

CUBIC JOURNAL

NUMBER 5

Alternative Knowledges – Communities · Creativity · Narration

ISSUE EDITORS

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CUBIC SOCIETY

Jap Sam Books

2022

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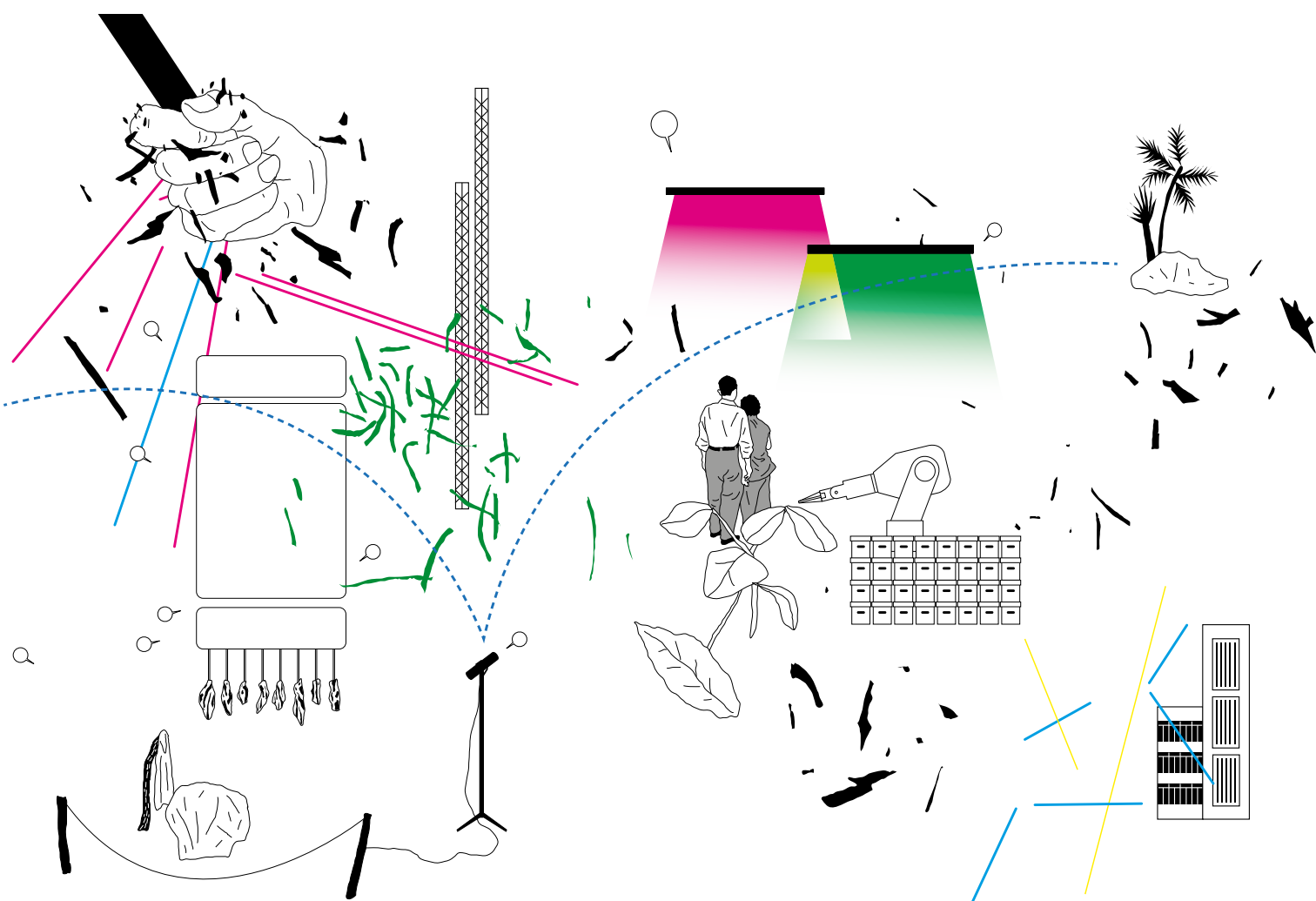
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Alternative Knowledges – Communities · Creativity · Narration

Peter Benz
Huaxin Wei
Justin Chiu-Tat Wong

4–13



Thomas Kuhn's (1962) *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and its subsequent extensions by others provided an initial theoretical grasp to frame and understand the parallel existence of different research approaches. In particular, Kuhn realised the importance of social context to any research practice, and how – as a result – the embeddedness in particular contexts could make the “languages” of different research approaches “incommensurable”, i.e. inherently impossible to translate strictly between different contexts.

More recently researchers like Tim Ingold (2009), in his chapter “Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge”, expanded this early take on the practice of research to consider the existence and validity of whole systems of alternative knowledge reflecting the existence of different knowledge forms that are informed, established and passed on within distinct communities, cultures, and/or contexts in other (non-academic) ways including language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, rituals and spirituality. Indigenous knowledge is most often cited as example for such systems as it has proven to sustain societies around the world for many generations, but other communities and (sub)cultures – various minorities, LGBT communities, professional guilds, social classes – may just as much have developed their respective distinct bodies of knowledge.

Many of these knowledge forms are predominantly practical in nature, thus aligning them with creative practices in the arts. Also the arts are alternative knowledge systems in their own right that by their very nature seek to act as agents to adequately capture, interpret and give access to non-conforming knowledge for a broader audience. Where the more conventional formats have exhausted their possibilities, artists, designers, and/or other creatives may create metaphorical spaces for exchange through an externalised conversation between the researcher/creative

practitioner and their subject. According to the painter and Bauhaus educator Paul Klee (1920) in his *Creative Confession*, “art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.” This implies that creative production isn't about merely (re-)stating the preconceived but making accessible previously inarticulate knowledge by giving it form

The tactile and sensuous knowledge of line, surface, and material that has guided makers through their varied and heterogeneous endeavours since the dawn of humankind, over time became embodied in sets of technology (“science of craft”; from Greek *τέχνη*, “art, skill, cunning of hand”), collections of techniques, skills, methodologies, and/or processes, which the artist/designer – at occasion supported by machines – performs in pursuit of specific objectives. In this sense, technology becomes a methodology for de-constructing and re-constructing, for the coding of knowledge, forming articulations across and beyond specific media.

Albert Eisenstein's *Montage of Attractions* (1921) may be interpreted as an early modern expression of (re-)coding as a conscious creative practice, yet all technologies inherently depend on such codes, on categorisations of objects, preconstructed modules, and standardisation of rules and formula meant for manipulation and sharing between different disciplines. Christian Marclay' (2016) compositional piece *To be Continued* employs graphical comic books elements for his musical scores, thus relying on an underlying framework/system apparently shared by graphic novels and music alike. The discovery of such an analogy constitutes the foundation of his thesis; the musical performance of visual articulations in the scores render the discovery intuitively accessible.

It was with these considerations and examples in mind that we called the global creative community for contributions by summer 2020 in an attempt to map practices for generating and

sharing alternative knowledges across a variety of creative methods and forms.

Our call accepts that there may be an infinite number of equally valid, but possibly less accessible – or merely accessible by certain communities – knowledge systems, much like concurrent physics is considering the existence of a multiverse of parallel universes. If this were indeed our view, then obviously it would be a futile exercise articulating a comprehensive overview of all existing/possible systems. Instead, all we may attempt is articulating potential frameworks to qualitatively and/or quantitatively describe such systems.

Utilising creative technologies to articulate ‘other’ knowledge almost inevitably affects the narration of research by extending it beyond the confines of logical empiricism. Jerome Bruner’s (1991) *The Narrative Construction of Reality* argues how the narrative acceptability shifts from the exclusive hegemony of verifiable content to the persuasion of hermeneutic composition.

Picking up on this line of thought, within this issue we came up with three frameworks to “read” and interlink our contributions.

An initial review of contributions in this issue suggests a handful of approaches and techniques that warrant further exploration for their potentials towards more systematic structures in alternative knowledges. They articulate through:

1. Format “leaps” between research process and its outputs (e.g. by Chow, and/or Erdmann);
2. (Re)combination and repurposing of research materials (see Bogart), transferal of their principles (see Röller), and/or their comparison (as in Wei/Shek);
3. Experimentation with narrative forms (see Burge, Hasdell/Chen, and/or Hasdell/Kwok);
4. Integration of algorithmic principles for uncovering the unseen and unheard (again Bogart, but also Johnston, and/or McMullen/Winkler); and
5. Understanding, engaging, and representing public communities (as do Ustick, and/or Lee).

As many of our contributions rely significantly on images as means of knowledge communication, another framework could focus on purely visual data to draw out relations that may not be initially obvious. For example, current photo editing applications easily allow to calculate “average colours” of individual images. Pages 8–9 feature a comparative overview of colour palettes of respective contributions’ imagery. Despite at first glance the average colour palettes seem generally rather similar, a closer look does reveal colour “relations” between contributions.

Like most academic publications, also we asked contributors for keywords they would like to associate with their contributions. But, additionally we counted frequencies of nouns as used in introductory texts for respective contributions (listed on the opening pages of contributions next to the keywords). A comparison of keywords and most frequent nouns between individual contributions is often already quite revealing. Comparing noun frequencies across contributions, again suggests relations between contributions that were initially not apparent.

To consolidate all these observations in one comprehensive overview, we came up with the attempt of a map (pages 10–11), using our findings as trigonometrical touch points that could then be used to gradually develop a “topography” of our issue. Contemplating our issue’s “knowledge landscape” we came to realise that we originally called for submissions suspended between the axes of communities – creativity – narration; we ultimately achieved a collection spanning the dimensions of narratives – images – process/work.

