MONDAY
VOL. 5

ANGEL OF HISTORY

MONDAY presents experiments in arts writing that invite readers to imagine future forms of criticism. The contributing writers have in common a playful approach to their writing. Their subjects extend beyond fine arts to include performance, style, manifestos—all manner of cultural expression. Published by the Jacob Lawrence Gallery at the University of Washington, MONDAY seeks to be both accessible and rigorous, and above all to remind us that our approach to cultural criticism can be as heterogeneous as the themes it addresses.

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COVER
Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920. Edited and inverted.

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“To survive,
know the past.
Let it touch you.
Then let
The past
Go.”

—Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

INTRODUCTION

Marisa Williamson

Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920. Oil and watercolor on paper, 31.8 x 24.2 cm.

"A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

This is the storm. Along with the pandemic spreads knowledge of the existence of many pre-existing conditions: the uneven impact of state violence, the broken healthcare system, economic precarity, delusional and dysfunctional institutions and leaders, unsustainable habits of consumption and waste. Disbelief. The moment of danger Benjamin warned of, in which the past flashes up, is daily. Who will survive this progress?

I look around for a guide or a messenger, and find my way through the same old people. Octavia Butler is one such intermediary. When I read *Kindred* in 1999, sitting in a 7th grade classroom, I thought, 'at last, something I can use.' Year after year, I reread the story until I became a character in it: a black woman living in post-colonial America, in the city of angels. The protagonist, Dana, is pulled back to the antebellum South. She learns her purpose there is to save a young white man, time and again, ensuring he grows up to be the slave owner who impregnates her enslaved great-great-great-grandmother.

Whose life and death do we mark with a day off from work, a monument, memory? Whose story instead must be critically fabulated?[1] In my story, I

am swapped with Sally Hemings, born into slavery in Virginia. Sally knows whiteness. She grew up with whites, studying their habits and tastes. She doesn't for one second mistake herself for white. No. She knows her place. But, looking at them she wonders how it got to be this way. Looking at herself, she wonders what is keeping her bound up here in the past.

It is the twenty-first day of a new decade. Things are off to an ominous start. I drive a borrowed car through a subdivision of flat houses, pressed down by a heavy damp fog. Why resist? Climbing uphill with resolve, I apply more pressure to the gas. Almost there. The numbers progress unusually, skipping forward, circling back. I find it: 16232 37th Avenue NE. Octavia Butler died here, outside of her home in Lake Forest Park, Washington, on February 24, 2006, aged 58. She is among the angels of history. Another, Jacob Lawrence, hovers over my head. For the month I am in a residency that bears his name.

The scholar Lisa Woolfork explains that in *Kindred*, "Butler's reversal of the linear space-time continuum and of the notion of chronological as well as ideological progress is more than a staple of science fiction. Butler uses the time-travel technique to raise moral dilemmas of interracial love and sex, gender equality, and racism. In this way, she elevates a trope of fantasy fiction into a meditation on the means and meanings of traumatic knowledge."[2]

Monticello is the plantation home of Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, and

Sally Hemings, his biracial slave and mistress of almost forty years. Sally Hemings (1773-1835) was part of a large family with a long history of enslaved domestic service to Jefferson and his wife, Martha Wayles', family. Hemings served as a lady's maid to Jefferson's two daughters—traveling as a fourteen-year-old to France (where slavery was illegal) to work and live for two years in Jefferson's home abroad. Their relationship is said to have begun there.

When I started asking friends to contribute to this issue of MONDAY, the idea of ruin was given in relation to the text *Theses on the Philosophy of History* by Walter Benjamin. The essay was written in early 1940, shortly before Benjamin's attempted escape from France. There, government officials were turning Jewish refugees like Benjamin over to the Gestapo. *Theses* is the last major work Benjamin completed before fleeing to Spain where, fearing Nazi capture, he committed suicide in September 1940. This traumatic knowledge was assigned to me by my CalArts thesis advisor. *"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."* His fugitive work compelled my own.

Monticello is fifty miles north of the town of Culpeper—the childhood home of my late maternal grandmother, Louise Williamson, her mother, Sally Robinson, and their family, a few of whom still live on the plot of land they once sharecropped in the rural outskirts of town. DNA testing done in 1998 ties the Jefferson and Hemings families together, inextricably. Previously, oral, statistical and written accounts had supported the controversial, and yet

centuries-old belief that Thomas Jefferson fathered all of Sally Hemings' four children following his wife's death in 1782. Martha Wayles Jefferson's father, John Wayles, is known to have fathered children with Elizabeth Hemings, his slave, and Sally Hemings' mother, making Sally Hemings the much younger half sister of Jefferson's wife.

"I will do a performance at Monticello based on my research on Hemings," I wrote in 2013, "as well as my interest in collective and self mythologies, museological space, freedom and its opposite(s), race, gender, labor, sex and love through an historical lens. The work addresses these interests as they pertain to my life: a modern life existing as it does as a consequence of known and unknown literal and figurative ancestors."

Her identity is wrapped up in her work. She wants to do a good job. She wants to be known, valued, and remembered for her accomplishments. But, it is hard out here for a woman, especially a black one. She'd like to have children. Teach them what she's learned; songs, survival skills, recipes, handicrafts. She would like to see them go further than she's gone. There is dignity in motherhood. She knows that. Her own mother, of course, is a saint.

On my reverse pilgrimage from the Butler home, my thoughts turn to Marcel Duchamp's last major artwork: *Étant donnés (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas)*. It is a monumental installation I visited growing up in my hometown art museum. I reflect on what is given. I know that Duchamp

retired from artmaking to play chess, he told the public. In secret, he worked in the studio for twenty years on the tableau, seen through peepholes in a wooden door. I consider its explicit content: a nude woman lying on her back with her face hidden. Her legs are spread. She holds a gas lamp in the air. The backdrop is a painted landscape. I reconsider what is implied. Inside, is she 'asking for it'? Are we? It is like the title of a drawing by Kara Walker, about which Zadie Smith writes: "Its meaning is unsettling and unsettled, existing in a gray zone between artist's statement, perverse confession, and ambivalent desire."[3]

For the exhibition *Angel of History* at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery, I set up beds around the largest space. Each bed encloses a tree planted in dirt. These were iterations of a monument proposed and temporarily placed (twice) in Charlottesville; once, on the Downtown Mall where a white supremacist ran down protester Heather Heyer, and again in the newly rediscovered African-American burial ground that lies just outside the University of Virginia Cemetery and Columbarium (where monuments to the university's confederate soldiers stand). The backdrop is wallpaper, a forest of Jacob Lawrence's *Trees* (1942).

A video plays in the adjacent gallery. It is shot with a drone on the University of Washington campus where it is snowing. Four white columns in a clearing stand like the ruins of a greek temple: Loyalty, Industry, Faith, and Efficiency, "LIFE." The video is a sequel to *What Would Sally Do?* the 2013 video of the performance I did at Monticello. The plantation has four white columns. On February 7th, I gave a lecture and performance in the gallery.

I ask some people I know and admire to compose a thesis on traumatic knowledge and anti-monuments.[4] Tell me what you know about ruin(s), the epic takedown, wreckage, history, catastrophe, crisis, waking the dead, paradise, violence, the future, debris, progress, the monumental, and the messianic.

Adrienne Garbini digs into a particular archeological site in Brooklyn, Dead Horse Bay. A slanted inversion of Storm King Art Center, where she and I first met, Dead Horse Bay attracts visitors seeking to redeem man's broken relationship with nature by aestheticizing it. From this ruin (a National Park Service-administered landfill) she culls together an index of objects that prompt speculation as to how people might feel if their behavior were looked at under the gaze of radioactivity and decay. Her essay is matter-of-fact and urgent. It shares these qualities with Nora Khan's *Mind Goes Where Eyes Can't Follow*. Khan calls out the policing gaze of the righteously self-quarantined cyberflâneur floating along in the maelstrom. She warns of hacked vision, compromised through deep and isolated immersion in the algorithmic spectacle theater of the internet. *Mind Goes Where Eyes Can't Follow* will appear later this year in a special issue of *Women & Performance* edited by Pratt professor Kim Bobier, PhD, and myself, titled *Views from the Larger Somewhere: Race, Vision, and Surveillance*.

Dawn Holder and I started corresponding after she gave an artist talk at the University of Hartford,

where I teach. Her porcelain sculptures invoke a world where monuments (like the Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville) no longer stand. In an early email to me she wrote: "I have always had a curious obsession with ruins. I liked the reminder that nothing is set or static. Language moves, changes, evolves, but the root words still hold. Power shifts, things fall apart, places are left behind to rot, yet here we are… trying to keep it all together, banishing the termites from our houses, fortifying our edifices, and looking for stability and hoping some part of us will remain after we depart. Just as language is a twisted rope bridge to the past, I have always been drawn to the physical reminders and past objects that mark the experiences of those who came before me and tried to make their way in a certain place."

Matt Shelton and I quickly fell into a routine of sharing coffee breaks at The University of Virginia while I was in residence there in 2018. We committed one of our conversations to writing some months ago. An excerpt of it is included here, along with his art and text work dismantling the epic film *Gone with the Wind*.

Malcolm Peacock joined the MFA program at Rutgers Mason Gross during my time there as an instructor. When we met, he already knew who I was and introduced himself with a series of challenging questions. He is swift, sharp, and on my tail. I am grateful when we find ourselves in step. For this project, I came to him with questions about himself, about art, and about running.

I like to think Crystal Campbell and I go way back. The truth is that, in our handful of encounters, the conversation progresses quickly, quietly, and smoothly, covering centuries and geographies of traumatic knowledge we have both been called to document. Her poetic essay speculates on the whereabouts of Rutgers alumni Paul Robeson's fugitive form rendered in plaster and painted bronze. It is also about love, and care, and attention, as many of these texts are.

Images captured by photographer David Norori punctuate the document. We have been, along with Arien Wilkerson (who plays the angel in these shots), Kevin Hernandez Rosa, and Nicholas Serrambana, in collaboration for over a year on *Vault*. *Vault* is an interdisciplinary dance performance conceived by Wilkerson and Rosa that transforms John C. Clark Elementary School into an outdoor exhibition space. Clark Elementary was closed down when its 350 students were moved to three other Hartford schools in 2015 after toxic chemicals were found in the building. *Vault* is an effort to understand the human body and the North End of the city as engaged (but also in conflict) with history and its surroundings. *Vault* is designed to amplify endangered public histories and celebrate movement in and through time. *Vault* makes a space for dance as a reparative act.

We, the Fragment, a poem by Billie Lee, opens up sacred space to begin addressing traumatic knowledge in a time of ruin and re-creation. Billie and I are colleagues and roommates in Connecticut. Her guiding questions, deep conversation, insight and intuition have helped me find my way through this particular

work and many others. *We, the Fragment* appears here and in the forthcoming multimedia project *Monuments to Escape*, which uncovers buried histories on the New England Scenic Trail.

I am reading about a flood in Sarah M. Broom's *The Yellow House*. My husband turns from the book he is reading. "Did you know that white people shut down schools after Brown v. The Board of Education rather than integrate with Black people?" "I know," I say without moving my head. I am trying to read for pleasure, but the words pull in and out of focus. A headache from a past life lurks behind my ears and at the crown of my head. I know too much. *"Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad,"* Benjamin writes. Octavia, Walter, Jacob, Sally, Marcel, now particles in the snow, I hope this finds you pregnant with tensions. I hope your crystal monad is well. My prayers are with you winged seraphim. Your work when I reread it, for redemption or pleasure, illuminates inner space. It pulls other work, other words, into focus. It burns an afterimage into the mind's eye of how carefully configured thoughts like yours can and will crystalize and arrest my own scattered ones.

Walter Benjamin's *Theses* is an open source document. Octavia Butler's books are available at select libraries. A PDF of *Kindred* is available for download on monday-journal.com where this text and supplemental media content by Billie Lee, Matt Shelton, and Adrienne Garbini can be found. I would like to thank

Emily Zimmerman, Julia Powers, and Raziah Ahmad for their help in gathering, organizing, and packaging the many parts of this project with such care; Kim, for her intellectual generosity; the contributors for their incredible work; The Jacob Lawrence Gallery, The School of Art + Art History + Design at the University of Washington; Arien Wilkerson, Kevin Hernandex Rosa, Elizabeth Calvillo, Kemi Adeyemi, Carole Fuller, Margie Livingston, and Meg Rabinowitz.

Marisa Williamson
2020 Jacob Lawrence Legacy Resident

NOTES

[1] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 vol.12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1-14.1

[2] Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 12.2

[3] Zadie Smith, "What Do We Want History to Do to Us?" *New York Review of Books*, February 2020.

[4] Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Alien Relationships with Public Space," *TransUrbanism* (Rotterdam, NL: NAi Publishers, 2002): 155.

WE, THE FRAGMENT

Billie Lee

we

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fragment

Billie Lee

To the diaspora of your desires, to the intimate deserts.
And if you grow, your desert likewise grows.
If you come out of the hole,
the world lets you know
that there is no place
for your kind in its nations.
Why did you put me in this world
if only for me to be lost in it?

—Hélène Cixous

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"The true picture of the past flits by.
The past can be seized only as an image
which flashes up at the instant when it can
be recognized and is never seen again.
For every image of the past that is not
recognized by the present as one of
its own concerns threatens to
disappear irretrievably."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

RUNNING DIALOG

Malcolm Peacock & Marisa Williamson

7.11.20

MW: *You have been running for a long time. When we met at Rutgers in 2017, you were getting back into training for competition while digging into your MFA work. I think of Paul Robeson, another Rutgers-educated artist-athlete. In the past I have run far and with more discipline than I do now. I was raised to see practice, endurance, competitiveness, speed, agility, strength, and recovery as parts of a well-rounded skill set. When did you start running? Who taught you? What do you think about when you run? Where has it taken you?*

MP: I love running. I can say that because love involves risk, and I have risked a lot in my relationship with running. By 5th grade, I was well-liked and favored in the problematic ways that adults in education often pin children against each other, and their behavior is then mirrored by children. That year, a boy named Michael was the fastest distance runner. He was new to our school, fast, and Black. Nearly all of our classmates were white. I began to finish in 2nd place in the races around the back stops when years prior I'd place 1st. Internally, it hurt. And I think the pain came from what I could recognize as a failure to be the highest contributor to a team in the game that was being played. But for me, it was very far from a game. Michael was bullied by other children for his

speech and his race, and each time that I came in second to him, I became the lesser negro. The ways that we were treated each day were relative to the purposes that we served in the lives of white children and adults. At a very early age, I developed an understanding of exceptionalism, tokenism, and labor. At this time in my life, I would see high school students running and laughing in packs. I longed to have a healthy relationship to a team that practiced running which felt gratifying within my body.

