but also living and non-living species. How would you reimagine the power of care and what do you see as its universal value?

NH   A nice example came out in the course on Curating and Care that I teach at Central Saint Martins with my colleague Andrew Marsh. Normally we would have worked with the students on an exhibition and a publication together, but

because of the pandemic, this was not possible in 2020. We instead developed a new kind of curatorial project called *Care Packages*. They would work in small groups and would exchange with each other. We were encouraging them to make something physical that can be sent in the post or be dropped off at someone's doormat. We encouraged them to think about care in terms of how they can make a caring working experience. This foreground the joy of collaboration: you support each other and work with each other in a way that doesn't create stress or anxiety. This is more important to us than the outcome of what you make. The students approached this issue of care from many perspectives, such as food and cooking and how that is a way of caring for ourselves and other people in our lives. They shared recipes and ideas about supporting local markets while other projects were more about the environment, like community gardening, upcycling materials, and making creative projects with them.

I learned about this kind of thinking about care from the Feminist Healthcare Research Group and this particular exercise seemed appropriate when I started teaching at Central Saint Martins. I felt that we needed to address the fact that we cannot expect everybody to just function as usual without ever asking "What do you need?" It is powerful if students in their early twenties consider care ethics as a fundamental question in curatorial practice and cultural work from the very beginning of their studies.

This makes me think of Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's writings on speculative ethics. One thing that she says is that the difficult question is not really "Do we care?" or "Do we not care?"; the question is "How to care?". We always have to consider care in a specific situation or context or community, or about a specific issue. There is no general rule for care behaviours. I want to compare this with the idea of site-specificity in art. That's why the question of "how to care" always has to be asked again and again. As a curator, I don't think you can come up with "This is my care formula and I'm going to keep doing this for the rest of my career in this way." It will not work. Care always has to be site-specific or context-specific. We need to be responsible for and care for how behaviours change and develop over time.

A PROJECT
THAT
SPECULATES
ABOUT
DNA-
DIGITAL
DATA
STORAGE ON
HUMAN SKIN

SKIN DATABASE
TO GET MORE OUT OF DNA

Finitude

(n) Finite planet,
Finite resources,
Infinite imagination

SHIHAN ZHANG
YANGYIFAN DONG
QINQIN YANG

As we all witnessed a global pandemic involving everyone involuntarily, we began to rely heavily on virtual meetings and real-time collaboration tools. Many of these tools and projects evolve on the spot to catch up with the demands of life during the pandemic: Zoom video meetings, online collating documents, cloud storage, NFT market, etc.

The limited access to the world has also made us turn to what we could do at home – working at first, shopping, entertaining, exercising, cooking, almost everything. Home is essential to everyone, but more so when it is a combination of public and private occasions, personal and business belongings. More openly, the outside world started to enter our intimate territory, not limited to our personal space, but potentially even the body, skin and DNA.

Our research came across CRISPR – a cutting-edge technology that uses DNA sequences to archive digital data. Scientists have successfully assembled synthesised oligonucleotides in vitro and added the nucleotides into the genome of E-coli. The paper, "CRISPR – Cas Encoding of a Digital Movie into the Genomes of a Population of Living Bacteria" proves the possibility of storing and retrieving data from living cells. This brings us to reflect on possible modifications to human skin DNA to become a place to store information.

You might imagine that all data generated from your digital activities gets stored easily on the Cloud, but the truth is our current infrastructure can handle only a fraction of the coming data explosion. According to a report from IBM, 90% of the world's data has been created in the last two years, and data growth continues to explode. It was estimated that by 2020 1.7MB of data would be produced every second for each person on earth – 146.88GB per day per person. This surge in data is expected to consume all the world's microchip-grade silicon by 2040. Then the question is: how can we store all our data after 2040?

Skin Database is a project that speculates about DNA-digital data storage on human skin. It investigates an alternative relationship between the human body and our digital memories and imagines a time after the data overload in 2040 when hardware-based storage is not able to support striking data growth and people start to archive data on their skin by taking advantage of the outstanding capacity and longevity of DNA-strands. We aim to open discussion on how fast developing DNA-editing technology such as CRISPR could make an impact on our daily routine and potentially shape new social norms.

"IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT BY 2020 1.7MB OF DATA WOULD BE PRODUCED EVERY SECOND FOR EACH PERSON ON EARTH. THIS IS EXPECTED TO CONSUME ALL THE WORLD'S MICROCHIP-GRADE SILICON BY 2040"

(opposite)
Memory Tags

By the year 2040, each person will have limited Cloud storage while other traditional methods are no longer popular due to their short lifespan and limited capacity. For an average of 30 days, people need to download and archive their data from the Cloud to their body and free up space from the Cloud storage for the next month. A device is created as a converter for people loading data to their skin. The antenna attached to the device has a wireless connection to the Cloud and is therefore able to download digital data. Tubes in the centre contain necessary chemical materials for synthesising DNA strands while the outer circle on the device is divided into several sections in response to different skin areas on the body. A tube is extended from the device, allowing the user to plug into the implant easily.