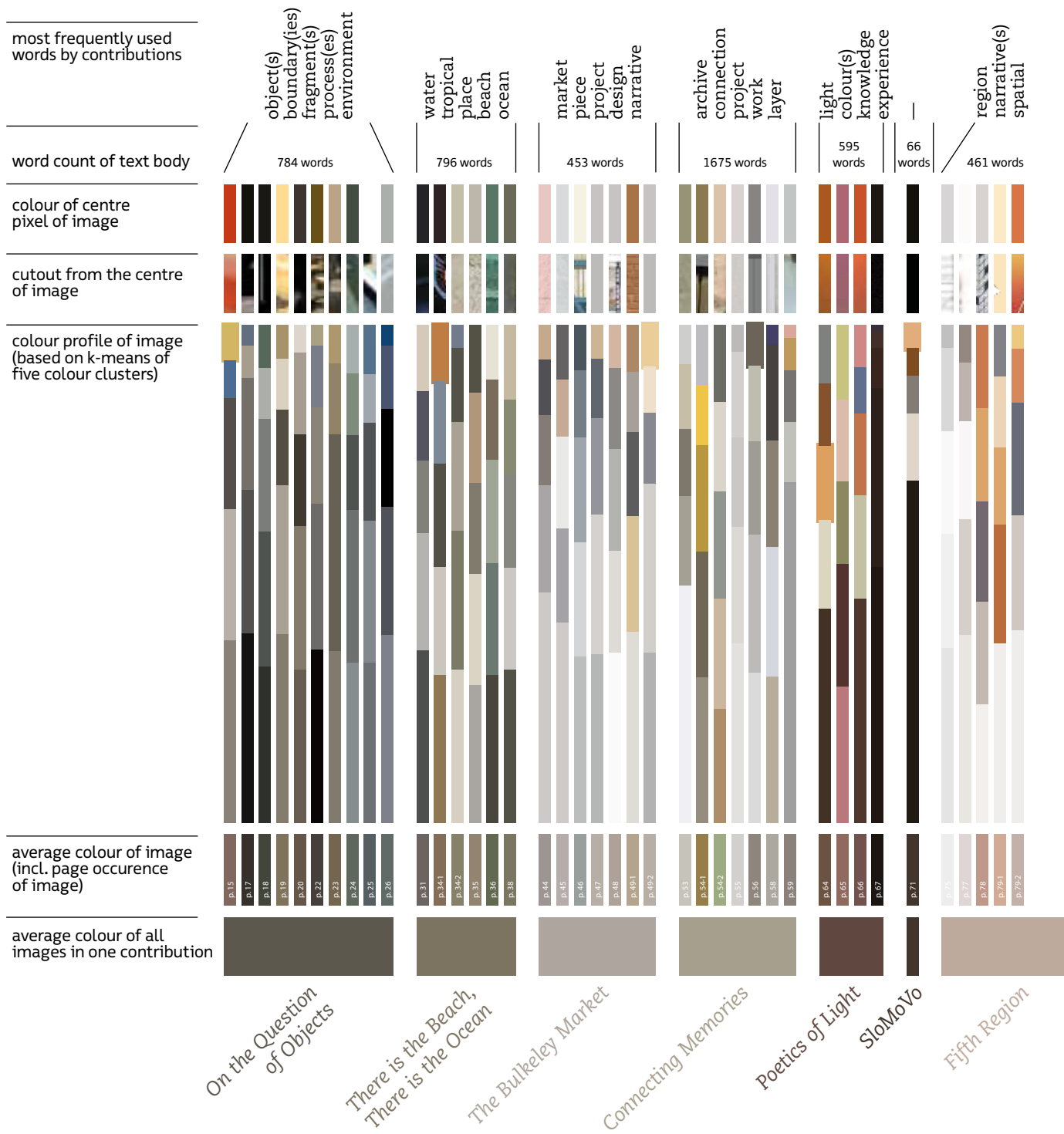
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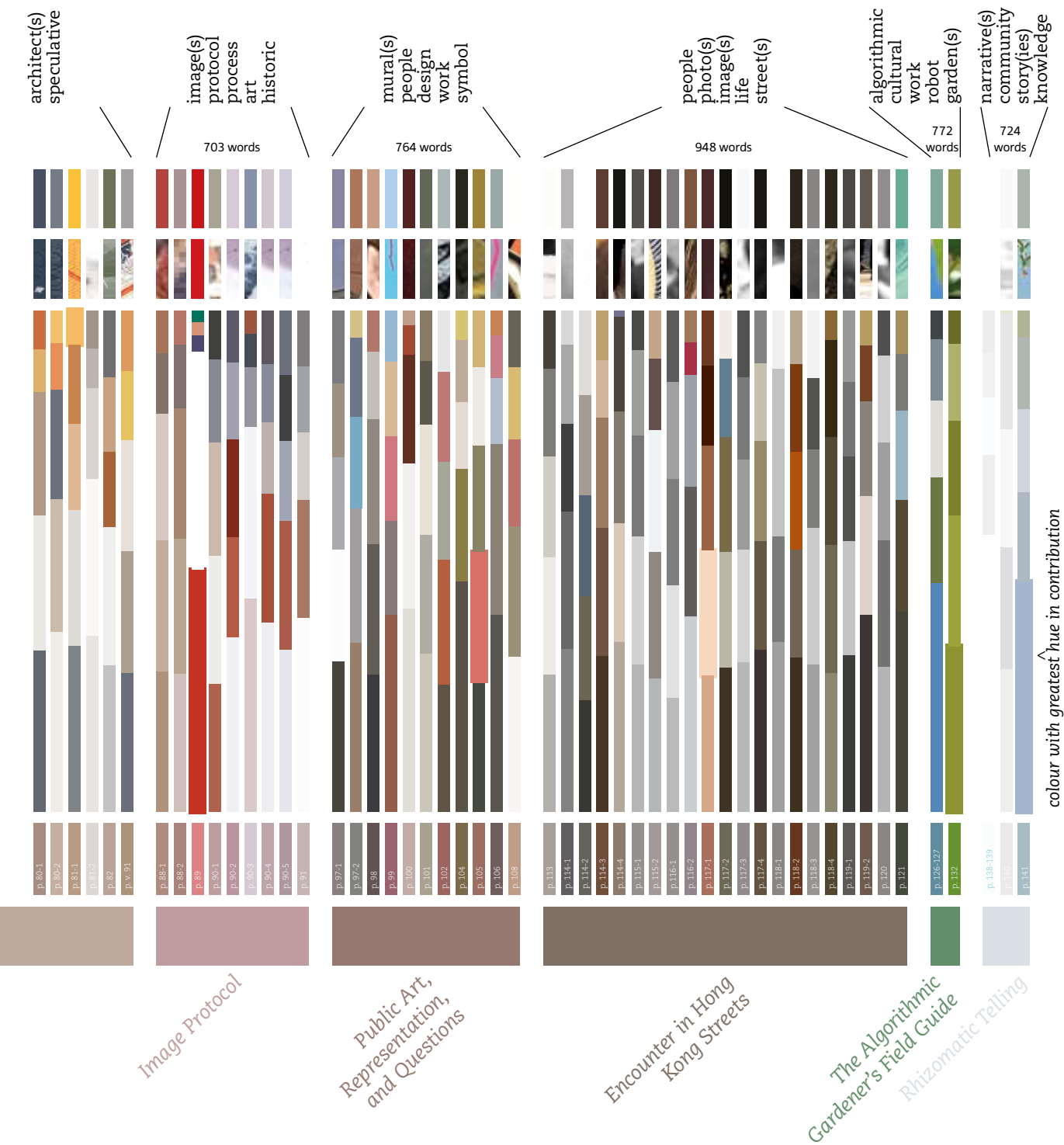
For this issue's editorial, it was our intention to comply to the same rules we imposed on our contributors: make your points by alternative means and merely allow maximum eight hundred words for introduction, positioning and/or contextualisation of the piece. Yet, as we come to the end of this production it does feel necessary to address the elephant in the room: the global experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As lives were unrooted and academic practices were turned upside down throughout constituencies all around the world, every step within the production of this issue was affected, ultimately delaying its publication by about eighteen months. While there was not much we could have done differently given the impact the pandemic had on the professional and personal lives of this issue's stakeholders – as well as societies around the world in general – we do wish to sincerely thank especially our contributors and reviewers, the Cubic Editorial Board as well as all the various supporters for their resilience, their trust, and ultimately their patience.

As academia is now grappling with the economic, political, social and cultural fallouts of the pandemic in a post-pandemic world, this issue has inevitably and involuntarily become also a review back into a recently disappeared time – that is captured in the knowledge landscape in our editorial map and we may look at with a bittersweet sense of nostalgia.

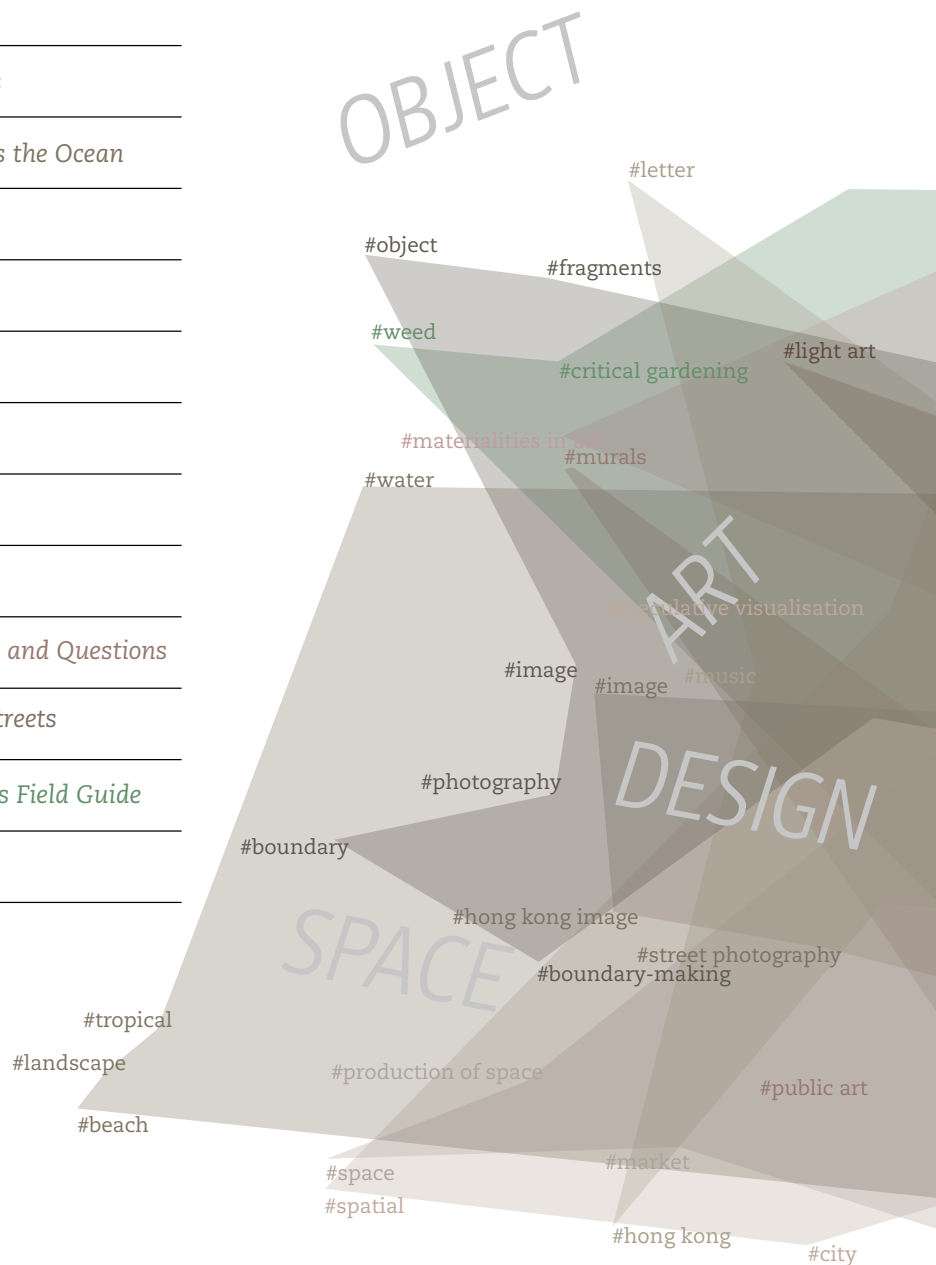
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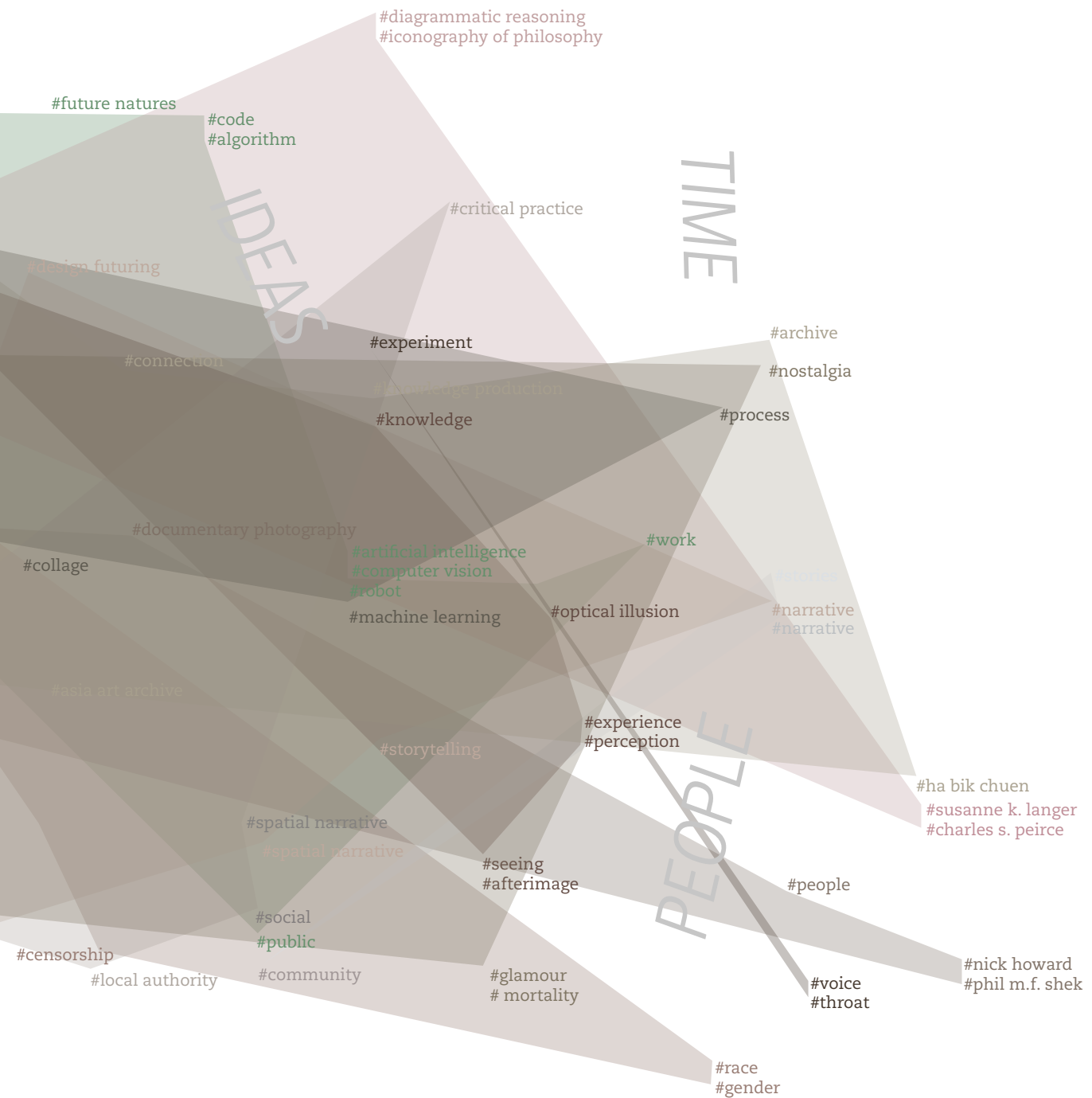