From 2008-2012 I ran for Dulaney High School, a distance powerhouse program with dozens of county, regional, and state championships spanning the '80s to the present. I grew up in a relatively big family, and my extended family is huge. I've always been very oriented toward interdependence. My father emphasized and demonstrated sacrifice for us in my childhood. My favorite part of any team race is the moment when pain settles in my quads and I'm next to a man in the same uniform as me. There's a "spidey sense" that kicks in. This movie plays back of memories of sweating in practice, pushing each other, knowing that that person stayed behind on a run with you when you hurt your ankle, or shared with you intimate secrets and anxieties of their day at school or at home on a long run when nobody else was around but you and the trees. All of these moments turn toward sacrifice. To say, "If you're in trouble...so am I." For me, running with others is a form of art and creation because it can tell a story about resilience, bonding, and relationships. Each time that you're out on the roads or trails, you're connecting with another person through breath and pace.

Asking someone, "Will you go the distance with me?" and then you both nod yes, laugh, and run yourselves to your limits. All in the name of being present for each other.

I made great friends while I ran at Dulaney, and experienced an inhumane amount of racism. As an artist and an athlete, I was able to hide behind accolades and external validation. I relied on masks to hide my internal turmoil with queerness that had begun as a young child. In the summer of 2015, eight months after my first marathon was a flop, I ran in Reykjavik, Iceland. It was a "warm" day there. 58 degrees. The sun was high but the sky had shades of orange beginning to settle in. And I ran halfway to the peak of a mountain. I hadn't run very long in months due to depression from the failed marathon. But in this moment of isolation, I felt a wholeness I hadn't felt before while running. I had spent the week alone in my hostel bedroom with little money. On walks, I was called nigger on the street. It was an awfully boring week. I had no clue why I was there in that country. But I think that run was why. I couldn't get to the tip-top, but making it as far as I personally could make it was enough. I was able to look out at the water beneath me and far away. Saw buildings with people walking. I felt that I had reached the highest peak...for myself. I felt in that moment that all of the pain of that week was surmountable.

Today, I still love to race. I run fast times alone on the roads and tracks. I am chasing the clock but with a healthy understanding of what is possible for my

body, when I don't and do put in great work. I am chasing euphoria. And I'm chasing moments of expansion, where I trust myself to challenge the runner that I was the day before. I'm trying to fight through pain and fatigue to create moments of pride. I think in a lot of my running, I'm fighting against hardships in order to recognize myself. To be proud of me and to know that I, alone, am enough. I'm thinking of slaves every time I run. How this action that has saved my life wasn't afforded to them and often resulted in capture or death.

I want to share words from my friend and fellow artist Mahari Chabwera that I think are relevant here.

> "I think black women drive everything I do. My mom and my aunt and my grandma foremost come to my mind. I want to do some spectacular shit for them. For these women that raised me. And I want to show them that it's possible to do it on your dream. My grandmother didn't have the space to try to do it on her dream and I don't think my mom and my aunt realized that they could do it on their dreams."

Cops are heavily present on some of my runs. It is so obvious to me. When running at night, there is a risk and danger presented. But I have to come back out. I have to do it for all of us. I have to keep showing up.

MW: *One time I came to your studio with some of my freshmen students: all young white women. The studio was dark. We came in and sat on the floor. You and a*

collaborator had flashlights taped into your mouths. I think we were instructed (non-verbally) to read written text aloud—first a handout, then text pinned to the walls. My heart was racing. I was terrified. I am so rarely on the audience side of performance art. I am usually the performer. As a teacher, I was worried I hadn't given the students enough context. Looking back, I wonder how I could have, or whether it was, in fact, more a question of curating the aftermath. I am increasingly interested in the production of terror, horror, and fear in artwork. How, if at all, do you (or we as performers and/or teachers) curate the aftermath?

MP: Something that jumps out to me very immediately is a desire to care. And this begs the question: Can the work itself be a space where the performer holds and cares for the audience? I think most definitely so. How do we care for people in the wake of a work if we aren't able to talk to them individually and don't know them? You mentioned questioning whether or not you gave your students enough context, and it's important to note that there would only be so much context that you could give them yourself. Even I, as the person who made the work, could only give so much context because so much of what ended up happening in the piece (or maybe I should say pieces) was subject to the choices of different audiences on different nights. Each night people made decisions about time, space, sharing, touch, and even brought guests without notice. Something else I think about is the desire to inform or preface someone who is to experience my work. I think things like trigger warnings are important for laying the ground. But I'm against summarizing and capturing the work

in a few sentences to solidify a sense of certainty for the audience. My friend and fellow artist EJ Hill was the first person to point out to me the risk in that project—that I was leaving myself open to hearing and holding the emotional weight of others and also leaving myself open to the possibility of being attacked, even potentially physically harmed in my studio. I've spent years doing things in the aftermaths of artworks that deal with holding space for others' experiences with my work. Sometimes, it has proven productive and has even created a sense of community amongst those who experience my work separately. I think that we, as teachers and performers, can step outside of curating the aftermath and allow our works to live lives and stay attuned to those lives. When an artwork leaves me and ripples into the world, it takes on many pulses in others' lives. I'm interested in how these can be checked over time. Checking in with people in the immediate wake is a possibility. Offering space for anything they may want to share. Just truly being present.

I want to share a brief story about one of the moments of aftermath in my work that has stayed with me and sits very deeply in me when I make artwork. After sharing the work that I made at Skowhegan there were a lot of different responses. I went to the library with a person who was rather to themself through the summer and was resistant at first to talking about their experience with my work. They wanted to speak about the experience of the person who sat next to them in the chapel during the work. Eventually they opened up about how the work resonated for them because the meditative cadence of my

questions in the eulogy that I delivered felt similar to their meditation practice. While talking they looked away from me, toward a window to their left, and their head dropped into their hands as they began to cry. It was a harsh cry without sound. The rattling of their shoulders was felt in my stomach. I sat there. They wiped their eyes and took a long breath and stared at me and said they were sorry. And they said, "In the piece, I felt very old. And by that, I mean, I felt very wise." Looking back, it was important that I was present at that moment. There was something that needed to be released and I think I provided some sense of safety or comfort for them in knowing they weren't alone in the processing of something so dense. I don't know what the something was. I wanted to touch them. And this was my gut reaction. But I knew that this was me making the situation about how I felt they could best be consoled. I decided not to touch them. Art has the ability to stir up inside of us things that lay dormant over time. I thought and still think that maybe they just needed a moment to breathe and for someone to be there once they caught their breath.

MW: *I have been mulling over a James Baldwin quote often featured in summary, but here, featured in full:*

> "The role of the artist is exactly the same role, I think, as the role of the lover. If you love somebody, you honor at least two necessities at once. One of them is to recognize something very dangerous, or very difficult. Many people cannot recognize it at all, that you may also be loved; love is like a mirror. In any case, if you

do love somebody, you honor the necessity endlessly, and being at the mercy of that love, you try to correct the person whom you love. Now, that's a two-way street. You've also got to be corrected. As I said, the people produce the artist, and it's true. The artist also produces the people. And that's a very violent and terrifying act of love. The role of the artist and the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see. Insofar as that is true, in that effort, I become conscious of the things that I don't see. And I will not see without you, and vice versa, you will not see without me. No one wants to see more than he sees. You have to be driven to see what you see. The only way you can get through it is to accept that two-way street which I call love. You can call it a poem, you can call it whatever you like. That's how people grow up. An artist is here not to give you answers but to ask you questions."

Your work deals with haunting spaces, traumas, the queerness that underlies personal and popular histories, and often involves inviting audiences to share the tight, intimate, or uncomfortable space of your practice with you. I know that it is sometimes met with critique if not outright resistance. In your creative life right now, personal life even, is there anything about this lover-artist comparison Baldwin makes that rings true? How are you negotiating danger, difficulty, resistance? Are you aware of any growth, conscious of things unseen, finding new and nourishing ways to love and be loved?

MP: Yay the creative process! A favorite. My first time encountering it was through watching a panel where LaToya Ruby Frazier reads part of it. Here is one of my favorite lines from the essay: "We are frightened, all of us, of these forces within us that perpetually menace our precarious security."

I want to say thank you for your accurate, but more importantly, thoughtful interpretation of my work. I like to think of art as a way to extend love, an offering if you will. In love's inherent nature there is the risk of pain and/or loss. Of course, there is a difference between hardship and abuse. In making art, I think that it's very possible to unintentionally cause pain through exposing others to unsettled matters in their own lives. But I think the risks presented when we choose to love or actively choose to be present with an artwork are similar. Both can yield such immense possibility for growth, healing, or new ways of seeing something or someone. In 2013, I witnessed the last hour of my father's life. I was pretty young and this changed the course of my life. I'm trying to have my work carry not the same heaviness of that moment but the same clearing. The same cut and opening if you will. Death erases physicality and then leaves us with a space to move through. To feel through. Within each of us, I think there are hard questions we can ask ourselves if we want to become our most full selves. When my father died, one question that I really had to ask myself was, "Am I a liar?" My father didn't know me as a queer person. As a sexual being. And years of trauma followed due to a refusal to answer this question. In the "current moment" of the world, there is a lot of outward

thinking about social injustices. Something we should consider is that the world's problems manifest inside of us as well. Currently, I'm making a timeline of events that deal with my understandings of sexuality, engagements with queerness in digital spaces, sexual health, drawing as sex, and the impacts of grief all in order to write this book. I am trying to dig into myself further and get to some core underlying questions...questions that I don't even yet have...in hopes of growing and understanding myself more. I think this challenge could give others a sense of community in their own processes of unveiling necessary truths. I find hard truths to be ripe places of origin for possibility and potential. The stakes feel high. I hope that the book will be there for someone whenever they may need it. I'm a firm believer that I need not know someone in order to show them love.

Photographer: Vijay Masharani. Still from *Something Else* by Malcolm Peacock, 2017. Richmond, VA. Courtesy of the artist.

"To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

BY LOVE, HAVE YOU SEEN PAUL ROBESON

Crystal Z. Campbell

Crystal Z. Campbell, *Is This Not A Legacy*, 2019. Site-specific text installation at Gilcrease Museum. 26 x 11 x 7 ft. Courtesy of the artist.

Is This Not A Legacy is a love poem for objects and human remains housed in museums, closets, and collections. By love, I ask if your acquisition is rooted in longing, a confusion of desire, possession, and necessity. To you, artifacts and persons of the pasts, tell me:

Were you a gift?
Uprooted from funerary sites?
Results of theft?
Forms of currency?
Repercussions of barter or trade?
Consequences of capture?

By love, I ask how inheritors of this legacy will release these narratives from manifest destiny, settler colonial nostalgia, and captivity. By love, how can I afford to look and not question the harm of my gaze? By love, I mean how the architecture of emptiness and silence can also be sacred.

Love is a marriage of the past and the present.

Sculptor Antonio Salemme with his sculpture of Paul Robeson. Courtesy of the Antonio Salemme Foundation.

Love often troubles me, too. Love often carries me, too. I am working in response to love, or to the question that holds me. I am held by love; it is sometimes a warm rapture. It is sometimes a shared instant released to memory. It is sometimes knowing that an unfavorable action might be a test of loyalty. It is

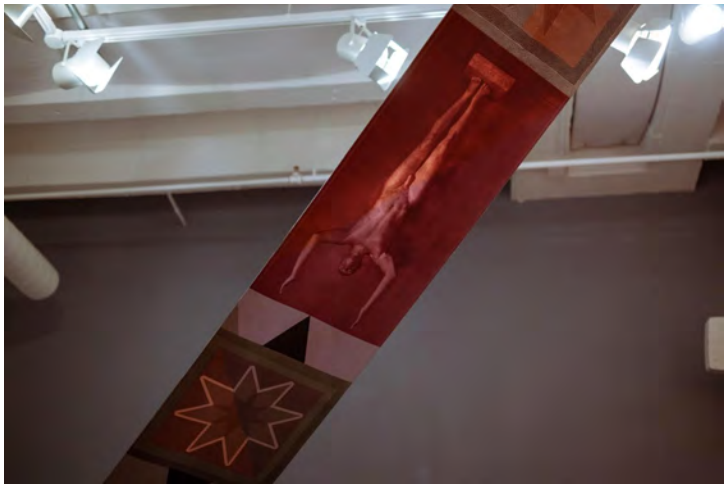
sometimes a wish, that remains a wish. It is sometimes knowing that destruction is an unspoken ask for attention.

For every proclaimed thing or person I have loved, there is never a monument. For every proclaimed thing or person I have loved, I wonder where it will land.

Crystal Z. Campbell, *Model Citizen: Here I Stand*, 2019. Installation with banners, digital video, sound by James G. Williams, and live performance. Performers: Kolby Webster, Nicos Norris, and Daniel Pender. Photo by Destiny Jade Green. Courtesy of the artist.

For now, I would like to place an open call. I am placing an open call to ask about a statue of Paul Robeson. Dear lovers of the world, keepers of history, who have looked, and remain looking, have you seen Paul Robeson?

Paul Robeson warns us: “Every artist, every scientist, every writer must decide now where he stands. The artist must take sides. He must elect to fight for freedom or for slavery. I have made my choice.”



Crystal Z. Campbell, *Model Citizen: Here I Stand*, 2019. Installation with banners, digital video, sound by James G. Williams, and live performance. Performers: Kolby Webster, Nicos Norris, and Daniel Pender. Photo by Destiny Jade Green. Courtesy of the artist.

Paul Robeson was Black. Was Paul Robeson loved? Paul Robeson was an activist, orator, rugby star, actor, lawyer, writer, singer—a true polymath whose tongue and talent found him overseas often.

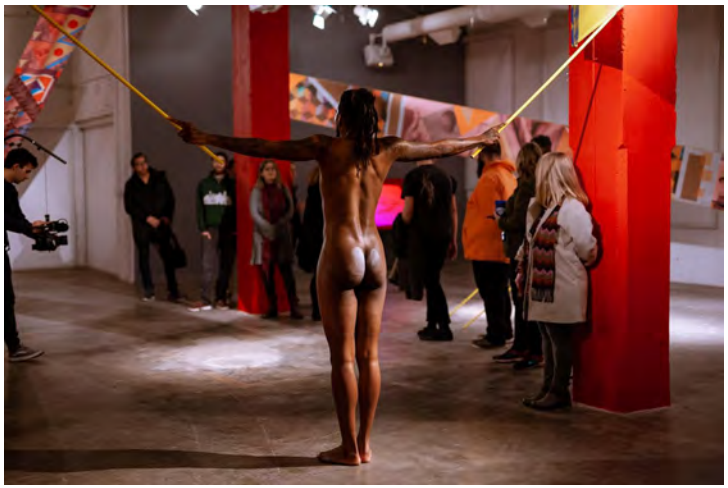
Was Paul Robeson seen? Paul Robeson was friends with cameras. Paul Robeson was one of the most surveilled persons of his time.