The story of the Skin Database project is revealed by the five artefacts:

MemoryTags: a generic-engineered synthetic skin tissue that transplants into the human body for data storage, which aims to invite audiences to reflect how our body needs to adapt to this alternative human-computer interaction.

TACTAG® machine: a converter that loads digital data into the human body through transplanted MemoryTags. It transfers binary codes into DNA strands by matching the sequence of code (00, 01, 10, 11) with A (Adenine), C (Cytosine), G (Guanine) and T (Thymine) and then synthesises them into a gel that can be applied to the body directly.

TACTAG® manual: a dramatically long product manual that instructs users on using the TACTAG® machine and makes them aware of its many hazards. It aims to evoke audiences' awareness of safety and ethics issues resulting from DNA-editing applications by demonstrating the lengthy manual filled with background information, user instructions, and for the most part, side effects.

Embody: a monologue video piece showcases the experience of a speculated TACTAG® user, Ashely, who uploads her memory on her body but ends up with unforeseen issues. It not only conveys our product concept design but also intrigues audiences to attend to the intricacy and complex risks behind using nucleic acid as a data storage medium.

In this future, TACTAG® became a normalised solution for data storage and exchange, and new social norms started to emerge. Our body, skin and DNA, which have been the unique secret cipher to each individual's intimate realm, are transformed into public realms. How, then, should we keep the data and ourselves safe? Just as you store files in different folders on your hard drives, you can store specific data on different areas of your body's skin. The more private the data is, the more intimate the area it is stored on. This way your private data will be safe with you, but you still need to be careful about your intimate relationship. TACTAG® provides care instructions on each solution's package, such as suggesting people apply special sun
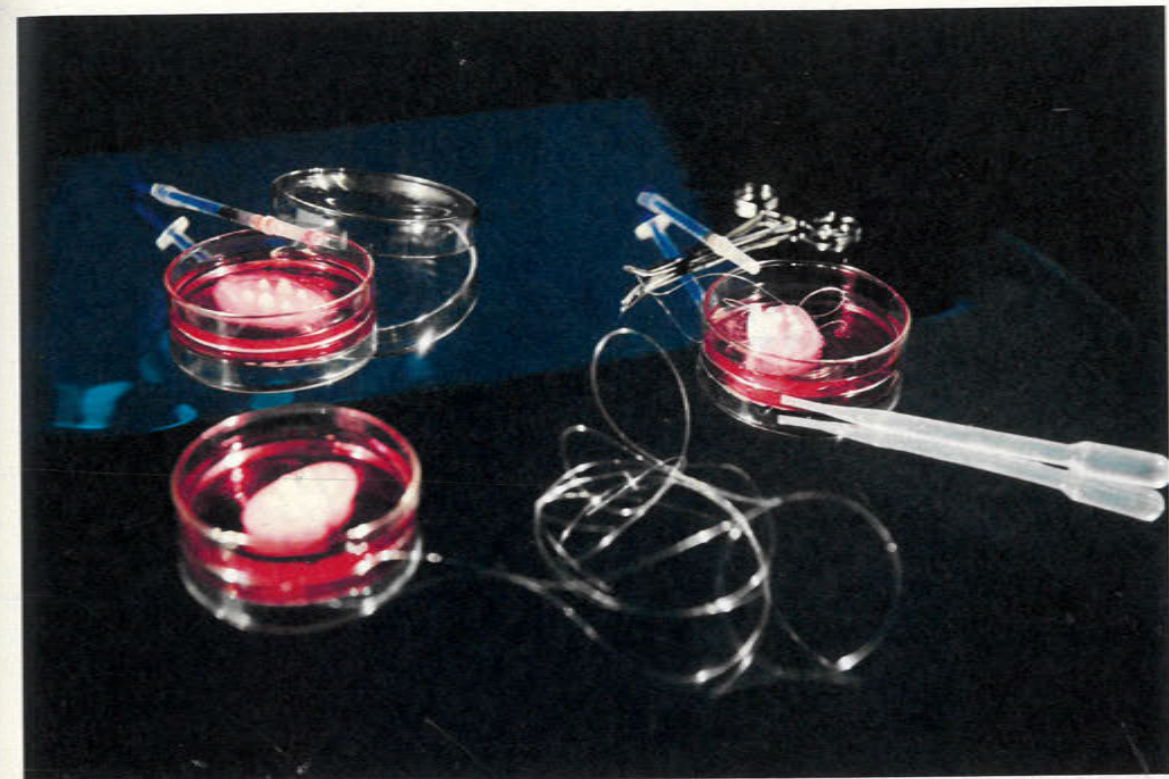
Memory Tags
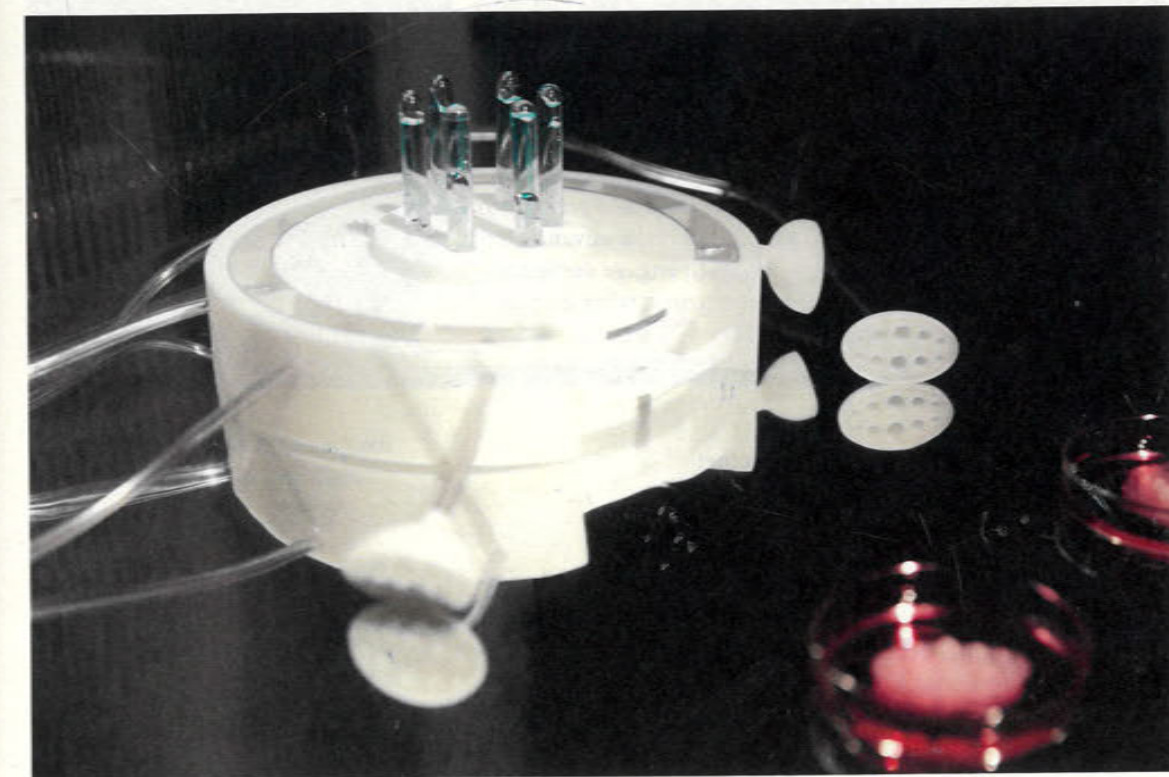
TACTAG® machine