Knowledge Landscape

	On the Question of Objects
	There is the Beach, There is the Ocean
	The Bulkeley Market
	Connecting Memories
	Poetics of Light
	SloMoVo
	Fifth Region
	Image Protocol
	Public Art, Representation, and Questions
	Encounter in Hong Kong Streets
	The Algorithmic Gardener's Field Guide
	Rhizomatic Telling





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Bio

Peter Benz is an associate professor at the Academy of Visual Arts, HKBU with an interest in the investigation and development of possibilities and methodologies for experience as a creative medium; everyday objects, in everyday products and 'un-designed' marginal spaces; and issues of economic livelihoods, gender inclusivity, social impact of creative practices which he explores through surveys, statistical analysis and mappings. Especially because of the latter preoccupation he's become increasingly involved with exploring alternative means, forms, and approaches for academic publishing.

Dr. Huaxin Wei is an associate professor in the School of Design of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research interests span across several fields including interactive narrative, game design and analysis, and interaction design, with a focus on meaningful interactive experiences. Her research on game narrative has resulted in a framework for analysing video games from a range of narrative perspectives.

Justin Chiu-Tat Wong, was an Assistant Professor at the Academy of Visual Arts, HKBU. His research interests include comics studies, generative comic, and the development of political cartoons in Hong Kong. He began his career as political cartoonist and illustrator in 2007 when he started publishing his daily political cartoon column *Gei Gei Gaak Gaak* in *Ming Pao*. Since then, several comics series such as *Lonely Planet*, *Hello World*, *This City / That City* were published along the years. His publications include *Lonely Plant*, *Hello World*, *New Hong Kong*, *Big Time*, and *Je préférerais ne pas*.

On the Question of Objects – “Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus”

Ben Bogart

14–29



#object

#machine learning

#collage

#boundary-making

#photography

This text is an artistic companion to the accompanying collages where complexity, ambiguity, emergence, and abstraction are emphasised. Through artistic practice I investigate the primacy of objects and their relations. Consistent with Barad’s Agential Realism, objects are constructed through their relations. This conflicts with a capitalist and colonialist view where objects pre-exist relations and are that which can be extracted, used and/or consumed.

The images herein are composed from fragments of photographs taken at a particle accelerator facility where fragment boundaries are constructed by a machine learning algorithm. Images are composed by placing fragments according to their relationships using a second machine learning algorithm that emphasises some boundaries and dissolves others. These layers of boundary-making are analogous to cognitive processes where the objects of thought are proxies for complex relations. This is the crux of our contemporary era; social and material complexity cause us to attend to objects at the detriment of the systems that allows those objects to be.

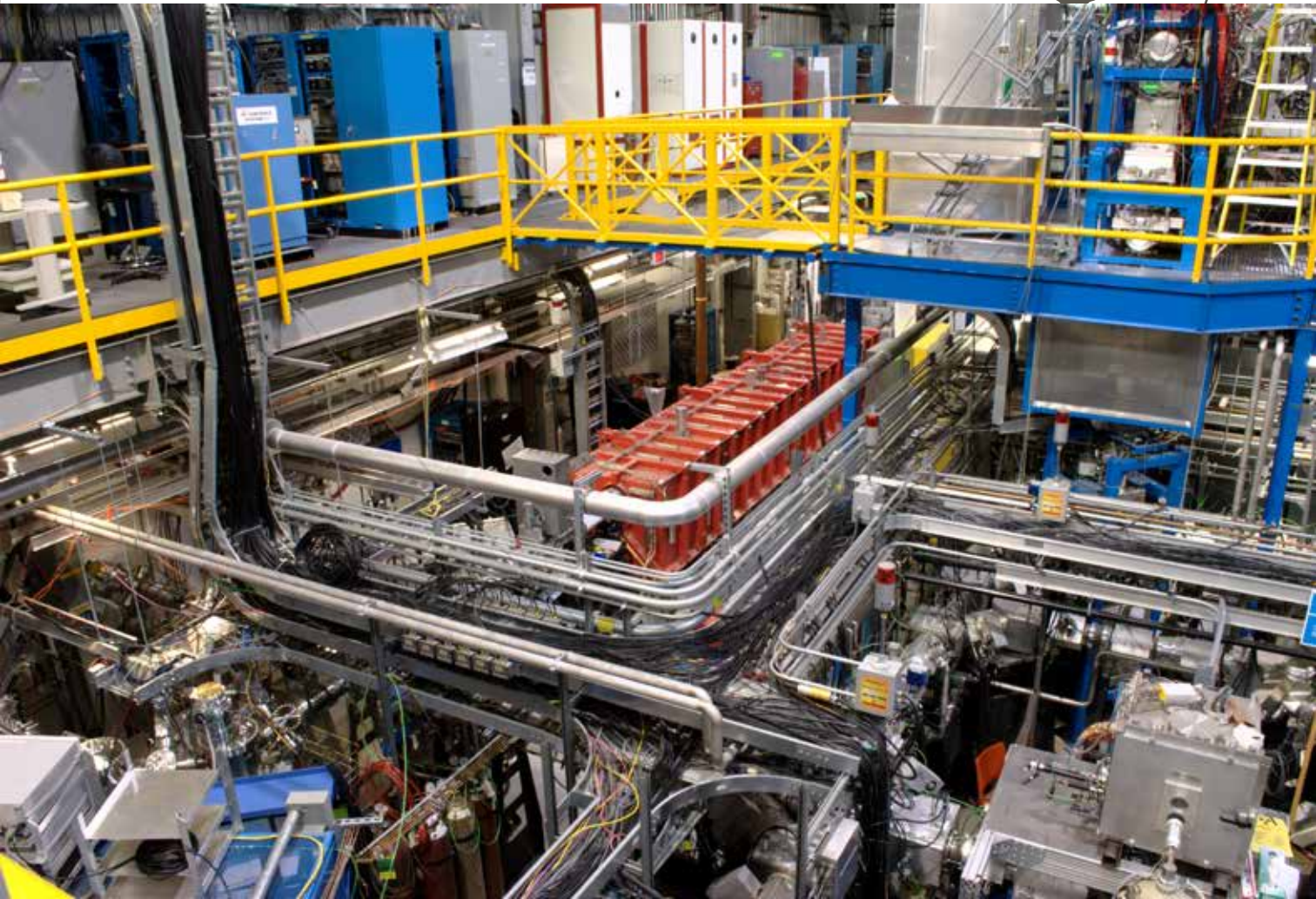


Figure 1: TRIUMF particle accelerator facility. *Source: Ben Bogart.*

Object

Through my practice, I have come to think of objects – objects being defined by demarcated boundaries – as constructed through intra-action following Karen Barad's (2007) *Agential Realism*. The consideration of objects as independent units is the bedrock of extractive capitalism. An object can be removed from its environment and those physical relationships (natural processes) that lead to its existence are excised. The object is re-contextualised (used, consumed) within a new set of processes. The relational history of the object is not lost in this excision because the value of the object is a direct result of its history. While not lost, extraction does conceal that history through the creation of a new understanding, context and use. Extraction constructs a new object through the imposition of a new boundary. The construction of objects through boundary-making is how we can comprehend anything at all: boundary-making is the basis of thought and matter. Objects are merely proxies for complex physical/relational processes that are packaged into tidy, predictable, conceivable, unitary elements.

Image

The 'apparatus' referenced in the title is the TRIUMF particle accelerator facility at the University of British Columbia. This apparatus is used to break hydrogen atoms into subatomic particles used in diverse physics and medical research projects. At its essence, I think of particle physics as the study of wholes in relation to their parts, i.e., the study of the boundaries of objects. The collages accompanying this text are works-in-progress created from a series of one hundred twelve photographs. As an example, see Figure 6, taken of the beam lines and their contexts at the TRIUMF facility. Each photograph is extractive; its spatial bounds (frame) are imposed by the lens and shape of the camera

sensor while temporal bounds (exposure time) freeze the dynamism of the site. The photographs are objects constructed by a history of intra-actions between camera, light and apparatus, where the camera itself is also an apparatus. The photographs are decomposed by a machine learning algorithm¹ that imposes boundaries along paths of discontinuous colour. This breaks each photograph into fragments constructed according to the peculiarities of the machine's naive (non-semantic, non-human) processes of segmentation where the machine's sense of an object does not resemble that of a living mind. The boundaries are emergent and follow from the intra-action of the photograph and the machine-learning algorithm. Large objects can be intelligible as photographic, while smaller objects approach gestures of mark-making or strokes of paint.