Have you seen Paul Robeson?

Remember that time when a statue of Paul Robeson disappeared? Sculptor Antonio Salemme created a full-size rendering of Robeson in plaster, painted him the color of bronze. The sculpture made rounds in San Francisco, but the offer to exhibit it in Philadelphia was retracted upon arrival.

In New York, the sculpture of Paul Robeson was met with outrage. Salemme replied with a modification to his creation—a fig leaf to shield viewers from Paul Robeson’s reproductive organs. Despite the invitation, the sculpture was not shown. Later, the sculpture was transported to Paris and, afterward, never seen again.

Have you seen Paul Robeson?



Crystal Z. Campbell, *Model Citizen: Here I Stand*, 2019. Installation with banners, digital video, sound by James G. Williams, and live performance. Performers: Kolby Webster, Nicos Norris, and Daniel Pender. Photo by Destiny Jade Green. Courtesy of the artist.

I am not surprised you have seen sacred funerary objects buried deep into the earth, intended for the afterlife. I am not surprised you have not seen Paul Robeson. I am not surprised you have seen a former "founding father" mounted—and now dismounted—upon horses across the nation, and have carried his coined silhouette in the lining of your pocket. I am not surprised you have not seen Paul Robeson.

Love is, sometimes, a secret. Love is, sometimes, exposed. If we ever see Paul Robeson again, we should tell him he was loved. If we further memorialize Paul Robeson, we should tell the people who loved him. If we loved Paul Robeson, we are belated in honoring his former wife. She saw Paul Robeson.

With special thanks to Jennifer Hope Davy, Moheb Soliman, and Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán.

"The class struggle, which is always present to a historian influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call in to question every victory, past and present, of the rulers."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

GONE

Matt Shelton

This picture is created. as it originally was presented

We finished plowing the creek bottom today.

Why,
land is the only thing in the world

that will hurt you

[Bell clanging]

Only just me and Pork left.

He's the best overseer in the county.

But–
[Dogs barking]
and we understand each other—

But–
There's none in the county can touch you—

but I just can't bear
that you're half-Irish, too.

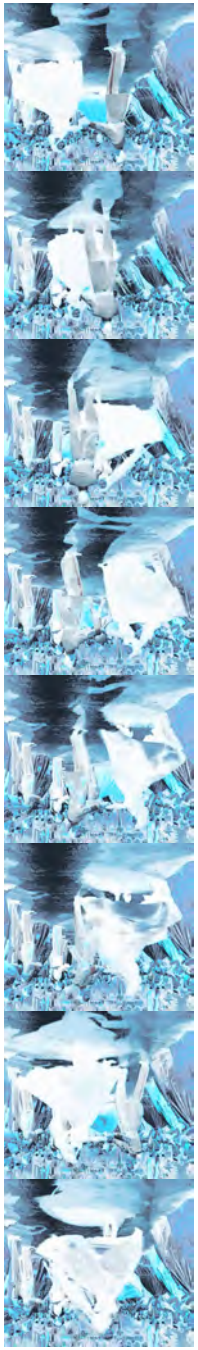
———

Pork!
Have you been making a spectacle of yourself

waitin' on poor white trash.

Barkin' in the house like that.
going around in black.
[Murmuring]

Why should I have to
Take the lamp



———
I can't think of anything
you can do without a reputation.

You, uh, had broken something.
that I lack.

—
And don't you be forgettin', Missy

[Dixie plays]

for all of us.

Isn't it thrilling?
The cause of living in the past

———

[MOUTHS]
Oh, can't we go away and forget
All these poor, tragic people.

Look at them.
dying right in front of us.
[Wild cheering and applause]

the war makes the most peculiar widows

[Women gasping]
You'll hate me for hearing them

I get so bored I could scream.
[Waltz plays]

Why, the land they live on is like their mother

[Woman screaming]
Wearin' herself out

[GASPING]


Falcon Steel

DIGGING UP THE LAWNUMENT

Dawn Holder

"It has been suggested that if ever a plant deserved a monument for its service to mankind, it was bermudagrass for what it has done to prevent soil erosion, to stabilize ditch banks, roadsides and airfields, to beautify landscapes and to provide a smooth, resilient playing surface for sports fields and playgrounds."[1]

*

I navigate my browser to Google Maps and click on satellite view. Zoom out, click and drag the landscape around. Zoom in with three clicks. Stark shadows highlight rooflines. I am simultaneously in and above the landscape. Framed by their tidy lawns, the houses, sidewalks, and driveways form an orderly and predictable pattern along the street. Informed by this omniscient aerial perspective, I start sketching.

*

[1] Richard L. Duble, "Bermudagrass: The Sports Turf of the South," *Aggie Horticulture*, Texas A & M University, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/turf/publications/Bermuda.html.

Dawn Holder, *Suburban Lawn Iteration IV*, 2016. Porcelain, 10 ft. x 21 ft. x 2.5 in.
Courtesy of the artist.

*

My short fingernails cake with dirt as I probe the ground with my trowel, making holes for the surprise lilies that I am relocating. How long ago were these bulbs planted? Was it the same person who scattered the daffodils around the yard? Or was it the one who left behind the rusty nails and bottle caps, the bits of Coca-Cola bottles, and shards of china that I keep unearthing? Or, perhaps it was the person who pressed plastic torpedoes of mole poison into the yard? (The moles are still here.) All reminders that this space has been lived in and cultivated. Or should I say colonized and settled?

A thousand years ago, Caddo people cultivated crops in the Arkansas River Valley and built large earthworks across Arkansas and Louisiana. Two hundred years ago, the Osage lost their tribal lands in Arkansas via treaties with the United States government and were forcibly removed to Oklahoma via the Trail of Tears. Clarksville, Arkansas, was established 184 years ago, eight years after Cherokee settlers in the area gave up their land. Eighty years later, Thompson Street subdivision was gridded out on this land. One hundred years later, I dig.

*

Mow

1. to cut down (grass, grain, etc.) with a scythe or a machine.

2. to cut grass, grain, etc., from: to mow the lawn.

*

"Admit it. You want them. Those beautiful stripes on your lawn that'll make your grass look like ballpark grass."[2]

"To create a vivid pattern, mow high. Mowing at the highest setting creates softer grass that bends over easily. A shorter grass blade will not bend over as far, and the pattern will not be as noticeable. Raising the mowing height even a half-inch can make a difference. Don't forget to feed your lawn every 6-8 weeks with Scotts® Turf Builder® Lawn Food!"[3]

*

Dawn Holder, *Grass Variation (Diagonal Mound)*, 2015 (detail). Porcelain, 5 ft. x 5 ft. x 5.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

[2] "How to Stripe Your Lawn for a Big League Look," *Scotts*, Scotts, June 11, 2020, www.scotts.com/en-us/library/lawn-care-basics/how-stripe-your-lawn-big-league-look.

[3] Ibid.

*

When I first moved to Arkansas, I rented a house with a few acres of land just outside of town. The yard was so large it took a whole day to mow with the push mower I borrowed from my new colleague.

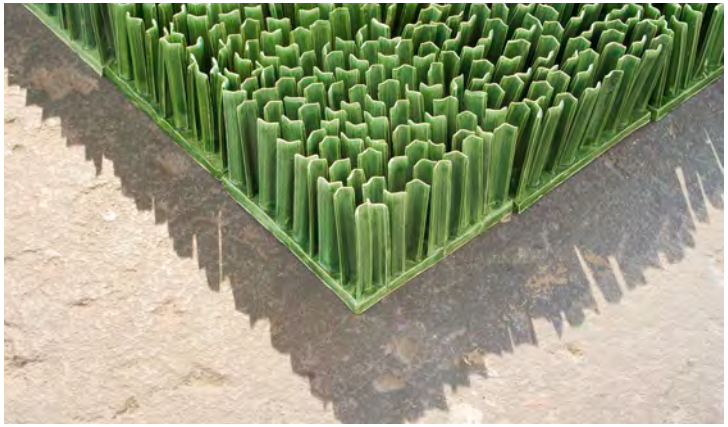
I had considered letting it go wild, but that was before I look down to see patchy, brown spots slowly making their way up my leg. Upon closer inspection, I see that this is not dirt, but a battalion of tiny ticks. I panic, run to the hose, shoot them off my legs with jets of water. The tiny ticks are on my dogs. Impossible to remove. I panic. Shave random patches of the dogs' fur. The ticks are everywhere.

At the farmers' co-op, I buy a sprayer and insecticide. I spray the whole yard. Just carpet bomb the whole thing. Everything dies. Butterflies flail listlessly, grasshoppers flounder awkwardly. I am instantly flooded with regret.

That was nine years ago. I still feel guilty. (It turns out you can simply use a lint roller or a wad of duct tape to collect the seed ticks from your legs. Flea and tick shampoo for the dogs.)

*

In the studio, I roll out delicate sheets of porcelain, thinner than pie crust, and press them into corrugated molds. I pull out the rippled sheets of clay and cut them into thin creased strips. When these porcelain blades firm up, I plant them into soft squares of clay.



Dawn Holder, *Monoculture*, 2013 (detail). Porcelain, 8 ft. x 15 ft. x 2.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

The porcelain grass begins to grow into a series of square modules that will eventually become a perfect green lawn.

I keep a tally of blades per day to acknowledge the accumulation of my time and effort. In 2014, American adults collectively spent more than 2.3 billion minutes on lawn care and gardening.[4] Between 2012 and 2016, I spent approximately 70,000 minutes in the studio making over 125,000 blades of grass. If labor is a metric for assigning value, how precious are lawns?

This work is repetitive and labor-intensive, a mirror reflecting the suburban obsession with creating the

[4] John Egan, "How Much Time Do Americans Spend on Yardwork?" [Infographic], *Lawnstarter*, March 1, 2016, www.lawnstarter.com/blog/lawn-care-2/time-spent-on-yardwork-infographic/.

Dawn Holder, *Grass Variation (Mown Path)*, 2015. Porcelain, 5 ft. x 5 ft. x 2.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

perfect lawn. My fragile lawns cannot be touched or walked on. How many lawns are maintained but not enjoyed, and at what cost?

Why do we desire to tame and control the landscape around us with lawns? Is Bermuda grass a monument to the American Dream?

*

Mow down

1. to destroy or kill indiscriminately or in great numbers, as troops in battle.

2. to defeat, overwhelm, or overcome: The team mowed down its first four opponents.

3. to knock down.

*

The violence in the language we use to describe the maintenance of our lawns makes it clear that as a society we are ready to remove obstacles to a perfectly ordered outdoor experience by any means necessary. By obstacles I mean those things we deem out of place: weeds, too-tall grass, insects, burrowing animals, humans of the wrong color.

*

I grew up in the very suburban city of Atlanta. When I was a teenager, a sign appeared in our front lawn one day: YARD OF THE MONTH, in a scrawl of angry writing. Apparently the various construction projects my family had recently undertaken so disturbed the fabricated unity created by the monument of green rolling down the street.

*

The first time I show one of my porcelain lawns in a museum, a small child takes a running jump and lands on it. Everyone is mortified. When I arrive to replace the broken pieces, I am secretly excited by the swoosh of footprints on the pristine surface. How long would it have taken me to try this myself?

Signage is installed so everyone knows to KEEP OFF THE GRASS.

*

Footprints left by an unsuspecting child who jumped onto a porcelain lawn (*Suburban Lawn Iteration III,* 2014). Courtesy of the artist.

*

"When smiling lawns and tasteful cottages begin to embellish a country, we know that order and culture are established."[5]

*

The above quotation from Andrew Jackson Downing, the founder of American landscape architecture, is often cited in articles that examine the American lawn. His sentence encapsulates the ideal suburban street—a safe, predictable, pretty place.

In the original text, the sentence is preceded by: "With the perception of proportion, symmetry, order, and beauty, awakens the desire for possession, and with them comes the refinement of manners which distinguishes a civilized from a coarse and brutal people. So long as men are forced to dwell in log huts and follow an hunter's life, we must not be surprised by lynch law and the use of the bowie knife," and is followed not long after by: "It is the solitude and freedom of the family home in the country which constantly preserves the purity of the nation…"[6] This text was published in 1850, but the violence and capitalism embedded in the text rings true today.

The implication is that without the interventions of proper architecture and landscaping, humans exist in a primitive state of coarse lawlessness. Instead, the owning and taming of the natural world yields the desired status of refinement and purity. The irony is that this colonialist point of view ignores the environmental and cultural violence necessary to enact this conformity.

Who has access to homeownership and lawns? What measures (forms of lynch law) have been taken (are still being taken) to maintain the monoculture of these spaces? Why have we designed our neighborhoods as monuments to this ideal? How can we shift this paradigm and start digging up this lawnument—in both its physical and symbolic capacity?

*

Dawn Holder, *Suburban Lawn Iteration V*, 2016. Porcelain, 10 ft. x 19 ft. 4 in. x 2.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

[5] Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses: Including Designs for Cottages, Farm Houses, and Villas, with Remarks on Interiors, Furniture, and the Best Modes of Warming and Ventilating* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1852), p.v.

[6] Ibid.

*

"Free yourself from weeding. …

As with all garden products it's important to read and follow the directions on the label.

Following a simple weed prevention routine makes it possible to minimize many weed problems before they ever happen."[7]

*

My spouse and I agree to avoid the lawnmower all spring. It's broken anyway. The weeds bloom shades of purple all spring. For a moment, the lawn recalls its former life as a meadow, releasing us from the monotonous violence of its upkeep.

Instead, I learn about spotted burclover, henbit, chickweed, purple deadnettle, violet, speedwell, sorrel, and cleavers. What is the plant with the tiny star-shaped purple flowers? I am slowly learning their names and uses, picking some for salad and pesto.

*

"The only difference between a weed and a flower is judgment."[8]

*

I point the shovel's tip into my Bermuda grass, placing one foot and then the other on its top edge with

a forceful hop. I leverage the handle backwards to a satisfying tearing sound. And then repeat, chunking the lawn into sections. Point, jump, tear.

Grabbing the clods, I shake the dirt free, easing out the worms and burying them in the newly exposed soil. The grubs, sleeping in white curls, are hurled to a pair of waiting bluebirds who ferry them back to a nest high in the neighbor's oak tree.

As I slowly obliterate the roots, stolons, and rhizomes, I am struck by their vigor and tenacity. How their white nodes (hands) grip the ground with unexpected strength, marking time, connecting past and present as they reach, grow, replenish, invade. I am happy to hear the popping crack as the shovel disengages their iron grasp.

*

[7] "Steps to Minimize Garden Weeding," Preen.com, Lebanon Seaboard Corporation, www.preen.com/articles/steps-to-minimize-garden-weeding.