cream which has an extra level of sun-protection to avoid data loss or potential DNA mutation caused by UV light.

How do you interact with people and move around the city if you carry data on your body? This is when radical human-computer interaction becomes normalised. If you want to present your data to others, you can connect yourself to any public monitors to read your data. Skin sanitiser is essential to avoid biological or digital viruses. Public transportation is also renovated to adapt to this new normal, where everyone has to keep distance from one another to prevent data thieves on the train. You might feel it is weird and sounds like a faraway future, but look at us today during the Covid pandemic: aren't we already in a similar parallel future?

As a studio, we always like to build immersive experiences and commercial products to make possible futures tangible to invite audiences to interact.

TACTAG®-shirt: We also designed a long-sleeve T-shirt that serves as a map or index for a personal skin database. Each bulb on the T-shirt suggests the skin areas to store different types of data. We speculated about the many ways that people might generate and store data in the future based on what our current experiences are. For example, with the rise of short video formats on social media, "LIFELOG" is a place for storing records of our life in video or other data formats. "PREFERENCES" stores the personal settings for all kinds of things: IOT devices or just coffee. A bulb for Zoom meeting recordings or an NFT art collection could also be great.

Immersive experience: We built an interactive exhibition aimed to invite audiences to better immerse themselves in the scenario of the speculative application of the emerging biotechnological data storage. In addition to the artefacts we have discussed above, we also built an interactive wall based on image-marker augmented reality that allows audiences to explore distinct aspects of a likely future lifestyle in regard to using DNA as data storage. The purpose is to take advantage of AR to bring about interactive experiences to engage audiences and drive discussion of future scenarios. So now, what do you think about living in this future?

Credits:

Concept design & Director:
Shihan Zhang, Qinqin Yang

Graphic Designer:
Yangyifan Dong

Film Director:
Bo Fone

—
TACTAG exhibition at Gray Area
Artist Showcase, San Francisco
2019

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Stephen Barrass
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John Jerrods
Aimen Green
Zoë Kimberley

Unknown Quantities #09

Finitudes