Collages are constructed by arranging these photographic fragments according to relationships such as colour (see detail Figures 2–4) and orientation (see detail Figures 7–12). The placement of fragments on the image plane is determined by a second machine learning algorithm² that may emphasise and suppress various boundaries. When fragments of similar colour are placed in proximity, their boundaries dissolve such that they blend perceptually into a larger object (for example, the yellow area in Figure 12). When fragments of dissimilar colour (or orientation) are arranged nearby, their boundaries are emphasized (for example, the boundary between blue and yellow regions in Figure 12). These structures emerge from the intra-action between/within the set of fragments and the machine learning algorithm. The viewer contributes additional boundary-making processes by recognizing some fragments as photographic and perceptually grouping areas of similar fragments. The work emerges from layers of boundary-making: from the physical apparatus, through photography, machine learning decomposition and re/composition, to the viewer's mind.³



Figure 2: Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress A*, 2020. Digital medium.



Figure 3: Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress A* (detail), 2020. Digital medium.

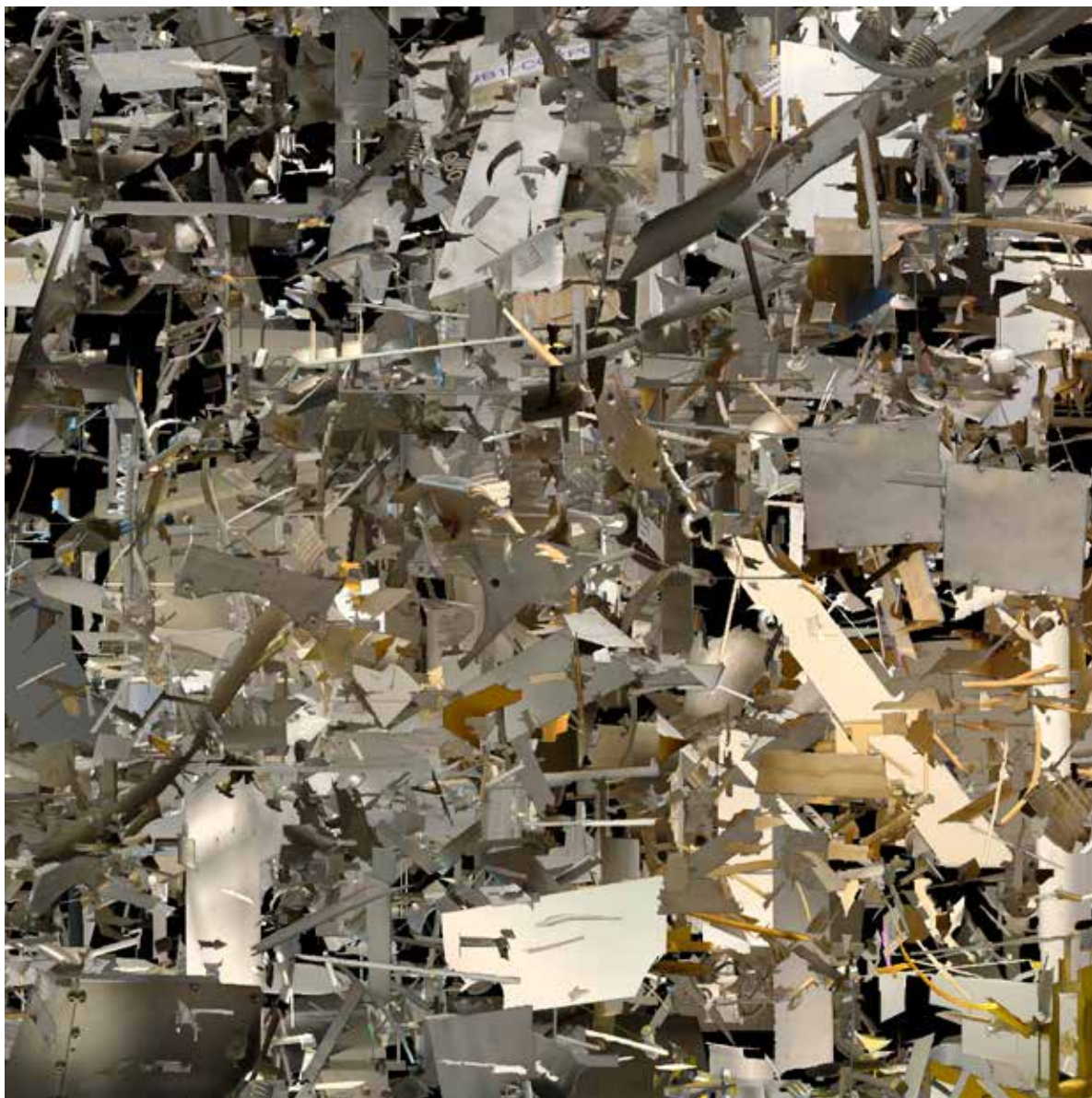


Figure 4: Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress A* (detail), 2020. Digital medium.

Figure 5 (pages 20–21): Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress A* (detail), 2020. Digital medium.

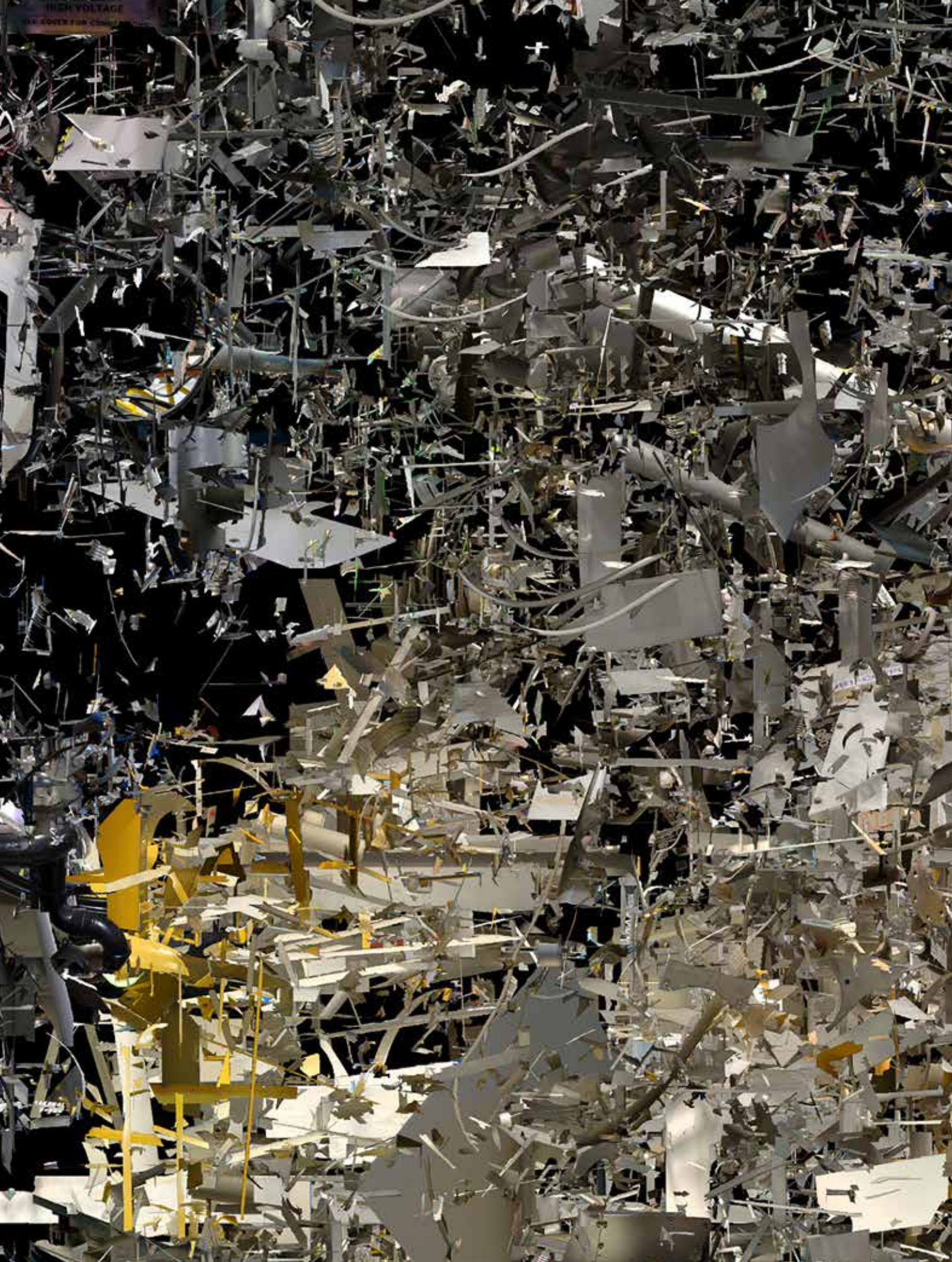






Figure 6: Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress B*, 2020. Digital medium.

Figures 7–8 (pages 23, 24): Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress B* (details), 2020. Digital medium.







Figure 9: Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress B* (detail), 2020. Digital medium.

Figure 10 (next page): Ben Bogart, *Imagined Field from the Deconstruction of an Apparatus, Work in Progress B* (detail), 2020. Digital medium.



Boundary

Thought is inherently extractive because objects constitute thought. Recognition situates the experience of the now in the experience of the past by constructing objects that persist in multiple contexts (moments in time). Perception, thought and imagination all involve systems of boundary-making processes that decompose and recompose objects. This is not to validate or condone the processes of extractive capitalism, but to highlight the importance of boundary-making in our relation to the world. By comprehending the world, we all intra-act such that we divorce processes and materials from their contexts and construct new ones.

Extracting/constructing objects from the environment changes the environment. This is the crux of our contemporary era; social and material complexity cause us to attend to the objects at the detriment of the systems that allow objects to be. By removing objects from the environment, we impose new boundaries that fundamentally change the object and environment. We constantly reconfigure the world and must be mindful of the new worlds that emerge as a consequence. Sex, gender, race, normality, ability, value, wealth, education, individuality, nation, religion are the fodder for individual and systemic boundary-making that include and exclude, amplify and suppress, centre and marginalise.

Acknowledgments

The images that accompany this text were produced in the context of the *Leaning Out of Windows* project, where artists, scholars and physicists are placed in collaborative dialogue in the development of new artistic works. *Leaning Out of Windows* is funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada in association with TRIUMF and Emily Carr University of Art & Design.