[8] *Organic Nettle Leaf Tea*, tag on teabag, Traditional Medicinals, Inc., USA.

Dawn Holder, *Untitled Grass Gesture*, artifact remaining from performance study where the artist walked across blocks of porcelain grass. Courtesy of the artist.

*

I take a midmorning break to check on the garden. An exuberance and variety exists where once was only flat green—not only plants but also birds and bugs and little toads. Chickweed and sorrel and dandelions still find spots to grow. The birdseed sprouts sunflowers. The compost volunteers unexpected squash and tomato and watermelon plants.

The daily rituals of the garden create space for attentiveness to the present and a connection to the past. Here, I am motivated to better care for this place, for myself, and for my community, while still acknowledging the complicated history that binds us.

As I tend to the plants, I notice the tender leaves of the tomato plants are covered with little flecks of white. I crouch low on the ground, looking upward. The leaves are framed by a bright blue sky, and rendered translucent by the searing Arkansas sun. Clusters of soft, green-bodied aphids darken the underside of the leaves. I carefully rinse them off with a jet of water from the hose, leaving a few for the ladybugs.

"As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

"One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

MIND GOES WHERE EYES CAN'T FOLLOW: INTERNALIZING THE LOGICS OF CAPTURE

Nora N. Khan

The pandemic in the United States has allowed for an experiment, at scale, in how a visually obsessed culture orients itself, frantically, toward the unseen—the virus, its transmission. Capture of the bodies suspected to be infected, or about to be infected, by this unseen, has intensified. The theater of security and quarantine has made legible the precise kind of psychological space that surveillance depends on. Surveillance depends on an initial buy-in, whether begrudging or unwitting, of millions of users and subjects of technology. But the buy-in is entrenched and secured beyond vision. It is continued on through rhetoric, through persuasion, through training in the play of unseeing and seeing, such that each of us using technology internalizes the logics of capture.

Over the past decade, both critical activism and legal and academic advocacy have helped cultivate widespread awareness of the trade-offs we make in using consumer technology. In fact, there is more widely available history, research, and ongoing theorizing on surveillance, on calm design of consumer technology, the history of dark patterns, than ever before. "Users" seem to largely understand how they—we—rescind our civil liberties and privacy for the convenience and ease of elite design. Business school scholars like

Shoshanna Zuboff publish international bestsellers on the foundations and strategies of companies pursuing surveillance capitalism, and ploddingly examine each new buttress in their architecture.[1] Interface designers and programmers are more wary of their own role. Tech activists and anti-spying coalitions educate teens about the surveillance state. As users, we seem to share an intellectual understanding of being surveilled. Users, citizens, accept corporate and governmental surveillance in exchange for use of a host of platforms, infrastructures, and software tools. Users adjust to a baseline knowledge of how their profiles and movements are tracked, their data lifted.

Less evident are the small shifts in public rhetoric, which continue to ensure collective buy-in for surveillance. Through these changes in narrative, which ask that we surveil ourselves and each other, we learn to inhabit the role of the surveilling eye. We sympathize with the surveillant and fail to interrupt our capture of the surveilled. We begin to relate to each other through the act of policing of language, expression, of bodily movement, intention, motivation, and presence. Taking the world as ours to consume, define, hedge, label, watch, and rewatch, in endless loops, we become police.

As forms of colonizing, imperialist seeing continue online, one begins to internalize the logics of capture. Everyone that falls across one's screen belongs to one, and every movement is one's to possess. Even within the growing spectacle of contactless pickup and no-touch sociality, in which one avoids overt touch or bodily intimacy, and produces visual evidence of this

avoidance, the more subtle logics of capture persist. Latent elements of the surveillance state have been activated and expanded rapidly in the current economic, epidemiological, and bio-political crisis. Particularly oppressive surveillance has targeted essential workers, who are particularly vulnerable, living at the intersection of manifold socioeconomic, gender, and racial inequities. In April and May of 2020, police across the country echoed the spirit of punitive seventeenth-century "lantern laws"; they detained and arrested individuals going to work, to second and third jobs, or to home to nap in between, for violating "curfew," despite their having papers of excuse around an arbitrary, overnight declaration. In June of 2020, police departments across the country scanned digital images of protestors, individuals critical of the police, and then hunted for their faces on social media to then track them down. Journalists from the *New York Times* to popular podcasts reported and report such insidious efforts breathlessly, as though a massive surveillance architecture has not unfolded around us, and in our hands, for over a decade.

Each event is a new head of a growing hydra. A crisis reveals hidden workings of this Leviathan, a many-eyed, glittering apparatus that flashes in full view, before sinking below the surface of the water. But for the theater of capture to be enacted, a groundwork had to be very methodically, slowly, dug, tiles placed, laid in iterations. For the apparatus of surveillance to become easily acknowledged, visible to us, for it to really take root in our enforced distance from one another, it had to become part of our own, active seeing. It is no longer totally hidden

in third-party apps, in hidden, black-boxed machine learning systems reading our images for life signatures. We are daily, steadily inculcated, through narrative and media consumption, through public health initiatives and tool updates, to internalize the logics of surveillance, so that we become surveillant of a bio-political landscape that consists entirely of at-risk bodies. In a form of scrying, we mine our screen's display of crowds near and far, sussing out, discerning their hidden intentions.

This article's title, "Where Eyes Can't Follow: Internalizing the Logics of Capture," can be further appended with: "as a Dream of Sovereigns." Sovereigns dream of capture, of the mechanics of capture being hidden. They dream of this hidden capture becoming ritualized, internalized, done out of the sight of those who would protest. I take up as my focus the many ways that surveillance logics are internalized by us, watching spectacular life unfold, consuming feeds, images, and media about violence, often in real time, online. Caught within the theater of algorithmic capture, itself fueled by theaters of true, active, physical capture, we risk experiencing a slow conversion to the embrace of the logics of policing. Seduced by the power of identifying with its logics, we naturalize them, and then lose sight of our own tendencies to police.

I am inspired by thinkers like Simone Browne, Jackie Wang, and Safiya Noble, who leverage their criticism at the design of the carceral state, and the technologies that support it. In their wake, I take up how foundational methods of algorithmic capture are to

society. Earlier forms of coding, of measuring movement, through the census, lantern laws, and branding, have transformed into current algorithmic supremacy, which fuels predictive capture, entrenching injustice along scales we can barely conceive of.

Mapping Psychological Space and Groundwork: Setting the Stage

As the U.S. first grappled at scale with the emergency of the pandemic, a shift of the "burden" of policing, from the police to citizens themselves, started to take place. Communities were harnessed, overnight, to police themselves, and other communities, using technology already at hand. Such practices are supported and encouraged by the mediation of images through surveillant digital infrastructure. I map how we become part of the disciplinary eye, take our place in concentric rings of internalized surveillance, turned into lifestyle.

The digital surveillance infrastructure we work within was always ready for self-surveillance through apps, platforms, and access to databases. It was always driven by an ethic of predictive community policing that seeks out and marks potential "risks." And this structure was primed perfectly for the mass internalizing of the logics of capture, policing, and oblique social management. Threats to the public good, like a virus, are easily solved by the "affordances" of technological solution-ism.

As a number of writers, such as Kim Stanley Robinson, have written, the pandemic's impact

has been equally "abstract and internal. It was [and is] a change in the way we were looking at things" before.[2] This internal, abstract change is my subject. As the social pandemic began to unravel alongside the actual, public focus shifted to a view from overhead, to consider the designs of social systems and resource distribution. Pundits discussed urban design as it perpetuates inequality, through racist housing laws, redlining, zoning, and anti-houseless public architecture. The widely uneven infrastructures of public support surfaced, and a lack of preparedness left citizens further dependent on devices—their pervasive infrastructures of techno-surveillance—for guidance, strategies, information. Each person, left to themself, seizing on a digital semblance of stability, reliant on its offerings.

The conscientious, cognitive laborer, in enforced solitude, scrolls her feeds. She zooms in on virus simulations, does her own amateur epidemiological modeling. She researches Sweden and herd immunity, flirts with conspiracy, and gets more and more frustrated about her isolation as a state directly linked to the select actions of individual strangers. Who are these people making it harder for her to leave? From her couch, tucked into a blanket, she scans images of poor people on the subway, crammed shoulder to shoulder, and shudders. People in photos start to exist for her within the language and metrics of the virus; are these people sick, are they immune? Are they asymptomatic or are they potentially spreading their disease everywhere?[3]

Keeping abreast of the "rules" required near-constant surveilling of media and surveillance of self. A week offline—assuming one had the internet—could mean missing curfew, or not knowing public sentiment on masks had changed in one's community and state. Here, an invocation of "We" seems tempting, and would work if we existed within a clear bio-political order, in which all people lived and experienced the world in predictable ways. "We" are instructed to wear masks. "We" are told how we all should navigate urban spaces, approach each other, and stay at bay. "We" are told to strive to be contactless, to avoid touch. There is a dissolution of "We" when the bio-political order is unclear. Simulations, algorithms, and predictions all change, and so create rapidly changing rules. We all certainly heard a lot of chiding, mostly of the many who will flout rules made in this cybernetic stronghold, even as those rules change daily. This is not an expression of sympathy for those who actively put others at risk, but a note on the natural disorientation caused by rules based on public health "interpreters" of rough, emerging, and competing simulations of a poorly understood, unseen virus.[4]

The theater of pandemic lit up with fear, anger, and critique of those who do not practice social distancing. Police without masks started a referendum on police abuses and disdain of the public, especially the overtaxed poor.[5] From the vantage point of the interior, it became difficult to know precisely what was happening outside of news and social media. Every action and event came mediated. It was, and is, up to the reader to sort out what is real, what is

exaggerated, to the best of their ability within algorithmic bubbles. Small news items are amplified, concentrated, and made ubiquitous within the span of an hour.

And outside, in the confusion of received information, citizens began to monitor others, on alert for violations of social distance. "We" quickly enforced a kind of gaze on each other, a kind of gentle surveillance, a relationship of power that immediately posits the viewer as correct. In the emptied streets, the police prowled with new reasons to enact violence. News of New York City police's choices dominated headlines as the city became a pandemic epicenter. Areas that were already over-policed experienced more policing. Bias against communities of color intensified. Little empathy, more aggression. As NYC police officer Jorge Trujillo described early days of the pandemic, "So on top of the unprecedented problem that we're dealing with, the police can come and escalate and make things worse."[6] Many pointed out the inflexibility of policing, how the absence of oversight meant little to no change in the abusive tactics of the police. I was struck by how deeply important citizen countersurveillance, the vitality of it as a tactic, would become. Who would see back?

In May of 2020, protests erupted in dozens of cities across America in response to the viral filmed extrajudicial murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. In late May, Minnesota Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington announced that protest arrestees would be "contact traced" to determine their associations,

political affiliation, levels of organization, platforms, to then build "an information network."[7] That "contact tracing," a concept used for passively finding sickness, be then used to trace "unseen" sentiments, like anti-police activism, anti-fascism, or anti-racism, and criminalize them much as sickness, was not an ambiguous move. Keen technology critics like Adrian Chen swiftly noted how the "war on COVID is normalizing surveillance in a bad way."[8] The language tracked.

Kentaro Toyama, a surveillance expert at the University of Michigan, notes that "the normal ethics of surveillance might not apply" in a time of crisis. Normal ethics meaning a shared understanding grounded in civil liberties, in which individual privacy should be protected, and surveillance is seen as primed for misuse.[9]

Theaters of Policing: Spectacular Aims

Surveillance serves the American state, but it also serves civilians whose interest is in maintaining the violent, bankrupting, extractive economic system the American state relies on. Their lives, families, and communities are only "safe" if the state is steadied under law and order. Being part of the eye, then, having the ability to capture and evade, is a distinct power within this regime. Being able to see "danger," name it, and call for punishment of it, is rewarded. The spectacle of the weak, the suffering, and the aggrieved fuels an algorithmic economy that cycles, feeds, and amplifies on rage, grief, and other strong emotions.

Pandemic theater has been not only a great amplifier, but a wide-scale simulation of logics of capture, seeing, and unseeing. Never in history have we had access to so much information about the iterative, compounding injustices in the world; further, never in history have we had the ability to wall ourselves off from them so smoothly. In isolation, the protection of the body—the healthy body—becomes a site of contestation. And in sovereign systems like or comparable to America's, with weak or absent social welfare systems, the individual must carry the burden of her self-healing. It is your individual responsibility to keep your health intact, and so, to map and chart possible threats around you from your terminal. Every healthy body must protect itself and has the right to do so with any tools available. Quarantine has become a mark of the healthy in the absence of good data. And so, while the pandemic has begun long-overdue public discussions about structural inequality, the incompetence with which it has been handled has given free rein for many to prioritize personal safety and sovereignty over the rights of others. Policing of the most marginalized intensifies, out of fear of death.

The management of sickness and plague is where our commitments to relative senses of community, if they existed before, are tested. Paul B. Preciado describes the pandemic as a "great laborator[y] of social innovation, the occasion for the large-scale reconfiguration of body procedures and technologies of power," along with a "new way of understanding sovereignty."[10] Sovereignty is not just waged but made concrete through networks, through gaming of algorithmic calculus.

Some are deemed outside the realm of community, dispensable by definition. Understanding how these definitions are augmented, concentrated, and distributed through algorithmic media is critical, as we are experiencing the pandemic through the framework of computation.

In domestic isolation, videos and streams and feeds pour in. People inside, cut off, turn even further inward. Online, fake news proliferates through armies of bots. The play unfolds. A cast of characters emerges: the unmasked suburban libertarian; the anti-vaxxer; the working, undocumented immigrant in farm fields; the essential worker, the hero-nurse, the ones clapping at dusk; the zealous moralizer. Each character type, each position, becomes part of the story of the bio-political state. Surveilling other's crises, other's grief, and the narratives of pain and loss, death, becomes a form of ritual. Through the algorithmic and digital media economy, outrageous narratives, each an "example" of political positions, become naturalized.

Through this piece, I want to argue for capture as a pervasive, seductive cognitive tendency, a practice that is honed through media consumption. The isolated eagerly take on this work out of a sense of urgency, self-protection, and survival. Capture becomes a matter of life and death. This tendency toward a logic of capture—grown, cultivated through uninterrupted consumption of mediated, violent acts of capture—becomes itself a lifestyle, an undertaking with civic weight and import. Seeking answers in the pandemic within screens, one finds unlimited

freedom to surveil, download, and zoom in on the bodies of others with a clarity that comes from a many-tiered remove. This tendency leans toward an unreflective adoption of an authoritarian bent toward streams of videos and images, and the objects and bodies represented therein.

The viewer and feed are co-constitutive. The viewer flows through her feed, moving from inhabiting one surveilling eye to the next, scanning, watching, aggressively framing, moving right along with the feed's flow of violence. This digital movement with algorithmic spectacle compounds and entrenches one's political position, and affirms it. Though a critical reader of digital media might suggest everyone "reflect" and always make space for critical consumption, it does not seem tenable at scale, to mobilize the mind and spirit to thoughtfully read every video and image in the feed.

Further, we read images and videos of violence, violently, and do so by technological design. Machine learning-driven visual consumption has its own spectacular time. It depends on capture of bodies and objects to function; its time is collapsed, fueled through sorting, bucketing, separation of protestor, vigilante, worker, hero, scourge. Outrageous narratives, "examples" of individual political positions, become naturalized. Each character, type, position, becomes part of the story of the pandemic theater.

As spectacular time unfolds through the media, we see historical structures of relating, capturing, naming, all bleed through.[11] One is cognitively disposed

to recognize, or mis-recognize, spectacular violence as violence. Ritualized forms and patterns of viewing violent capture—the police capturing, a vigilante, capturing—as an event that happens in blur, far away, or far below, become commodified. Inevitably, when our media time is dominated by images of capture, the spectacle of consuming violence becomes, itself, a subject of focus.

Sociologist and scholar Zeynep Tufekci has written at length about the dangers of "pandemic theater," in which security measures and police harassment are likely amplified in any vacuum of information.[12] As was well covered in New York, police harassed, fined, and arrested black and brown citizens on camera for not socially distancing, while their cohorts handed out virus "protection" kits of masks and wipes, with care, to sunbathers in Domino and McCarren Parks.[13] Mimicking extant "stop and frisk" practices meant 35 of 40 arrested people in New York City were black.[14] Similarly, in many countries, police data for COVID-19 arrests and fines followed predictable, comparable patterns. In Sydney, Australia, for instance, social distancing's highest infringements take place among Indigenous people, despite being .04% of the population, reflecting systemic bias and over-policing of Indigenous locals.

Algorithmic and digital media economies deputize civilians to be purveyors of violent spectacle. And these economies mask the ways in which being a spectator makes one more vulnerable to capture, to disciplinary tracking, targeting, and training. In 1998, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun richly theorized the

cyberflâneur who navigates online space as a kind of "detached observer who remain[s] hidden from the world while at the center," invested in a fallacious illusion of control. Not much has changed within today's algorithmically driven digital media landscape. Today's *cyberflâneur* maps seamlessly atop with the captor, the surveilling state. She is instantiated and trained into a position. Any stance of detachment and distance impossible. The consumer of spectacular algorithmic time and life is shaped by her relationship to the spectacle, even though she might imagine herself as merely gawker, a passive seer. In this cycle, violent spectatorship is naturalized, exacerbated.

In 2020, the new age of the *cyberflâneur*, the algorithmic citizen might still believe herself in a position to judge, assess, analyze, close-read with objectivity. She might fancy herself a critical reader, capable, with the tools of visual analysis, of understanding the story of any image. What if this critical position is totally collapsed, compromised, hacked? The reality of how computational systems today actively shape, crop, highlight, direct and nudge image readings makes a critical close-reading very difficult. The algorithmic spectacle of crisis embeds the tussle of divergent, wildly opposed ideologies into its framing, harnessing more watchers. I read a static news headline, topping an image of a nurse in a mask, standing proudly in an intersection before protestors. I then watch her in a video; she pushes and is pushed by a woman draped in an American flag. As a viewer, I immediately sympathize with the nurse. I identify with this overworked, underpaid woman who looks like me. I cannot find a scrap of critical generosity for the woman in the flag, even as I learn she has gone bankrupt, as her small business closed. In eight seconds, I am pulled into bad reading, conclusive judgments.

In introducing Chun's essay, Nicholas Mirzoeff notes how Chun's cyberflâneur is further a kind of "rubbernecker," who lightly colonizes with her gaze, takes ownership of the subjects in the image."For all the futuristic talk associated with the internet," Mirzoeff writes, "the dominant models of internet use rely on nineteenth-century ideas of the colonizing subject, and skate over the implications of the largely independent ways computers actually exchange data."[15] Today, each spectator is still yet "also a spectacle, given that everyone automatically produces traces,"[16] literal traces, data generated with each click, each site visited, each uploaded photo. She leaves her tracks everywhere online, and she is also colonized in the process of viewing.

From Seeing With the State ⟶ Learning to Look Again

My goal here is a quick portrait of how users of technology are being encouraged to adopt a logic of seeing *with* the state, and *through* its eyes, offline. Algorithmically guided scanning and capture becomes a method of scanning, reading, and capture in the real world. Increased surveillance through streams and feeds can accelerate structures of literal capture. The technical space embeds and amplifies the most authoritarian tendencies that one might harbor. An inculcation into the logics of platforms exacerbates a tendency to surveil, to identify with the state, with

police, to identify with the entity with outsized power to see. The inconceivable becomes normalized. And considered, incisive critique of the grounding conditions that allow this distributed authoritarian lens becomes harder.

This seeing with the state is both the product of a nameable, immediate crisis, like the pandemic, and an expression of an ongoing, slow, training in our collective sympathies with the logics of policing, which we privatize, internalize, and take on ourselves as duty. Some public response has clamored for a status quo to be restored. A return to normal. Overnight, a new culture of informants has emerged, informing on social-distance violators. Apps like *Neighbors* and *Next Door* are used to deliver notes to the public, and the police, about crowds and gatherings of suspicious people. These rough networks of ambient capture and potential punishment, which enforce pre-existing power relationships (the healthy versus the sick, the protected and socially distanced versus the precariously housed, more at-risk) reveal a relationship to discipline that takes place outside the body but now depends on digital capture. Some remain untouched, always the center of the story, while other bodies are doomed, subject to disease, death—a story of foretold dispensability, now mediated.

In theorizing the pandemic, Preciado reminds us of Foucault's useful framework of biopolitics as one in which "the techniques of biopolitical government spread as a network of power that goes beyond the juridical spheres to become a *horizontal, tentacular force*, traversing the entire territory of lived experience

and penetrating each individual body."[17] How might we understand this tentacular force, shaping the state of exception ushered in by COVID-19? How does the state of exception allow for individual surveillance in isolation to flourish? If we understand technology and the digital as not just mirroring, but actively framing and magnifying existing structural narratives, how do we square the centrality of technology and smart devices as portals to services, money, and work, with the specific ideological world views they espouse? Further, how might critical and academic studies move much more swiftly with these tides of socio-technical change? While unorthodox to write about such world historical events in real time, my analysis of the past three months is rooted in identifying patterns and models central to emerging surveillance studies, criticism of software ideology, and the philosophy of cybernetics. Theorists need to move with the changing tactics of surveillance on all the fronts that it moves, so users, consumers, can actively interrogate their role and responsibility.

March 2020 to June 2020: it took four months to transition from crisis fueled by fear of viral infection to a secondary crisis of "necessary" surveillance, fueled by fear of people protesting police violence, on the state's fear of Black Americans as a political force, on a fear of "antifa." And a crisis of countersurveillance, fueled by citizen fear of police brutality and for many, of white supremacy. It all depends on how you are conditioned to see.

Critiques of vision and its role as the ultimate conduit of racial surveillance predicate that one is able

to see the surveilling mechanism, the apparatus. However, just as race exceeds the visible to denote the invisible, so too does racialized surveillance function along unseen byways. Preciado, for instance, describes the "subaltern vertical workers, racialized, and feminized bodies" as they are "condemned" to work outside, over-policed. In this work they are also, perversely, unseen.[18] I'd posit that the work of moving away from algorithmic surveillance and its unseeing is to first imagine, and then articulate, all the different modes in which feminized and racialized bodies are unseen. Through shared, collective imperatives to narrate, honor, and elevate unseen experience, to navigate the world beyond dominant modes of vision, to think along vectors of risk, safety, erasure, and power.

Surveillance has many modes of unseeing, because seeing involves choices to unsee, or not see. Clear surveillance can be ignored or not seen. Or, the surveilling apparatus goes offline. What the surveilling eye chooses not to see can be both a death sentence and a lost opportunity for justice. Police body cameras are shut off before enacting extrajudicial murder. In June of 2020, police brutalized protestors with tear gas and rubber bullets, riot gear shields, tasers, and batons, before cameras, rolling, in clear view of the world. But the demands of protestors were as much about the police violence past and ongoing, as the abuse that happens in prisons, and behind closed doors, domestic and institutional. The violence that is seen is the exception; unseen, systemic abuses are now, wonderfully, at the fore of collective consciousness. What happens in the absence of footage fills the shared imagination. Activists and community

organizers share statistics on missing women, on the missing dead of Black and immigrant communities. We are asked to imagine all the violence people are subject to, that goes beyond the sight of the world. The illegible violence. Without citizens to track, name, film, and complicate the state seeing apparatus, one can only imagine what is not filmed and shown to the world.

Activists have raised widespread awareness that increased countersurveillance, whether by civilians working individually in protests or in groups, helps document abusive, terrorizing acts, the murders by police. It remains to be seen whether increased countersurveillance can prevent deaths and harm, or does, instead, the equally important work of broadcasting nationally and internationally the fact of violence, which would otherwise be buried, hidden, or lost. Or, whether the evidence of countersurveillance only feeds into the algorithmic thirst for capture of violence.

In the U.S., from state to state, we have moved at a snail's pace toward practical logical measures that will help with developing a vaccine, manage social spread, and facilitate access to care. Instead, we have a swift activation of corporate and state control of medical data without firm plans or insight on how this data will or won't be folded into extant forms of algorithmic oppression, which punish one in insurance claims, loan applications, and other opportunities based on one's personal metadata. All these active technological interventions are part of the tentacular spread: the ambient style of mental capture

encouraged through algorithmic media, the normalization of tracing presented as necessary for public health. All the information we receive about COVID-19 is technologically mediated through computational and statistical simulations, received as information from above.

Within these spectacular, swift activations of surveillance infrastructure, it is critical to also recognize how surveillance is slow, how it is introduced in tiny waves, over years. This understanding helps us reframe debates about technological surveillance, from one of individual choice and civil liberties, alone. In this advocacy, being surveilled or not is presented as a clear choice, a choice that can be attained through just enough civic engagement and resistance and rejection. The pandemic, as Elvia Wilk describes, is a form of "slow violence, resulting not only from sudden, invasive 'foreign,' nonhuman threats, but also from ongoing, pervasive, systemic power imbalances inside and outside the arbitrary borders we draw around places, people, and concepts."[19] And within this negotiation of power imbalance, surveillance architectures are the ultimate example of a slow violence which "is hard to identify, hard to describe, and hard to resist."[20] Understanding how we are surveilled requires that we recognize our own practices of surveillance, and how we have accepted this role over time. The debate over surveillance demands that we examine our motives, that we interrupt our ownership.

De-Normalizing the Trace

Two years ago, living in Detroit's North End, I wrote about the psychological effect of Project Greenlight's live-feed cameras on the sidewalks and buildings of Detroit as they introduced a new type of paranoia, about the machine eye reading one badly, intervening without one's knowledge. To wit, this past month, Project Greenlight is, as many speculated, now being activated for contact tracing to enforce social distancing.[21] The logic of surveillance is not ever so surprising; opening the door to surveillance ensures more surveillance. A slow movement is made from the cusp of possibility (a confusion about what such cameras will be used for) to active, hunting surveillance—an eye that follows, that punishes, that notes deviation. Increased policing with a layer of specialized cameras is now justified as essential for keeping the collective safe. Black neighborhoods in Detroit like North End are hit the hardest, making the city a hot spot for COVID-19.[22]

By normalizing surveillance of one another and of communities for health reasons, we have experienced a truly unprecedented turn: the acceptance, the slide, into what is acceptable public surveillance, as enforced through consumer technologies. A new chime, a new interface, a new system of tracking.[23] A day before the protests in Minneapolis took form, Apple joined with Google and announced a new system update which introduced technical tools to "help combat the virus and save lives." They ensured user privacy and security are central—with new framework APIs, cryptography and Bluetooth

tracing protocols woven into phone updates.[24] These "exposure notifications" would, apparently, be made on millions of phones to "aid in the fight against the pandemic." They would be made "available to states' public health agencies, and governments" to build a host of virus tracing apps that will help one know whether one has had contact with an infected, positive-testing person.[25] As of late May, states like North Dakota and South Carolina had already signed up to unroll it statewide.[26] In August, few states had rolled out "Covid Watch"; as students gear up to return to their "hybrid" campuses, states anticipated better data from the app.[27]

Closing the loop of algorithmic supremacy, we see and sort the world algorithmically to become part of the sovereign's dream. Machine vision dominates; the cameras, computers, and screens that are eyeless and sightless, that see without eyes, reify and enforce within us an algorithmic seeing, processing, and sorting within ourselves. Algorithms, so often described and understood within the field of technological criticism as "not neutral," meaning, man-made, imbued with human values, human-crafted from dataset up, have their own form of seeing, sorting, and understanding. We are inculcated and drawn into their logics of capture without end. The apparatus of surveillance becomes one that is distributive, an apparatus we carry within us.

Preciado suggests we just need to change "the relationship between our bodies and bio-vigilant machines of biocontrol"—our phones, the internet, our computers—by "altering" them, or making for a

"re-appropriation of bio-political techniques and their pharmacopornographic devices."[28] It seems he is suggesting a kind of hacking or intervention. I appreciate this throwback impulse to old-school activism. But as we have discussed at length, because the "de-collectivization and tele-control" of online work catalyzes so much internally, the work of surveillance must also take place in our minds. The tool is but one wave; the brick wall of supremacy that goes hand in hand with capture is far harder to hack.

We can discuss mismanagement of the crisis as a type of open door to technocratic mass control, yes. But as the medical surveillance apparatus *activates* at scale, as policing intensifies or is privatized, we must be careful to not frame each slide as just another expansion, a new arm or tentacle of the surveillance state, but instead as a highly historical continuation of noting, tracking, and marking bodies with unseen "pre-existing conditions," as reasons to be abandoned by the state, diminished, and discarded.

We *should* remember the eagerness our communities displayed in this crisis to have more phone surveillance, more police, in exchange for civic freedoms. We should be hedging against the casually dangerous impulse to embrace tracking and tracing for being inside or outside, and also reserve our energy and critique for systems, for governments being wholly unprepared. Can we name this widespread desire for techno-authoritarian oversight, the scolds hoping for more police, more photos, more tracing? How much space will we leave for a serious self-critique of the comforts afforded by our relative positions? How

much space in cultural discourse do we make for assessing our role in continuing state surveillance, in expressing its logics? At this moment, calls to redesign or *redefine* surveillance—in some cases, embracing it as a potential good, or advocating for more "trained" systems for deeper tracking of health—ignores how the current infrastructure of surveillance is working perfectly, just as designed. Surveillance depends on people in power identifying with the police.