Notes

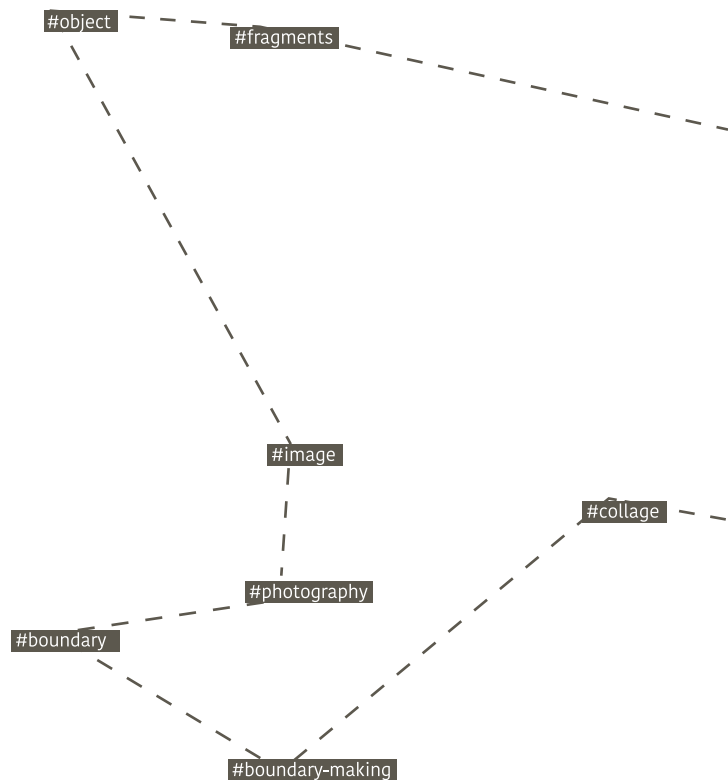
1. The Mean Shift segmentation Algorithm.
2. The Self-Organising Map clustering algorithm.
3. This list of components is excised from a broader system; the apparatus, the camera, the computer executing the algorithms and the viewer are also objects constructed through systems of boundary-making.

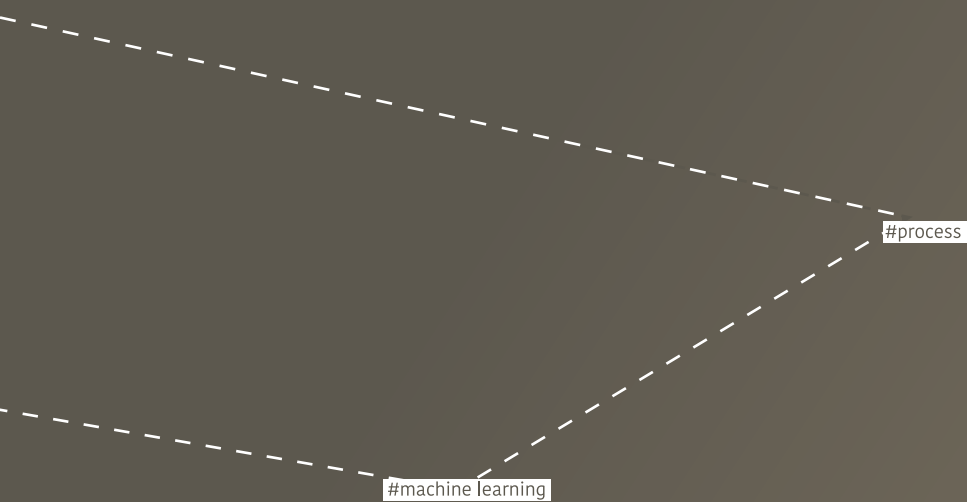
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Bio

Dr. Ben Bogart is a non-binary adisciplinary artist working with generative computational processes and has been inspired by knowledge in the natural sciences in the service of an epistemological inquiry. Ben has produced processes, artifacts, texts, images and performances that have been presented at galleries, art festivals and academic conferences internationally. Notable exhibitions include solo shows at the Canadian Embassy at Transmediale in 2017 and the TechLab at the Surrey Art Gallery in 2018. Their research and practice have been funded by both art and research councils. Ben holds both master's and doctorate degrees from the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University. During their master's study (2006–2008) they began their artistic inquiry of machine learning and developed a site-specific artwork manifesting a cognitive theory of creativity. In their doctoral work (2009–2014) they made “a machine that dreams” that is a model of dreaming and a site-specific artistic work.





There is the Beach, There is the Ocean

Denise Burge

30–41

My work investigates our complex cultural relationship with Nature with a capital "N", in particular the fantasy of tropical space: a collage of impressions and desires which ossify into a psychological 'elsewhere' that is in fact no place at all. By making images that simultaneously trigger and violate romantic tropes, I attempt to reverse the gaze of the tourist back onto itself.

This essay describes the process by which I became a tropical tourist at the age of six, the year that I found my father's heart-attacked body on our kitchen floor. This early experience of mortality, coupled with yearly family trips to the beach, created the representational code by which I now work out poetic relationships with desire and loss.

#nostalgia

#beach

#landscape

#glamour

#mortality





Figure 1: Denise Burge, *Pablo*, 2020. Paint, thread, and fabric, 152.4 x 167.6 cm.

Images are meant to render the world accessible and imaginable to man. But, even as they do so, they interpose themselves between man and the world.

Vilém Flusser (1983)

My work investigates tropical space as a product of fantasy, a collage of impressions and desires which ossify into a psychological "elsewhere" that is no place at all. I became a tropical tourist at the age of six, the year that I found my father's heart-attacked body on our kitchen floor.

Your body is the least part of you, perhaps: a sign marking the place where the true part of you begins. A map of the true part of you, reader, would show every place where you have been from your birthplace to the place where you sit now reading this page.

Gerald Murnane (1988)

The summer that I lost my father, and every summer thereafter, culminated in a trip from my North Carolina home to Myrtle Beach, in South Carolina. The "journey" was a five-hour drive, full of intense anticipation.

As soon as we crossed the state border, space became more exotically "Southern": the light, shapes and smells foretold the onrushing yet remote allure of the ocean. Flat roads droned through striated peanut fields. Empty, roofless cinderblock 'once-were' buildings were pagan temples. The first patches of tall pines, with sandy soil glowing beneath, signalled the final transition. Fifty miles or so from the beach, closer but ever distant billboard images of luxury beach living lured me into the "low country" state of mind, an idyll of sandy linen-wearing bodies strolling in the languid heat, disappearing behind impossible curtains of backlit Spanish moss.

Myrtle itself, by contrast, was a wild profusion of sweaty, oversexed neon-bikini-on-the-sidewalk-wearing rednecks, ready to party down. The lodgings we could afford were usually one block back from the oceanfront. Wet beach towels depicting tropical patterns and cartoon waves draped themselves over balconies and signalled the pleasures of the water.

A glamorous image appeals to our desires without becoming explicit lest too much information break the spell. In its blend of accessibility and distance glamour is neither transparent nor opaque. It is translucent.

Virginia Postrel (2013)

I don't have memories of swimming in the ocean, but I do remember drifting along the boardwalk in the afternoons, my skin glowing from a fresh burn. Idealised oceans on t-shirts, motel signs, and postcards magnified my desire, even though I was right in the middle of the spaces depicted. Cruising that same boardwalk at night – now neon tinted – I could only glimpse the ocean just over there, an ever-present black void that thrust its odour at me, reminding me of its depths.

Artificial ruins condense all the motifs of 'real' ruins – catastrophe, vanishment, irreparable damage – outside the context of history, making ruins into icons and therefore producing a 'style of loss'. ... with the transformation of artifice into second nature, both as a new, multi-layered phenomenon, and as a fully integrated cultural sensibility.

Celeste Olalquiaga (1983)

Memories of leaving Myrtle are as vivid as the ritualistic arrivals. I would gaze at the tan on my legs, wondering how long it would last. As the tall pines receded, I resolved to be back home, among ordinary lawns. My father's death returned as a fact in my life.

The story of water is the human tale of a dying water. Reverie sometimes begins in the presence of limpid water filled with vast reflections, bubbling with crystalline music. It ends in the bosom of sad and somber water, emitting strange and dismal murmurs. As it rediscovers its dead, reverie near the water, like a submerged universe, also dies.

Gaston Bachelard (1983)

For many years I didn't visit Myrtle, but recently, I've started to go back. From the perspective of being in an older body that doesn't want to give up, I respond to all of it with a new depth of feeling. I'm still seduced by an airbrushed surf, but now am equally drawn to the rough scarification of low tide. Now I see the ocean (and, by extension, my own oceanic body) as the messy thing it is: a matrix of incessant birth and death, flux and formlessness, constantly pressing, sucking and spraying. Brine permeates and erodes all structures, reducing them to skeletal ghosts. Gooey shreds of "once-were" objects wash up from miles away, drape over whatever is on the shore, and are swept back again. The water is the great destroyer, and I can only hope that my ultimate fantasy is to be dissolved by it.





Figure 2 (previous page, top): Denise Burge, *Holiday Sands*, 2019. Acrylic on paper, 25.4 x 25.4 cm.

Figure 3 (previous page, bottom): Denise Burge, *Vacancy 2*, 2019. Acrylic on paper, 25.4 x 25.4 cm.

Figure 4 (current): Denise Burge, *Miami*, 2019. Acrylic on paper, 45.7 x 50.8 cm.





There is something in tropical ruin peculiarly and terribly impressive: this luxuriant, evergreen, ever-splendid Nature consumes the results of human endeavor so swiftly, buries memories so profoundly, distorts the labors of generations so grotesquely, that one feels here, as nowhere else, how ephemeral man is.

Lafcadio Hearn (1980)

Figure 5: Denise Burge, *Shade*, 2019. Acrylic on paper, 30.4 x 35.5 cm.





Figure 6: Denise Burge, *Driveway*, 2019. Acrylic on paper, 25.4 x 25.4 cm.