Crisis, the state of exception, and the protests that followed all held and hold radical potential for a methodical revision of the history of this moment. If one can take the writing of a history as a site of struggle, and especially so within sites of the digital, then the present and future of surveillance must account for the collective, internalized efforts we take to surveil each other, algorithmically and in flesh. We can recognize the individual walking across our feeds is not to account for the lack of programs of increased security, justice, and restorative care, accounting for poor systemic distribution of resources. Our insecurity about them comes from a lack of safety; our desire to police comes from a lack of imagination about safety not predicated on policing. Turning away from each other, we can turn back to the state.

NOTES

[1] Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019). I draw on Zuboff's framework and investigation lightly throughout. Her breakdown of Google as a case study provides keen insight into the methods of obfuscation, opacity, law-breaking that tech companies undertake to gather the data and information of their users. But we might also note that Zuboff's methods keep her from advocating that the economic system that allows Google to thrive should not exist at all. Almost never does the ethical tragedy of wholesale abuse and theft of citizen data that she outlines in detail ever lead her to cast aspersion on capitalism or examine how surveillance is historically endemic, completely essential to capitalism's function. Further, it is critical to frame the internet's evolution into the ultimate surveillance tool as more than an assemblage of case studies of a few powerful protagonists who shaped platforms.

[2] Kim Stanley Robinson, "The Coronavirus Is Rewriting Our Imaginations," *New Yorker*, May 1, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-coronavirus-and-our-future.

[3] The early pandemic will be narrated as a suspension of time in which the virus was only seeable when it was historical; it can't be seen until it registers in the body.

[4] One outcome of the pandemic, mediated in this way, could be that more people will inadvertently train in how models and simulations produce reality, and further, in interpreting their inputs, their assumptions, their lack of clarity and points of necessary revision.

[5] Christopher Robbins, "NYPD Makes Arrests For Social Distance Violations As More Officers Call Out Sick," *Gothamist*, April 3, 2020, https://gothamist.com/news/nypd-makes-arrests-social-distance-violations-more-officers-call-out-sick.

[6] Alice Speri, "NYPD's Aggressive Policing Risks Spreading the Coronavirus," *The Intercept*, April 3, 2020, https://theintercept.com/2020/04/03/nypd-social-distancing-arrests-coronavirus/.

[7] NBC News, Twitter, May 30, 2020, https://twitter.com/NBCNews/status/1266758240018276352.

[8] Adrian Chen, Twitter, May 30, 2020, https://twitter.com/adrianchen/status/1266859149612072960.

[9] Toyama spoke of the situation in: https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/violating-michigan-social- distancing-orders-big-brother-may-be-watching.

[10] Paul B. Preciado, "Learning From the Virus," *Artforum*, (May/June 2020), https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/paul-b-preciado-82823. Paul Preciado's text is one of the few strong theoretical analyses of the politics and technological dimensions of this pandemic within the history of past pandemics.

[11] Guy Debord, "Spectacular Time," in *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995). Guy Debord described spectacular time as the time spent consuming images and, in the broader sense, "as image of the consumption of time," of vacations and time portrayed, "like all spectacular commodities, at a distance."

[12] Zeynep Tufekci, "Keep the Parks Open," *The Atlantic*, April 7, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/closing-parks-ineffective-pandemic-theater/609580/.

[13] Ron Lee, "How New Crowd Controls at Some City Parks Worked Out this Weekend." ny1.com, May 11, 2020, https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2020/05/11/new-social-distance-enforcement-at-city-parks

[14] Ashley Southall, "Scrutiny of Social Distance Policing as 35 of 40 Arrested Are Black," *New York Times*, May 29, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/nyregion/nypd-social-distancing-race-coronavirus.html

[15] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 166.

[16] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Othering Space" in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge,1998), 244.

[17] Ibid. Preciado takes time to walk us through Foucault's conception of biopolitics as foremost a way "to speak of the relationship that power establishes with the social body in modernity. Foucault described the transition from what he calls a sovereign society, in which sovereignty is defined in terms of commanding the ritualization of death, to a 'disciplinary society,' which oversees and maximizes the life of populations as a function of national interest." Preciado asks us to consider how discipline and punishment are enacted in the anesthetized technological theater of quarantine.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Elvia Wilk, "What's Happening? Or: How to name a disaster," *Bookforum*, (Summer 2020), https://www.bookforum.com/print/2702/what-s-happening-24019.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Kelly House,"Violating Michigan social distancing orders? Big Brother may be watching," *Bridge*, May 5, 2020, https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/violating-michigan-social-distancing-orders-big-brother-may-be-watching.

[22] Makada Henry-Nickie, and John Hudak, "Social Distancing in Black and white neighborhoods in Detroit," *Brookings Institution*, May 19, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/05/19/social-distancing-in-black-and-white-neighborhoods-in-detroit-a-data-driven-look-at-vulnerable-communities/.

[23] As Wendy Chun describes masterfully in *Updating to Remain the Same*, software updates introduce and obfuscate their content to such a degree through insidious and opaque dark patterns that users rarely notice or read—or have the space—to analyze what is being introduced. Over time, this relationship to software in which users are actively incentivized to scroll past has made the force of the click and swipe, the need to keep one's phone moving, a matter of powerful design working as intended.

[24] "Privacy-Preserving Contact Tracing," Apple and Google, https://www.apple.com/covid19/contacttracing.

[25] "Exposure Notification API launches to support public health agencies," Google, https://blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/apple-google-exposure-notification-api-launches/.

[26] Kif Leswing, "Three states will use Apple-Google contact tracing technology for virus tracking apps," cnbc.com, May 20, 2020, https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/20/three-states-commit-to-apple-google-technology-for-virus-tracking-apps.html.

[27] Mohana Ravindranath, and Amanda Eisenberg, "Contract Tracing apps have been a bust," *Politico*, August 19, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/19/contact-tracing-apps-have-been-a-bust-states-bet-college-kids-can-change-that-398701.

[28] Preciado, "Learning From the Virus."

"The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

DEAD HORSES

Adrienne Garbini

Adrienne Garbini, *White Horse Whiskey Bottles from Dead Horse Bay*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

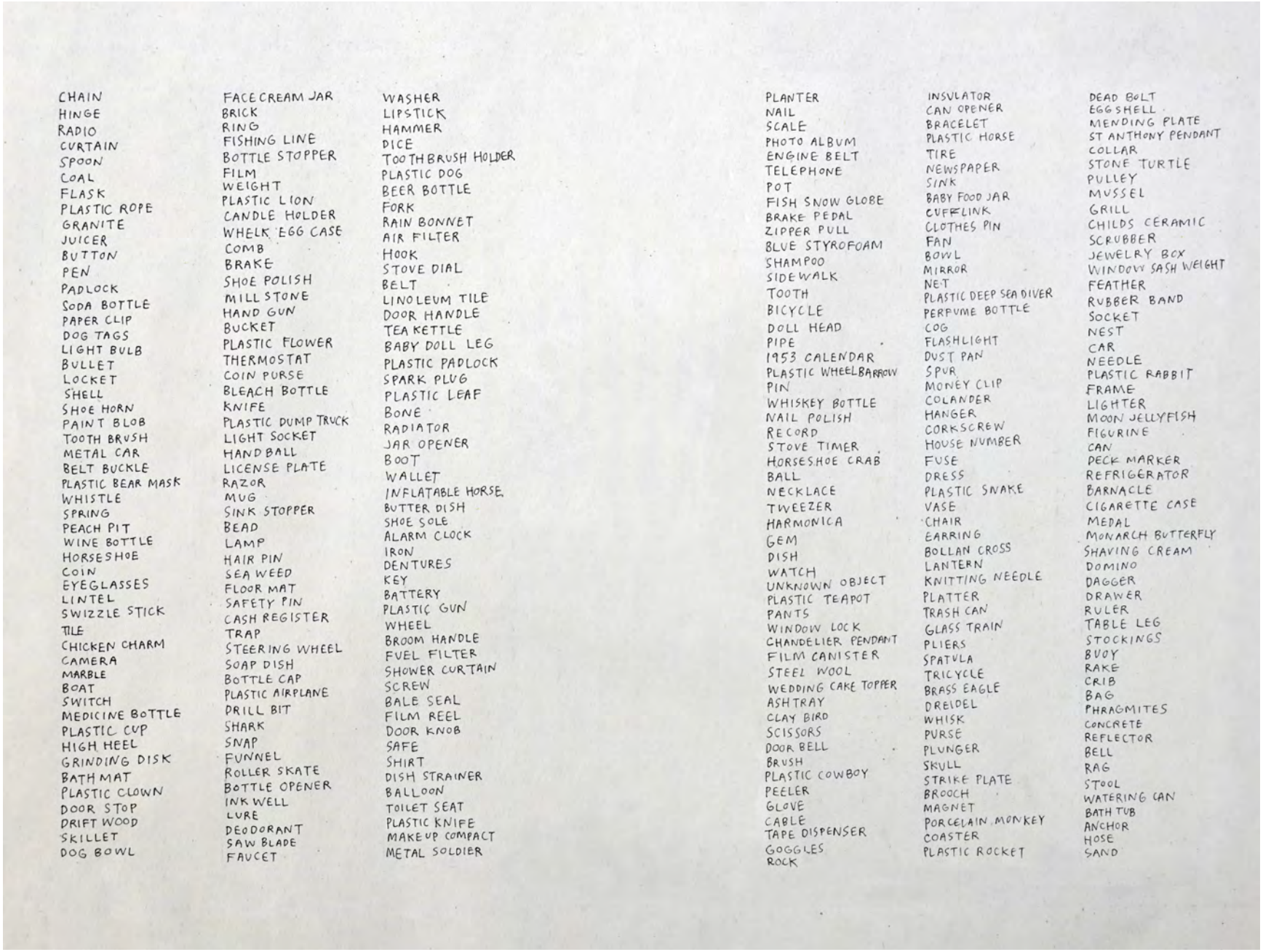
Bad news. The beach is closed. No opening in sight. The memories are packed with nowhere to go, circling the center of my mind's eye.

I am adapted to bad news. It lands on a hard tall pile, cascading down with resettling rubble. In this I feel joined to each person politely sweeping the edges of their own pile, and to any person accepting its flow onto whatever surface is able to hold it. There are exponentially compounding notices and the piles are teetering. In spite of the danger, the swaying has taken on a lulling quality.

My beach is Dead Horse Bay. I was born and raised in high altitude landlock and I have been living back in it for a while. From here it's a casual half-day road trip to Dead Horse Point. This place is home, but I am forever longing for the ocean. I spent my twenties attempting autonomy in New York, distressed over the troubling consequences of the popularity of island life. My apartment was a converted funeral home, my car was a decommissioned ambulance, and more often than not my job was a hostile work environment. My recreation was to check the charts for lowest tide times, drive my friends down to the southernmost part of Brooklyn, and comb the shore of Dead Horse Bay for objects of interest. From the parking lot of Floyd Bennett Field, it was a tranquil walk through a rolling meadow of tall grass giving way to dunes hardly covering an eroding landfill with a view of Coney Island. The return to the ambulance was a slog, muscles strained by bags of selected trash.

I have cherished this trash. It has been on the walls of my living room, incorporated into my sculptures, tattooed onto my body. I have moved it across the country in labeled boxes and archived it in neat storage stacks for future consideration. I was far from alone in this pursuit. While it was often possible to feel pleasantly desolate on the beach, on most visits I crossed paths with other combers, strangers clutching their acquisitions with only a small trace of rivalry. Directions were readily available, in the language of people taking pleasure in initiating others into a special place. Over many years, I saw in photographs and jewelry and videos and drawings and installations the distinctly rusted shards of the twentieth century pulled from this infinite mass. In cafés I overheard the hushed excitement of a new devotee recounting their haul. Bar rooms were lined with empty bottles four times the age of the patrons. I once met a woman who makes agile paintings celebrating the details of her experience, and she sent me her studies of Dead Horse Bay finds. She had rendered a chunk of faded teal patterned rubber that was the other half to a favorite piece in my collection—separated and brought back together like a Best Friend's necklace.

Dead Horse Bay is a spawning ground for horseshoe crabs. These living fossils gather on the beach every spring to lay their eggs on garbage heaps illuminated by the Strawberry Moon. Volunteers stay up through the night to count them as they mate on shifting mounds clinking in the rippling tides. The glass soundtracks the spectacle and dictates the practical footwear of the audience.



Adrienne Garbini, *Found at Dead Horse Bay*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

A memory floats around me. I went to the beach to search for this ambiguous object, a small black and white composition of dark matter in a plastic ring, an important piece in some industrial game unknown to me. At the water's edge there was a group of scouts on a field trip to watch the reproducing horseshoe crabs. The children were in turns joyful and disturbed as a naturalist guided them through the scene, vacillating between optimism in ancient routine and tragedy in habitat desecration, settling on hopefulness in the flexibility of animals and their accommodating attitude toward the clutter in their home. A father chaperoned, and at a pause in the presentation, he began an impromptu speech on the moral imperative of environmental stewardship. He suggested the children organize to return to the beach for a cleanup day, thereby testifying to the will of responsible people. I stood on the outskirts of the gathering holding my sandy wet plastic sack of whatever, and imagined wave after wave after wave of diligent child troops relocating the dump piece by piece, rewarded with a badge of a broken bottle and a mantle of souvenirs pried from the hands of adult scavengers shooed from their paradise.

An invitation to the beach invariably opens with addressing the dead horses. The name is a charm to be rubbed, history blinking awake. From the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, trash collected from all over town was brought to this disconnected salt marsh. At the time Dead Horse Bay was called Barren Island, and transit relied on wearing through horses faster than cars need tires changed. A perpetual procession of horses moved

through the streets pulling wagons weighed down with horse corpses to be loaded onto barges pushed off toward the farthest edge of the city. The people of Barren Island hand-processed the bodies for use in fertilizer, glue, grease, gelatin, soap, candles, buttons, pigments, perfume, nitroglycerin, handles, filters to bleach sugar white. Leftover sawed up skeletons were thrown into the water, anchoring the renaming of the Bay. The horses were also transmogrified into atmosphere. The stink in those years kept even the lauded social reformer Jacob Riis away; there is sparse documentation of the living conditions in the area. This inverse of a record could be used to diagnose what Robin Nagle, the anthropologist-in-residence at New York City's Department of Sanitation, terms invisibility syndrome: the willful lack of gaze society affords to garbage workers.

Rarely have I heard included in the narrative the Canarsee name for the area, Equendito. This word from the Munsee language has been translated as "broken lands."

The legend of Dead Horse Point is vague. Two thousand two hundred and three miles from Dead Horse Bay, it is a mesa in the Colorado Plateau promoted by the local travel council as one of the most photographed vantage points in the world. From this rock perch one can capture a panoramic image containing the Colorado River, Canyonlands, and the La Sal Mountains. In 2019, the Moab *Times-Independent* framed the naming story as "raw negligence at best or, at worst, cruelty bordering on sadism." Maybe rustlers used the peninsula in the sky

as a corral, trapping unwanted horses on the Point to die. Maybe ranchers herded wild horses there to keep them from competing with cattle. Maybe Mormon settlers stole horses from the Utes and killed them there as a show of force. In 1938, the *Times-Independent* mused that "when an old cowpoke a generation ago named it Dead Horse Point, little did he think that someday the horseless carriage would drive to its rim and discharge breathless occupants to be astounded by its majestic scenery." Little did this newspaper writer know that only a few years later uranium deposits would be found in the Chinle and Paradox Formations of Dead Horse Point and mined for use in weapons and nuclear reactors.

I am sitting in a comfortable chair in the alpine desert with sunlight streaming through wavy glass windows. I am reading articles and picking through novel phrases, timelines, frequently asked questions, maps, charts, lists, laws, cliches. Bone seeker. Intrusive investigation. The Principle of Justification. Jornada Del Muerto. Laramide Orogeny. Horsts. Grabens. Head noises. Threshold limits. Shinkolobwe. Undark. I am planted at a wrack line of information debris. I get up to feed dried mealworms to the chickens, pick apricots, and observe our dog swimming in the acequia. The mountains are August brown. Aphids are sucking the sap of the stickiest plants in the garden. There is less atmosphere here to shield me from cosmic rays. I go back inside.

I am pouring sand out of a tea kettle. This is my first trip to Dead Horse Bay. I read an article describing how to find it and what I would find. It is not how

I pictured it. I am thinking back to my pockets full of smooth colorful glass pebbles spilling out onto the back seat of my grandfather's sedan on a road through the swamps of southern New Jersey. My grandfather has been indulging my propensity for picking everything up. There is a dead horseshoe crab in the trunk I could not part with at the beach. We get to the house and I lay out my cache on the back porch. My grandmother comes out from the kitchen and swiftly remediates her environment, allowing me to keep my beach glass in a jam jar and demanding the rotting carcass be buried in the woods behind the barn. A tinge of the unmistakable scent of that burial is in the air at Dead Horse Bay.

Not long after cars took over most horse work, Dead Horse Bay reduction plants closed down. Escalating smell complaints redirected the bulk of daily city trash flow onto trucks and ships bound for incinerators and communities paid to take it. Dumping in the Bay intensified regardless. The remaining residents were forced out to make way for land reclamation. New York built on the ideology that filling in the sea is taking something back.

I processed my landfill harvest in a bucket of tap water in the roof garden outside our kitchen window. Each piece was dunked and swirled until the sand concentrated into a slurry at the bottom of the pail. I laid it all out on the shredded astroturf that separated my feet from the tar. The contents of this garbage was very different from what I put out on the curb. I was embarrassed by the crassness of my prolific food packaging and cat litter. Each batch of Dead Horse

Adrienne Garbini, *Dead Horse Bay*, 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

Bay trash was a universe of designs and functions. The field of objects drying among our squashes and sunflowers felt personal and precious. I struggled to understand the time in which these belongings were thrown away. I wondered if there would be a time when someone would feel similarly about my tomato paste cans and pineapple soy milk tetra paks.

The land built at Dead Horse Bay was first proposed as a major airport. When Floyd Bennett Field opened, it was touted as having the longest runways in the world. While the project was municipal, the City entered into a partnership with the Navy to establish a base at the Field, coinciding with the conversion of an adjacent Naval installation in the Rockaways into Jacob Riis Park. The Navy expanded their presence as commercial plans for the airport faded. During the outbreak of the Second World War, Floyd Bennett Field was transformed into the U.S. Naval Air Station, New York. By this time most of the tidal estuary had been filled in.

I drove the ten miles from my apartment to Dead Horse Bay on surface streets. When I lived in New York I stayed off the expressway whenever possible, as sitting in traffic has always felt like the waiting room for death. It was often unavoidable, particularly when leaving or coming back into the city. I've spent days creeping towards a tunnel. If one person could be called responsible for this mass depression, it is probably Robert Moses, the urban planner with a posthumous reputation on par with other noted twentieth-century tyrannical racists. His doctrine of renewal demanded that thousands of homes be

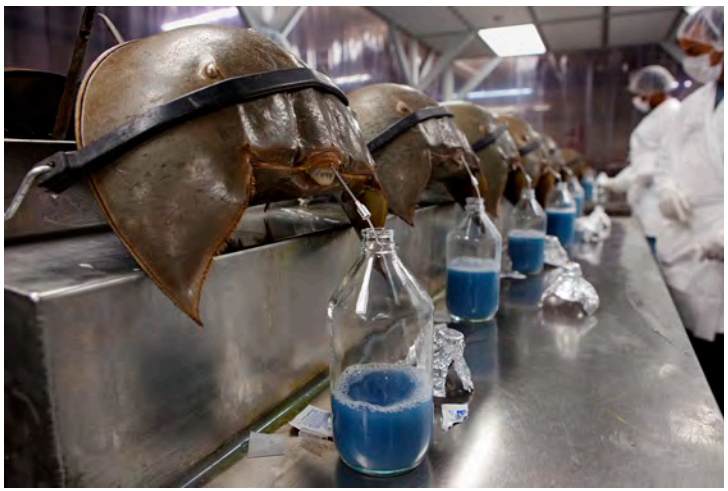
demolished to build infrastructure for cars to advance the real estate boom in suburban development. These houses were in largely working class neighborhoods with residents he considered disposable. The bulk evictions were swift; tenants had little time or money to move. Apartment buildings were crushed with near full contents.

A decade after I moved away from New York I learned that Robert Moses designated Dead Horse Bay to receive ruins generated by his projects. This fact was not on the surface of the common story, but I could have known it sooner had I researched more about what I was unearthing. He was also responsible for the road that leads up to the Floyd Bennett parking lot and the parkland I walked through to the beach. Up until 1953 he discharged city relics into the Bay and covered it with a poorly constructed topsoil layer that promptly began to disintegrate, drawing in generations of amateur archaeologists. When the Navy decommissioned their base, the Dead Horse Bay land was transferred by an act of Congress to the Gateway National Recreation Area. Since the seventies visitors have been hosted by the National Park Service.

Back in the mountains I am listening to a radio show about horseshoe crabs while driving along a familiar stretch of highway. Their blood is described as the color of the sky outside my windshield, and I am learning that the limulus amebocyte lysate it contains has helped their species ride out all of the mass extinction events in the last half-billion years. This substance quickly clots the blood when it is

exposed to miniscule amounts of toxins. It is used to test for contaminants in all medical products put into human bodies, including vaccines, implants, and surgical instruments. Since the seventies biomedical corporations have been trapping horseshoe crabs, draining their blood with a needle stuck into their hearts, and then releasing the survivors back into the water to recover and be caught again.

Memory vessels are containers encased in kaleidoscopic mosaics of assorted objects. The art form is thought to have been developed by enslaved people in the American South for use in funerary rites. The vessels were composed of a person's belongings, often broken to release their spirit, and placed on grave sites or held in the home. In the Bakongo culture the spirit world is turned upside down and connected to the living by water. The memory vessel honored the dead and helped



Horseshoe Crab Blood Harvest. Image credit: Mark Thiessen, National Geographic.

them to cross over. During the Victorian era the practice was taken up in the mass culture and disconnected from death. It was periodically revived through the twentieth century under the banner of American Folk Art.

I am burying bad news under a jumble of history. 2020 is a summer of articles on how "Doomscrolling is Slowly Eroding Your Mental Health." It is the summer that I read the National Park Service has closed Dead Horse Bay after investigators dug up radioluminescent disks during a survey of the trails and beach. The Navy used the small round widgets to facilitate operating in the dark by screwing the markers onto ship decks and clipping them onto personnel. They contain radium-226. Soil tests indicate that the markers have leaked.

Radioluminescent Deck Marker. Courtesy of Oak Ridge Associated Universities Health Physics Historical Instrumentation Museum Collection.

The National Park Service press release reminds readers that digging at Dead Horse Bay is unauthorized, as is removing items. This fig leaf directs an aloof shame onto the innumerable people that have walked the shore, bent down with curiosity, and been corrupted by acquisitiveness. The government that required the bottles littering the beach be marked "Federal Law Forbids Sale or Reuse of this Bottle" to prevent the sin of illicit recycling in the decades after Prohibition is reminding us that we have done wrong in collecting garbage.

The U.S. Advisory Committee on X-ray and Radium Protection proposed the first formal standard for safeguarding people from radiation sources in 1934. Prohibition had just ended and that year my great grandfather opened Garbini's Bar, after cutting his teeth in the bootlegging concern at his uncle's bakery. The hours were 6am to 2am to serve the workers coming off their night and day shifts at Dupont's Chamber Works plant in Carneys Point, New Jersey. When my grandfather got out of the Army after WWII, he went to work in the bar, eventually taking it over after his father's death. The patrons called their employer Uncle Duppy, and were instructed to inject the byproducts of their labor into the ground and into the Delaware River. The bottles my family handled went to the landfill in accordance with the law.

The April 1920 issue of *Scientific American* identifies the following objects as containing radioluminescent paint: electric switches, keyhole locators, ships' compasses, telegraph dials, mine signs, steam gages,

pistol sights, poison bottle indicators, bedroom slipper buttons, furniture locator buttons, theater seat numbers, automobile steering-wheel locks, fish bait, and eyes for toy dolls and animals. The article notes that by then more than 4,000,000 watches and clocks had been produced using radium to make the faces glow in the dark. I visualize a radioactive memory jug with a half-life of 1,600 years.

I sift through reports from Dead Horse Bay, minutiae scattered and repeating. I see the ambiguous object in a pensive up-close beach portrait, identified as an old storage battery leaching lead into the water. The unknown gasping open and shut.

On average, Americans receive a radiation dose of about 620 millirem each year, split evenly between background sources (cosmic rays, radon gas released from the ground, etc.) and medical sources (dental X-rays, mammograms, etc.) Radiation in substantial excess of the typical dose can be the cause of—or the treatment for—cancer. There is a latency period ranging from 5 to 60 years for cancer induction, making it difficult to prove a correlation to earlier radiation exposure among an array of other possible factors.

The woods I buried the horseshoe crab in were young. My grandparents built their house next to a farm field, and in the seventies a pit was dug there to deposit silt dredged from the bottom of the Delaware River. Ponds were formed and trees were planted over the disturbance. This ground was drawn from the environment of The Chamber Works Plant, which

produced more than 1,200 substances, including smokeless gunpowder, dye, kevlar, freon, neoprene, teflon, leaded gasoline, and refined uranium for atomic weapons. According to a lawsuit filed by the Town of Carney's Point against the company, Dupont released perfluorooctanoic acid, mercury, benzene, sodium hydroxide, aluminum chloride, ammonia, sulfur, sodium, nitrobenzene, nitrotoluene, chlorobenzene, methyl ammonia, ethyl chloride, and more into the land and water of the town. The woods are now popular with hunters, fishers, picnickers, and drug users whose discarded needles infuriate other visitors.

On the doctor's intake form, I check boxes and write notes for a history of cancer branching out from all around my family tree. These are broadly ranging malignancies, some leading to early death, others interspersed into extraordinary life spans along with heart troubles, strokes, autoimmune disorders, and worn out body parts. I complain of numbness in my feet and noncompliant hands inflamed by a predisposition for high tension repetitive labor.

There is cancer all along the uranium chain from the mines where it is extracted, the refineries where it is processed, the factories where it is applied, the communities where it is bombed, the power plants where it melts down, the sites where it is dumped, the winds and waters that carry its fallout. This reality doesn't qualify as news most days. It is muted background noise in a toxic monotony of screaming crises, becoming sharply focused as an imaging tool or a therapy for inhabitants of a decaying ecosystem.

Investigations in 2002 by the United States Army Corps of Engineers turned up polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, pesticides, and polychlorinated biphenyls at Dead Horse Bay. These substances have the potential to be highly carcinogenic, but are pervasive across so many environments that they did not inspire the urgency of area closure. If public warning was required at every site of military or industrial contamination, nearly all bodies would be marked as hazard harboring.

There is disagreement between historians and artists about where the contents of the beach at Dead Horse Bay belong. Should it be used as material to articulate the desires of the individual or protected as evidence of collective trauma for future generations to decode? There is little debate about the treatment of radioactive waste: deep geological disposal. In the internet, people are worried about saving the trash. They photograph the bright yellow sign notifying them to keep away, they write reviews warning you are risking your life to go there, they wave Geiger counters over their belongings, they declare that they will not stop adding to their stashes, they advocate for preservation.

In a dream I am walking out West on top of a sealed underground museum housing all of the art and collections gleaned from the ocean and brought back to the landlock. A docent endlessly beats a dead horse in the dirt next to an interpretive placard on the history of the aestheticization of ruins. A tour group gathers at a bronze horseshoe crab monument to survivors of mass extinction, grasping pamphlets describing the invisible world.

Adrienne Garbini, *Memoryware*, 2019, (detail). Courtesy of the artist.

Alex DeCarli, *Adrienne at Dead Horse Bay*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

NOTES

Adrienne Garbini's video *Dead Horse Bay* (2012) accompanies this essay and can be viewed at monday-journal.com/dead-horses/.

Further Reading:

M. A. Buchholz, M. Cervera, *Radium Historical Items Catalog*, report prepared for the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, 2008.

Sarah K. Cody, John E. Auwaerter, *Cultural Landscape Report for Floyd Bennett Field*, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, National Park Service, 2009.

Ian Frazier, "Blue Bloods," *New Yorker*, April 14, 2014.

Sharon Lerner, "Dupont's Museum of Disastrous Chemistry Continues to Spread Its Poison," *The Intercept*, July 7, 2018.

Miriam Sicherman, *Brooklyn's Barren Island: a Forgotten History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2019).

Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2015).

"The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism."

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*


COVID-19 Safety
Plan in Effect

CONCLUSION

Marisa Williamson & Matt Shelton

MS: One of the things I want to get your thoughts on is your invocation of the vernacular form of "covering" or "doing a cover version" in much of your performative work, and the ways in which this connects to other conscious and unconscious performative modes, both academic and vernacular, in our culture. For the purposes of our conversation, I would describe a "cover" or "covering" as a performance that interprets a pre-existing form with a particular sensitivity to the power that such an interpretation has to generate additional meaning via deviation from the original form. For example, we can analyze Jimi Hendrix's "The Star-Spangled Banner" and Roseanne Barr's performance of the same at an MLB game in 1990 as they relate to their respective historical moments, the social positions of their authors, and the audiences that consume those performances. Hendrix wasn't seen as "just playing the wrong notes," but rather as "commenting" on the War in Vietnam. I don't know what Barr was doing, exactly, but the point is that iconic forms like monuments or symbols or pop songs cannot be invoked without being interpreted. What do you think?