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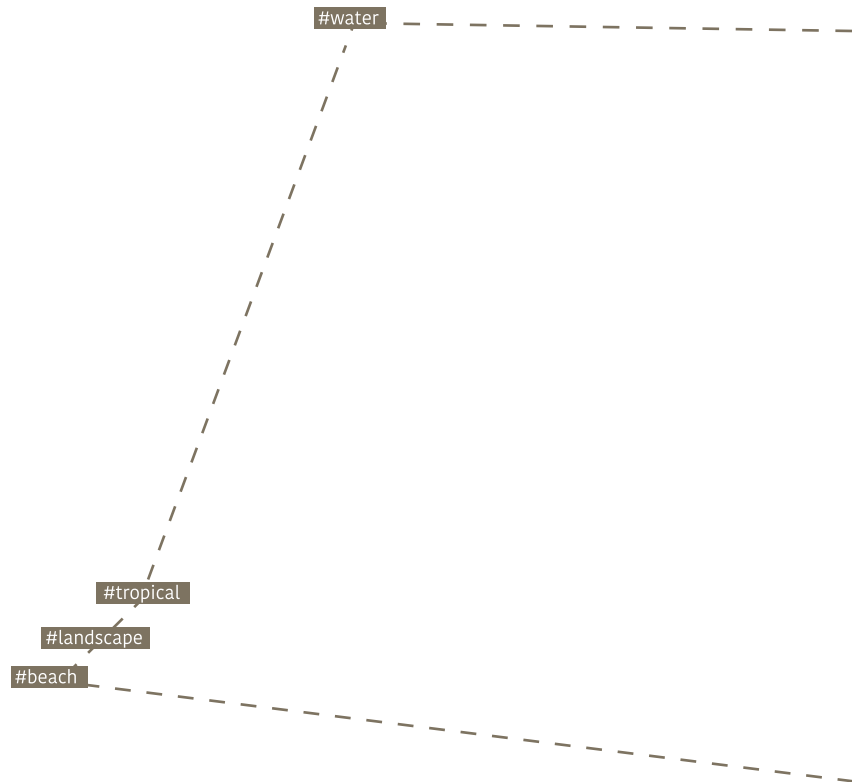
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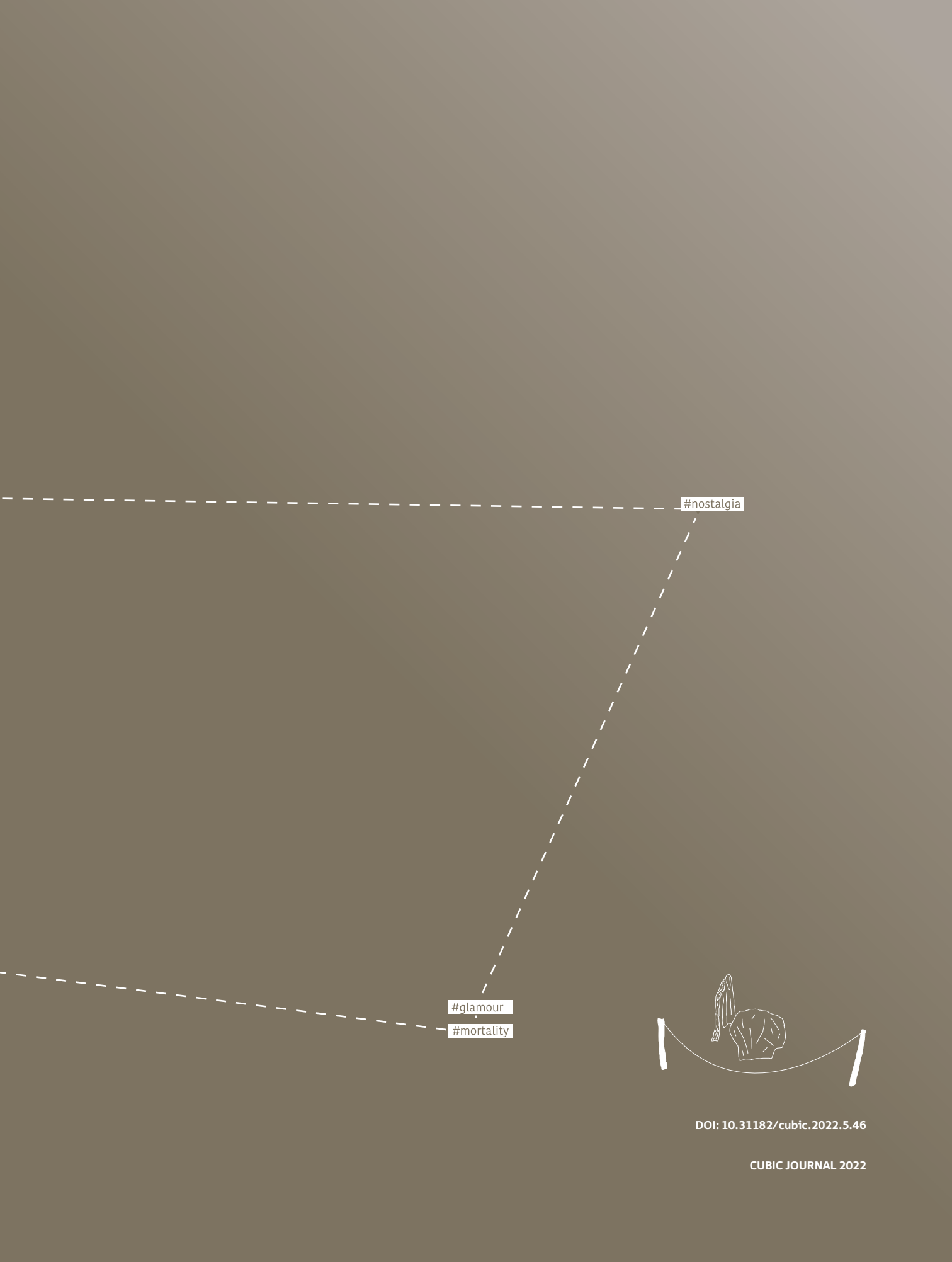
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Bio

Denise Burge is a visual artist living in the United States whose work centres around the practices of installation, and quilt making. Her quilt work has been widely commissioned and collected, having been included in two *Quilt National* exhibitions. Her collaborative work in film, animation and installation has been exhibited in several national and international festivals. She has been awarded multiple awards and grants, including residencies at the Headlands Center for the Arts, the Provincetown Work Center, and the Joan Mitchell Center. She is currently a professor of Art at the University of Cincinnati.





#nostalgia

#glamour

#mortality



DOI: 10.31182/cubic.2022.5.46

CUBIC JOURNAL 2022

The Bulkeley Market

Peter Hasdell (text)
Olivia Chen (images)

42–51



#local authority

#production of space

#critical practice

#spatial narrative

Olivia Chen has conducted research into the transient dawn markets of Hong Kong in which hawkers secretly operate second-hand markets, forming a liminal space in which objects of inconsequential value are sold and exchanged. Through this Chen has built an understanding of the web of the social relations and hierarchies that underpin poorer areas in Hong Kong, exposing the socio-economic disparities in Bulkeley Street, Hung Hom and giving the lie to the prosperous facade of Hong Kong. The reality that she captures is a vanishing one, with street markets giving way to shopping malls. Through protracted observation, Chen has found that such markets contribute to the recycling and exchange mechanisms of a material economy of the city, and that such spaces of production build social cohesion through weaving webs of social connections. As a wish to manifest these social webs, Chen's work *The Bulkeley Market* explores storytelling as a spatial practice in ways that highlight the importance of such issues in the production of social space.

For Chen's *The Bulkeley Market*, the project deliberately discarded conventional design in lieu of developing a spatial narrative. This was a way for her to interpolate her fieldwork observations on the dawn markets and their casual engagement with the local into the presentation of her ever-changing work, which comes to us in the form of a series of narrative vignettes of everyday life. This market is conceived to be endlessly transforming according to the vicissitudes of the social needs in the street, drawing from the ways the former Hong Kong street markets operated. In Chen's narrative the new market is a theatrical spectacle on a community scale- vendors move in at night-time and set up their stalls in new configurations, every time in different ways, parts shift and modify according to social practices, the times of day and the needs of daily ritual and renewal. Chen's proposal is developed using three local industries: a piece of meat, a piece of metal and a piece of paper – all three items and their processes so anodyne as to be beyond consideration – are choreographed and employed to weave narratives into an array of possible configurations of the market. In Chen's view this permits the continuance of the web of social relations. Observed fragments of life from the area are given roles and characters that integrate into the new market to increase social engagement and cohesion.

The Bulkeley Market project consciously employs a scenographic means of representation over the planometric form which is often favoured by architects and urban planners alike due to its more territorial, dominion-like properties. Similarly, the choice of the three starting points – a piece of meat, a piece of metal and a piece of paper – questions the privileging of design towards practices of consumption and commodification, opting instead for the everyday (de Certeau 1984). The tactical practices deployed in Chen's project- the various ways of gathering knowledge, the ways of seeing, valuing, and the

means by which these are synthesised into narrative form- each play an equal part in defining the values and possible meanings of the project. The use of informal practices of everyday life and intangible factors have often been the focus of tactical design approaches that seek to activate space through the "lived spaces of representation." If place can articulate collective memories and have significant local meanings for residents of that place that may well be invisible to passers-by, then parts of Chen's project may touch upon what Michel de Certeau terms a "crack" – a 'local authority' that is opposed to the imposition of official narratives from above. It can therefore be suggested that the accumulation of a web of minute details and stories and events constitute alternative forms of knowledge, meaning and signification for design that may have an equally important role to play in the production of space.

Figure 1 (page 44): Meat worker (butcher: scene 6) stall in Bulkeley Street scene with underground abattoir (collective memory) beneath the street. Early morning, pork store rising. A beam of light appears in the darkness, butchers prepare for the opening, when the butcher hangs the last piece of meat on the hook, part of the shop starts to move, rotate, and rises up. *Source: Olivia Chen.*

Figure 2 (page 45): People gather to buy a piece of meat. *Source: Olivia Chen.*

Figure 3 (page 46): Walking down the gap, she finds a factory which transforms prints into digital archives. The left-over prints are kept in a giant library. She's fascinated by the enormous collection room for books. She forgets about time. *Source: Olivia Chen.*

Figure 4 (page 47): At the end of the day steam cleaners clean the market. *Source: Olivia Chen.*











Figure 5: Getting lively, in the morning, chopping sound and the street, sounds of metal crafting. After the market is operating for a certain time, sitting devices emerge. Elderly sit, relax and wait for friends. Kids stand on it for fun.
Source: Olivia Chen.



Figure 6: While the restaurant completes preparation of food, a desk and cooking device appear and extend on street. They transform into a private *cha chaan teng*, an independent barbecue stall or an open tea house. Walk down a narrow alley, there is an obscure and quiet courtyard. People come here with small amount of food which can be to-be-expired food from market or from home to exchange for a meal with variety of nutrition. (a meal with strangers on a big circular table). Source: Olivia Chen.



Figure 7: A girl gets lost on the crowded street. She finds a thing in between a narrow slit, something old and raw. Smells woody and display letters without screen and light, a book. Source: Olivia Chen.

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Bio

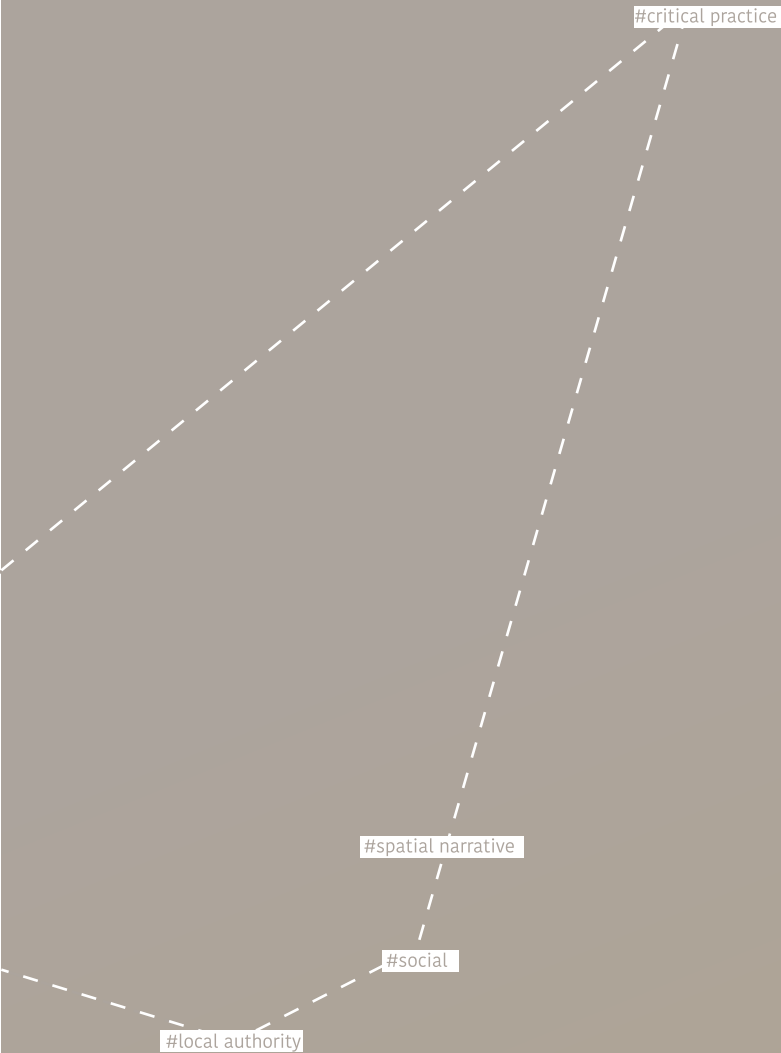
Peter Hasdell is an academic at the School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He has taught architecture and design in the Bartlett School, KTH Arkitektur, University of Manitoba, Hong Kong University and others. He was formerly a researcher at Chora Institute of Architecture and Urbanism and the Centre for Architecture Structures and Technology and is the founder and director of Architecture and Urban Research Lab (A+URL) and In-Situ Project. His research focuses on metabolic architecture on the scales of the city (city as a life form, urban ecology), and as architecture (interactive and responsive architectures).