MW: *My favorite cover of "The Star-Spangled Banner" is the one performed by Whitney Houston at the 1991*

Super Bowl. I do not know when I first saw the video. But, the video I have been watching was put on Youtube in 2012, the year she died. So likely, I found it in a scurry of online activity at the news of her death. Now, it seemed as though the video has always-already been on loop. Houston is my favorite performer. She had a lot of codes to switch between. She pretended to be healthy when she was sick. She alternated between pop, gospel, and R&B from verse to verse. She covered Dolly Parton. She was an actress, physically very beautiful, smooth skin, dynamic hair, successful and talented, all while treading water in a sea of real and projected ugliness. I live a few minutes away from her childhood neighborhood of Orange, New Jersey. Her mother, Cissy Houston, used to be my upstairs neighbor in downtown Newark.

I like to channel and cover Whitney Houston as I imagine her. It is an effort to draw attention to the peril, clumsiness, impossibility of living up to our ancestors. My intention is to honor that persona, make the persona more alive, use it as a vehicle to haunt and unsettle, and also leave the persona more intact than when I found it.

MS: I think this notion of covering, of interpretation, takes many different forms in your practice: there's the persona of Sally Hemings (a cover of an historical figure); the amateur, solo performance of pop songs that calls to mind karaoke; the invocation of different modes of performance along the costuming spectrum, such as the theatrical role, but also the uniform of the historical interpreter/docent, as well as the "living statue" of street performance; there's the queering of conventional gender stereotypes found in drag; as well as the history of satirical performance

found in Carnival masking traditions in general, and in Black masking traditions like the Krewe of Zulu in New Orleans and the Jab Molassie in Trinidad and Tobago in particular. Of course, site also can be interpreted, and thus, in a sense, "covered," so add that to the mix.

And if we read a "cover" as something that a viewer or listener sees or hears "through," such as a filter, in the sense that they are experiencing the present performance with a memory of the original, as something translucent through which light (or other signal) passes, then we can also include in our broad scan of covers your inclusion in some installations and performances your use of overhead projectors and mylar transparencies. I mention this because I think transparency is related to "covering," in the sense that it's largely invisible.

For instance, you once performed as Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson's enslaved mistress, on the grounds of Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, a UNESCO world heritage site, in what could lazily be called "colonial drag." There's video of you performing there with a microphone and a small amp, singing songs like The Miracles' "You Really Got A Hold On Me." At a performance at the University of Virginia in spring 2018, conceptualized as a "homegoing ceremony" for the Hemings persona, you sang a number of songs a cappella, including Solange's "Cranes in the Sky." What's the purpose of using pop songs and the performative mode of karaoke as readymades in your work? What do you think that does for the work? For the audience? For you?

MW: *I am using the songs as tools of autobiography. The karaoke performance is a confessional form. My covering of a site and song is a way to express feelings that are too painful, embarrassing, confusing, pleasurable, or complex to express directly and in my own words and with my own unaffected voice. Furthermore, I think that we repressed Americans love hearing songs we recognise. Within my performances, covering a 'popular' song allows me to read and speak to a room of strangers in what I hope is a shared language. I want to explore the sensation of the familiar appearing where and when it is not expected and furthermore performed by an unexpected persona. I want to find out how an injection of sentimentality can soften the impact of seeing a ghost.*

My ideas about the "already made" or readymade come from learning about Marcel Duchamp and from learning about myself. I am somewhere between gentrifier and gentrified in my sense of entitlement to, on one hand, a colonizing 'mine-ness' in regard to my own body and, on the other, a sense of it belonging to a larger constellation of inter-temporal beings (family, ancestors, black liberation struggles). What makes it mine is agency. What makes the readymade an original is the same thing. I'm interested in the ways that this site of settlement can be used for unintended purposes. Can the readymade be transformed through 'misuse'? What is a reverse settlement? A resurrection of the ruins of those who came before? A conjuring of the ghosts of your enemies?

In short, so much of what I see around me is readymade; various things I did not imagine, did not create, did not consent to. My use of other people's words, work, or likeness, is a form of possession in the ritual sense.

I hope it reads as playful, informative, sincere, and resistant. In my recent research on the various modes of day-to-day resistance within slavery, I keep returning to narratives of slaves who performed diligence, obedience, sweetness and accommodation, but were then found to be stealing, plotting escape, or conspiring to revolt against their masters. They wore everyday masks.

MS: I saw Andrea Fraser give a talk at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2013, and one of my notes from that talk has written in giant quotation-caps, "[The artist] MUST ELECT…TO INHABIT THE CONTRADICTIONS." I thought of this in your talk last spring at UVA, when you described institutional critique, the art movement most embodied by Fraser's work, as "the Master's tools," invoking Black feminist Audre Lorde's axiom that "The Master's tools [meaning the academy] will not dismantle the Master's house." I thought it was really clever and charming and an economic way of demonstrating the breadth of your inquiry, while also going "full cannonball" into the pool of contradictions you inhabit. Does that resonate for you? Is this an aim of your practice? From my vantage point, it seems to be the primary focus of a work where you as a living woman of color subject to the law perform as an undead white man[1] who helped design the law on the grounds of the university he founded, ostensibly, not to be interpreted as a static historical site but to be a continually replenishing font of understanding.

[1] The Ghost of Thomas Jefferson, Postcard book

Would you describe any contradictions you see in your practice, or maybe just in one work? Do you have anything to say about what constitutes "the unimaginable"?

MW: *I work at being at home in spaces of discomfort. What I would say about Audre Lorde's axiom and contradiction is that it leaves me with a lot of questions about what the tools and the worker* can *do. Am I trying to dismantle the master's house? Am I trying to kill the master with his own tools? Do I live in the master's house? Am I sleeping with him? Do I enjoy it? How do I live with these contradictions? How did Sally? Here I am, a product of colonization, trying on the daily to dismantle it. The work involves some degree of self-destruction to ensure self-preservation. It is about exorcising the white supremacy festering within. It involves staging an unassuming occupation of the master's house with the long-term goal of seeing it burn.*

Nothing is unimaginable. Though I would say that it would be good to imagine limits. How can we limit our impact on the globe-shaped home? How can we limit our exploitation of other people? We must put limits on capitalism and find ways to take public transit instead of drive. I want to work closer to home and eat less meat. We have to limit violence absolutely, and our set limits on our consumption in relation to production.


EXIT

LIST OF IMAGES

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Crystal Z. Campbell is a multidisciplinary artist, experimental filmmaker, and writer of African-American, Filipino, & Chinese descents. Campbell finds complexity in the public secret, or a fragment of information which is known by many, but perhaps undertold or unspoken. Recent works revisit questions of immortality and medical ethics with Henrietta Lacks' immortal cell line, ponder the role of a political monument and displacement in a shifting Swedish coastal landscape, and salvage a 35mm film from a demolished Black Civil Rights theater in Brooklyn as a relic of gentrification. Campbell engages with sonic, material, and archival traces of the witness through film/video, live performance, installation, sound, painting and writing. In a forthcoming fellowship appointment at the Harvard Radcliffe Film Study Center, Campbell will continue work on *SLICK*, an experimental feature film centering the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and its longstanding effects on the city of Tulsa.

Campbell exhibits and screens internationally: The Drawing Center (US), Nest (Netherlands), ICA-Philadelphia (US), Artissima (IT), Studio Museum of Harlem (US), Project Row Houses (US), Visual Studies Workshop (US), and SculptureCenter (US), amongst others. Select honors and awards include: Pollock-Krasner Award, MAP Fund, MacDowell, M-AAA, Skowhegan, Rijksakademie, Whitney ISP, VCCA Alonzo Davis Fellowship, and Flaherty Film Seminar Fellowship. Campbell is a joint Tulsa Artist Fellow and Harvard Radcliffe Film Study Center & David and Roberta Logie Fellow (2020-2021).

Adrienne Garbini is an artist and writer living in Colorado, currently working on *Hold On*, a book of essays concerned with material, waiting, and disbelief.

Dawn Holder is a sculptor and installation artist who investigates various elements of landscape and their socio-cultural significance through ceramics, photography, and mixed media sculpture. Her work combines diverse influences, such as Minimalism, Eco-Feminism, the Necropastoral, and aerial photography, to create densely detailed work that is both visually striking and physically vulnerable.

An Associate Professor of Art, Holder teaches ceramics, sculpture, and art history at the University of the Ozarks, in Clarksville, AR. She is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the Arkansas Arts Council 2015 Individual Artist Fellowship Grant for Sculpture and Installation, the Bagwell Outstanding Faculty Award in 2016, the Grand Prize at the 59th Delta Exhibition at the Arkansas Arts Center in 2017, and the Grand Prize at the 4x4 2018 Midwest Invitational Exhibition at the Springfield Art Museum. In 2019, she was awarded grants from the Lighton International Artist Exchange Program and the Arkansas Arts Council Sally A. Williams Fund for artist residencies in Rome, Italy and Skaelskor, Denmark.

She has shown her work in galleries and museums throughout the country, including the National Museum for Women in the Arts (Washington, DC); Disjecta Contemporary Art Center (Portland, OR); the Zuckerman Museum of Art (Kennesaw, GA); the Zanesville Museum of Art (Zanesville, OH); and the Historic Arkansas Museum (Little Rock, AR). Her work is included in the collections of the Historic Arkansas Museum and Brightwater: A Center for the Study of Food. From 2013-2017, Holder served as the Coordinator of *Projects Space*, a performative and installation-based exhibition of experimental ceramics at the annual National Council on Education for the Ceramics Arts (NCECA) conference. As active member of the feminist art collective Culture Shock since its inception in 2013, Holder regularly

works with the group to organize and participate in panels, lectures, and exhibitions. She earned an MFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design and a BFA in Ceramics from the University of Georgia.

Nora N. Khan is a writer of criticism. She is on the faculty of Rhode Island School of Design, Digital + Media, teaching critical theory, artistic research, writing for artists and designers, and technological criticism. She has two short books: *Seeing, Naming, Knowing* (The Brooklyn Rail, 2019), on machine vision, and with Steven Warwick, *Fear Indexing the X-Files* (Primary Information, 2017), on fan forums and conspiracy theories online. Forthcoming this year is *The Artificial and the Real*, through Art Metropole. She is currently an editor of *The Force of Art* along with Carin Kuoni and Serubiri Moses, and is a longtime editor at *Rhizome*. She publishes in *Art in America*, *Frieze*, *Flash Art*, *Mousse*, *4Columns*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Rhizome*, *California Sunday*, *Spike Art*, *The Village Voice*, and *Glass Bead*. She has written commissioned essays for exhibitions at Serpentine Galleries, Chisenhale, the Venice Biennale, Centre Pompidou, Swiss Institute, and Kunstverein in Hamburg. This year, as The Shed's first guest curator, she organized the exhibition *Manual Override*, featuring Sondra Perry, Simon Fujiwara, Morehshin Allahyari, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Martine Syms. Her writing has been supported by a Critical Writing Grant given through the Visual Arts Foundation and the Crossed Purposes Foundation (2018), an Eyebeam Research Residency (2017), and a Thoma Foundation 2016 Arts Writing Award in Digital Art. Her research and writing practice extends to a large range of artistic collaborations, which include librettos, performances, and exhibition essays, scripts, and a tiny house.

Billie Lee is an artist, writer, and educator. Her arts practice examines language, materiality, and embodiment informed by diasporic histories and Pan-Asian cosmologies. As a writer and researcher, her work is concerned with minoritarian knowledges and the cultural politics of art and education. She holds a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, an MFA from Yale University, and is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

David Norori is an interdisciplinary artist based in Philadelphia, PA. Norori works with photography, video, and design. He received his BFA in visual communication design and Photography at the Hartford Art School. He is currently working at the African American Museum in Philadelphia, PA.

Malcolm Peacock earned a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, in 2016, and an MFA from Rutgers University, New Jersey, in 2019. He is a multidisciplinary artist whose participatory and experiential practice examines issues of race, queer identity, sex, and history through his experiences with death and his family narratives. His work explores social dynamics between black people, with a particular interest in intimacy, power, heartbreak, and loss. His artist-led walks are part performance, part time travel as he leads participants through historical, spatial, and temporal narratives of places of personal and cultural import. Peacock's work has been shown at the Cindy Rucker Gallery, New York, and Terrault Contemporary, Baltimore, among other venues.

Artist, writer, and teacher **Matt Shelton** received his MFA in Painting and Printmaking from VCUarts in 2012. His photographic series *The Revenant* was published in the fall 2013 issue of the journal *Southern Cultures,* titled *Remembering the Civil War*. His prints, videos, and sculptural works have been exhibited in solo or collaborative presentations at Mary Baldwin University, Staunton, VA; Atlantis Gallery, Richmond, VA; Alice Yard, Port of Spain, Trinidad; Second Street Gallery,

Charlottesville; and an upcoming project at Massey University in Wellington, NZ, with frequent collaborator Nikolai Noel for the exhibition *Flat Earthers* curated by Raewyn Martyn and John Lake. His critical writing has appeared in *LOOKsee*, *Richmond Arts Review*, *Ext.1708*, and *Art Papers*. Recently he collaborated with artist Lisi Raskin as the script editor and conceptual advisor for *(Some of) The Mechanics of Critique*, an animated teaching tool about the role gender and race-based bias play in the studio art critique, published in *Hyperallergic* in the summer of 2019. He lives with his family outside Charlottesville, VA.

Marisa Williamson is a project-based artist who works in video, image-making, installation and performance around themes of history, race, feminism, and technology. She has produced site-specific works at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello (2013), Storm King Art Center (2016), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2016), the University of Virginia (2018), and SPACES Cleveland (2019), and by commission from Monument Lab Philadelphia (2017), and the National Park Service (2019). Her work has been featured in exhibitions at Artpoetica, SOHO20, and BRIC in Brooklyn, The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (NYC), Vox Populi (Philadelphia), Mana Contemporary Chicago, Human Resources (LA), and Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato and Stefania Miscetti gallery in and Rome, Italy.

Williamson has been awarded grants from the Rema Hort Mann Foundation and the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. She has been a resident artist at the University of Virginia, Triangle Arts Association, the Shandaken Project, and ACRE. She was a participant in the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in 2012 and the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program in 2014-2015. Williamson holds a BA from Harvard University and an MFA from CalArts. She is an Assistant Professor of media arts at the Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford. She is based in South Orange, New Jersey.