Chen Shuning, Olivia graduated from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design in 2019. She has designed and researched the living spaces of many marginalised communities including Tai-O and Hong Kong's dawn markets. Her graduation project has been recognised by the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers, which awarded her the 2020 Design Distinction Award and has been exhibited widely. Four years engaging in spatial design projects has strengthened her intention to offer support to neglected people and to engage with social issues through spatial innovation. Aided by her collection of local information, she probes the possibility of spaces for adaptation and change, all in the pursuit of an improvement of life.

#space

#production of space

#market



Connecting Memories, or the Making of an Inverted Archival Tree

Chow Yiu-Fai

52–61

Collect. Connect. I was intrigued by the correspondence between these two words, when I, primarily as a creative writer, started my residency at the *Asia Art Archive* (AAA) in Hong Kong, where I was invited to focus on AAA's *Ha Bik Chuen Archive* (H.B.C Archive). Ha (1925–2009) was a well-known artist, a fervent collector of exhibition catalogues, documentations, and the photographs he took at these exhibitions, among other things. Visiting the HBC Archive and his old home, I started to think of Mrs. Ha, of the impossibility of a collection without connection. We collectively remember; we connect for memories. If we can't know of what, we can at least know with whom. This essay documents my – or our – project titled *Connective Memories*, or the making of an inverted archival tree, a project that brought me into contact with six young people and over to the field of music. I end with a song on faith and letter-writing.

#asia art archive

#ha bik-chuen

#hong kong

#knowledge production

#music





Figure 1: Ha Bik-Chuen. *Source: courtesy of the Ha Family and Asia Art Archive.*

Collect. Connect.

I was intrigued by the correspondence between these two words, when I, primarily as a creative writer, started my residency at the Asia Art Archive (AAA) in Hong Kong. The year was 2018.

I was invited to focus on AAA's Ha Bik-Chuen Archive and conceive a project from this archive. Ha (1925–2009) was a well-known artist, especially noted for his sculptures and print works. In parallel to his creative practices, Ha was a fervent collector. Of particular interest to AAA is Ha's collection of exhibition catalogues, documentation, and the photographs he took at these

exhibitions. I was told that Ha, a self-taught artist, wanted to collect all these materials for his own reference, for his own use. Ha, however, collected more, far more than what could strictly be considered artist's materials; he collected reading materials of all sorts, photographs of all sorts, correspondence of all sorts – everything of all sorts, or all sorts of everything. The AAA itself has this to say about the value of this archive:

*"It provides a singular window into Hong Kong's art history through international exchanges, exhibition history, and the circulation of artistic practices and reading materials."*¹

He and his family used to occupy two neighbouring apartments on the same floor of a residential building in *To Kwa Wan*, one of the first areas of the city to have undergone development. One apartment was meant as domestic space, and the other as his studio-cum-archival space. Both apartments were packed.

A home packed with collected things – that served as the starting point of my residency project. I wondered how it might have felt like to live with a collector. Visiting the HBC Archive and his old home, I couldn't help imagining how Mrs. Ha would have felt – about her husband's work, his working time and space, his collection. And, from a slightly different perspective, would

Ha have been able to live, work, and collect as he did if Mrs. Ha had refused to let him or them live as they did? What kind of connection had they forged to sustain this practice of collecting? From such (unanswerable) questions, I started to realize that a collection wouldn't have been possible without this connection. Only collect; only connect.² We collectively remember; we connect for memories. If we can't know of what, we can at least know with whom. I wanted to work out my own project from this point of connection and see what it brought. I called it *Connective Memories*. This essay documents a project that brought me into contact with six young people and over to the field of music.



Figure 2: Ha Bik Chuen Archive. *Source: Chow Yiu-Fai.*



Figure 3: Ha's family home in *To Kwa Wan*.
Source: Chow Yiu-Fai.



Figure 4: Archival tree of HBC Archive.

Source: courtesy of Asia Art Archive.

First, the young people. Shortly after I started my residency, I learned, quite incidentally, that a former student of mine had joined AAA's youth group, PageNEXT, some years earlier. I talked to Desmond Chan, my former student, and very quickly I was assured that PageNEXT would be my first point of connection. I issued an open call and, in the end, six members agreed to join my project and formed the first layer of connection, constituted by me and these six young people. We talked, we drank, we dined, and we visited the Ha Bik Chuen Archive. In the end, they were asked to form another layer of connection, to identify someone and bring this someone to the archive. Together they would identify something and turn this something into a creative work. In Desmond's case, the someone was his girlfriend.

At the moment of writing this, these six young people have almost finished their works, delivering me materials for yet another layer of connection. As someone who has written lyrics for more than three decades, I have this almost instinctive inclination to carry my projects over to the field of music. I thought of Sophy Wong, an indie singer-songwriter whose music I love.³ I extended an invitation to her, and she agreed to collaborate with me. The idea is for us to create songs inspired by PageNEXT members' works, with Sophy writing the melodies and I the lyrics. This layer of connection, for me, is not only a personal one between a songwriter and a lyric writer. It is also a disciplinary one, across the often-disparate

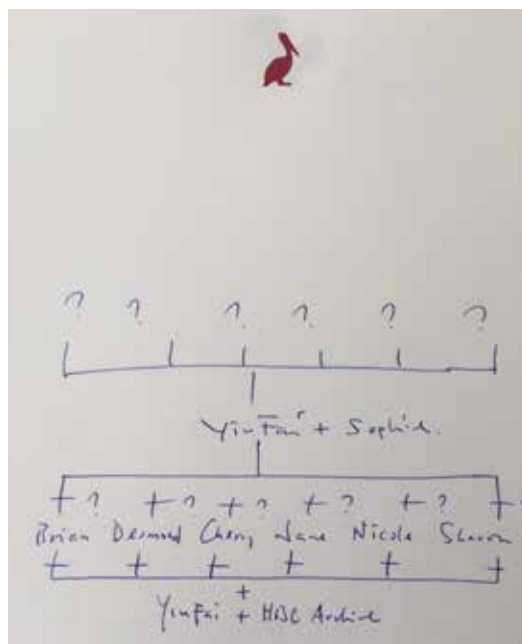


Figure 5: My inverted version of the archival tree.

Source: Chow Yiu-Fai.

fields of art and popular music. Once the songs are ready, Sophy will invite film makers to create visualisations of the music. Pending a host of uncertainties (including the COVID-19 pandemic, that – quite ironically – decrees distancing while I am writing this tract on connection), I am toying with the idea of returning to *To Kwa Wan*, where the archive, and thus all of our works, find their origins, and present them there.



Figure 6: Digital audio workstation, Abelton Live session of *Faith*.
Source: Sophy Wong.

We have been slow. To let an inverted archival tree grow is a slow process. This term emerged during one of the archive visits, when an archivist presented us with an image explaining how the materials are organized: an archival tree. I came to realize that the project I was conceiving might be its inversion. If to collect is to bring together, to collate, to connect is to bring into contact, to relate. One is an inward, top-down process, the other outward and bottom-up. If an archival tree is to catalogue, to compartmentalise, to contain a certain collected item according to a certain logic – in this case, to produce certain forms of knowledge on Hong Kong’s art history – an inverted archival tree grows contingently, thriving on virtuality, multiplicity, and humanity, yielding something quite different, unpredictable.⁴ If I were to venture a dichotomy meant to provoke thinking, then I would suggest that while one side of the binary is driven by the intent to ascertain and know, the other is to connect and inquire. The insertion of visual materials and the mobilisation of a not-so-academic style of writing for this essay, I would suggest, should be seen as part and parcel of this experimental inquiry. In that sense, I would even align this way of producing alternative knowledge to Brian Massumi’s (2015) “inventive methodology”, whereby the wish is to bring about “more of the world” and not “more of the same.” The juxtaposition of these two very different images – of the archival tree processed by the archivists and the inverted one hand-drawn by me – is essentially a response to this dominant methodological per-

suasion, against the same. The very neat and tidy digital chart evokes a visual sense of order and ordering in the archivist’s mind; even without needing to read the exact categorisations that it contains, we can see its exactitude. The drawing, on the other hand, suggests a spontaneous affair, associative and connective, not dictated by me but co-constructed with others. While “personal records”, for instance, serves only as one major category among 10 in the archival tree, its contents attracted quite a few of PageNEXT members, inspiring them to work out something more connected to their own biographies: on secrets, intimacy, and, as we will see, faith ...

A tree, layer upon layer. Sometimes, layer reads like later. We have been slow, and one consequence is that Mrs. Ha no longer lives in their old home. During the Chinese New Year of 2019, we were still able to bring our seasonal greetings to Mrs. Ha, accompanied by their son. We were not able to speak much, but she exuded the ease of being in a space where she had spent most of her life. Despite the staircases, despite her frailty, Mrs. Ha stayed. We said goodbye when someone brought her lunch, a daily routine. Please eat, please eat. Mrs. Ha insisted on seeing us off, waving to us from outside her front door. I hope she will be able to listen to our songs, soon.

This will be one of the six songs, inspired by the work created by Desmond and his girlfriend, called *Faith, the Heart of the Letter*.

“Faith, the Heart of the Letter”

《信心》

How many sheets of paper
Do I need to bring you
Layers of my sky
Or perhaps you already
Knew

重疊過幾張信紙
容納了幾幅天空
還是你已經老早 知道

Such a quiet pen
I am holding
My breath
Letter by letter, slightly heavier
Than my breaths

搖動過沈默的筆
藏入了呼吸中
一封封 比呼吸要重

Who is writing a good good dream in the middle of the
night
Who is writing a soft soft breeze in the midday sun
And I, right now, want to write
So much I have failed to write

在我掌握中繼續努力的紀錄 努力的紀錄
在你親手拆開中紀錄低努力的繼續 努力的繼續
也許不信什麼
而最好不信命
年月匆匆要守住 仍舊想寫信的心

When you start reading my letter, your hands touch
what my hands have touched
It's our attempt to record, to continue
To continue recording, to record the continuation
What don't we believe in
Better be destiny
What is the matter when I still have the heart to write
you letters

誰在笑著的寫貪慕
誰在痛著都寫祝福
而我在此刻寫下 庸俗與美好

Who is turning his smiles into words of longing
Who is twisting her sadness into blessings
And I, right now, want to write
All the banality, all the beauty

在我掌握中繼續努力的紀錄 努力的紀錄
在你親手拆開中紀錄低努力的繼續 努力的繼續
也許不信什麼
而最好不信命
年月匆匆要守住 仍舊想寫信的心 還在信 你的信

When you start reading my letter, your hands touch
what my hands have touched
It's our attempt to record, to continue
To continue recording, to record the continuation
What don't we believe in
Better be destiny
What is the matter when I still have the heart to write
you letters

為了幾分鐘 渴望 渴望的紀錄
為了幾分鐘 生命 至少可繼續
也許不信什麼
而最好不信命
年月淌開似張紙 仍舊想寫信

For a matter of minutes, I wish, to record my wish
For a matter of minutes, life suspends and continues
What don't we believe in
Better be destiny
Time unfolds into a sheet of paper
I still have the heart to write



Scan the QR code to watch the video
and listen to the song discussed in
this contribution.

Desmond visited the Ha Bik Chuen Archive in June 2019. He was immediately attracted to the private correspondence between Ha and a young person who wanted to befriend and learn from the master artist. They sent one another letters over an extended period of time. It was an act of necessity, in an era where long-distance communication was only possible through the writing of letters. But Desmond, and later Ava too, also sensed and envied the sincerity, the honesty, the intimacy woven in the weft of the written words, in the letters. He wanted to know how that was possible then, and if it would be possible now. So, they tried it.

It was too difficult, too contrived, and in the end inauthentic, as Desmond noted in his creative statement. They gave up. Instead, they reverted to their usual mode of communication: WhatsApp. After all, if writing letters characterised Ha's time, digital means characterise Desmond's. In the end, they retrieved the WhatsApp messages they sent to one another during the first month of their relationship and turned the messages into a booklet. Putting the virtual conversations in print is, in that sense, Desmond's attempt to respond, across the decades, to the correspondence he read in the archive. The booklet is Desmond's letter.



Figure 8: Desmond Chan's artwork, inspired by Ha's letter writing practice. *Source: Chow Yiu-Fai.*

This letter, the booklet, or to be precise, the digital rendition of such, was sent to Sophy, and she came back with a demo entitled “Better Days”.⁵ Having listened to it, I wrote the lyrics. Desmond and I decided to call our work 信心, for its beautiful ambiguity. At one point, we were talking about the project in progress, and we started using the Chinese word for “letter”, 信. As Desmond was explaining the difficulties of developing this habit of writing with his girlfriend to me, the Chinese term for “faith” flashed up: 信心, the two words literally meaning “letter” and “heart”. What is the connection between faith, letters and hearts?

Desmond and I do not know the answer to this, or to the many other questions that came up during our exercise of archival inquiry. Desmond, however, has found out more about his mode of communication with Ava. I remain baffled by the Chinese word for faith, and somehow am empowered by that coincidence.

Time unfolds into a sheet of paper

I still have the heart to write

Talking about alternative knowledge, that may be mine, at least at the end of May 2020.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the Asia Art Archive for supporting my residency and making this project and essay possible. I thank all the collaborators of the project. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers for their very encouraging and helpful feedback.

Notes

1. For more information regarding the Asia Art Archive and Ha Bik Chuen Archive, please see: <https://aaa.org.hk/en>, and <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collection/search/archive/ha-bik-chuen-archive>.
2. “Only connect” is a key phrase of E.M. Forster’s novel *Howards End* (1910), one of my favourites during my undergraduate time reading literature, one of my own connective memories.
3. For more information regarding Sophy Wong, please see: <https://www.sophysophy.com/>. Her music is available on Spotify under SOPHY.
4. Given the remit and confines of this essay, I am not engaging with theoretical and creative works that evoke similar politics of archiving and knowledge production, such as Deleuze and Guattari’s figure of the rhizome (1980/2004) and Aby Warburg’s last and unfinished project *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-29), see, for instance, Johnson (2012).
5. The project was completed in 2021 with a concert and a display of artworks, songs, and music videos at Tai Kwun, Hong Kong. For details: <https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/connective-memories>.

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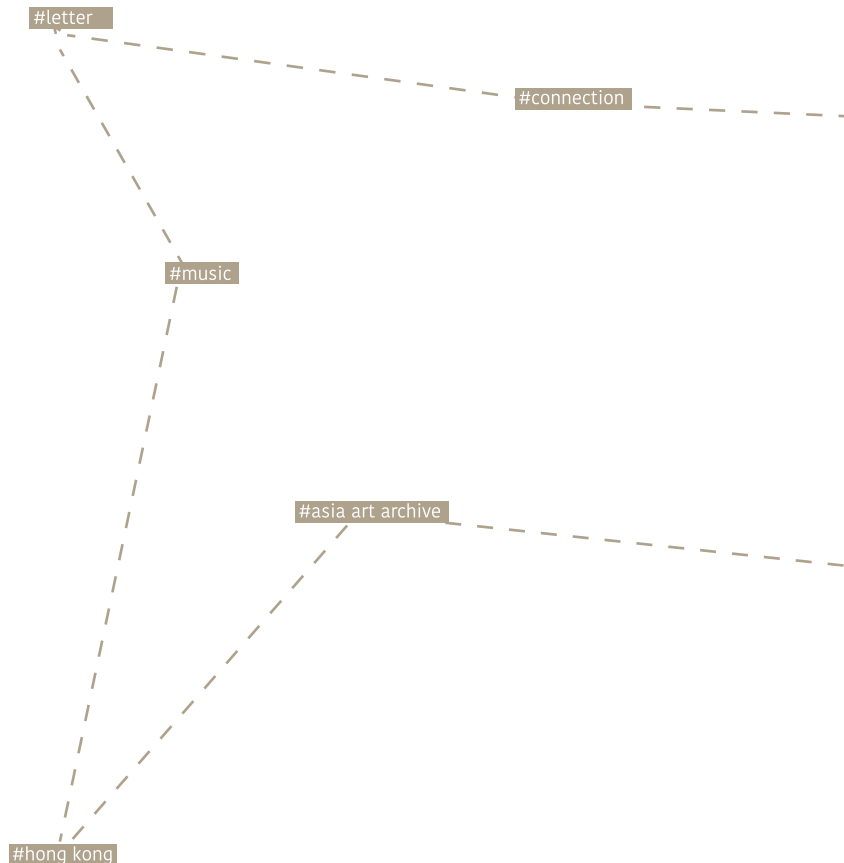
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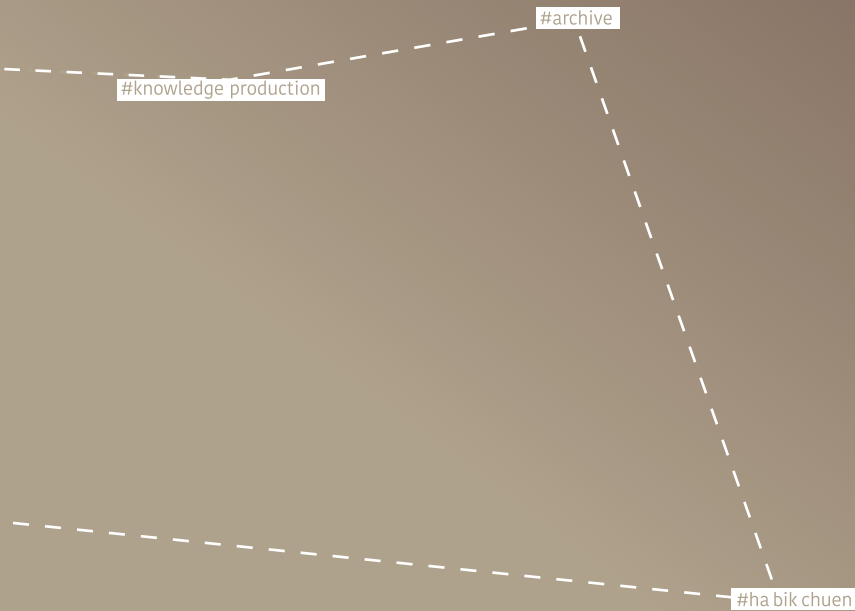
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Bio

Chow Yiu-Fai is professor at the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing, Hong Kong Baptist University. His publications cover gender politics and creative practices, including *Caring in the Time of Precarity: A Study of Single Women Doing Creative Work in Shanghai* (Palgrave 2019) and *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image* (Intellect 2013, co-authored). Chow is also an award-winning writer in lyrics and prose. Lately, he has been increasingly involved in multi-media and visual art projects.



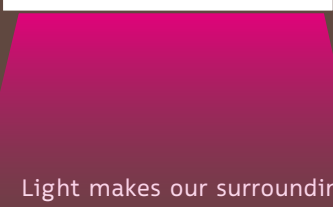


DOI: 10.31182/cubic.2022.5.48

Poetics of Light – Truth and Reality of Knowledge

Cornelia Erdmann

62–69



Light makes our surroundings visible to us. Vision plays a substantial role in how we access our environment and make sense of it. Yet, the understanding of light vision suffers from the discrepancy between physical and perceptual facts. This contribution questions the rationale of how knowledge and truth are generated. Language may often not be adequate to activate and guide all of our senses whereas artworks, especially light art, may evoke thoughts and demonstrate experiences (of perceptual processes) that open up reflective attitudes on reality's subjectiveness. In this essay, the original physical artwork can only be displayed as a representation. Printing light as images is in itself an experiment in knowledge production, a subjective experience. The imagery maps the light and colour effect of the artwork and invites the viewer to trace the installation's experience as well as to try out the after-image effect and optical illusion, examining knowledge along the way.

#light art

#afterimage

#optical illusion

#seeing

#perception

#experience

Light and colours are curious phenomena. In 1840, Johann Wolfgang Goethe had already discussed in his *Farbenlehre* (1840) that sometimes our sensory apparatus makes us see colours that are not there. When we close our eyes after looking at a bright yellow circle, we “see” a purplish circle; our perceptual apparatus creates an after-image effect in complementary colours. In reality, the light and colour we perceive don’t exist. Does that mean that they are not true?

Rationally generating knowledge is independent of sense experience based on reason. Reflecting on light and colours may reveal to us that knowledge is not about discovering, accessing and measuring the intrinsic structure of the universe, but is about creating versions of understanding which, ultimately, we consider to be “true”. Therefore, the truth of what we perceive may be a personal narrative initiated by an artwork and completed by the spectator. The poetics of light – that interplay of what is there and what is made by our sensory system – reminds us how art involves more than making what is visible to the eye.

“Light” is derived from the Old English *leoht*, meaning luminous, and is based on the Indo-European *leuk-*, meaning to shine or to see (Classen 1993). Since classical Greece and further elaborated in medieval times (Raizman-Kader 2006), considerations of light have distinguished the two concepts of *lux* and *lumen*. Unfortunately, this precise linguistic and conceptual differentiation has been lost over time but should be reconsidered. *Lumen* refers to the physicality of light, the movement of light rays in waves and particles; it describes the essence of illumination, what we physically perceive.

On the other hand, *lux* describes an internal, sensorial and psychological process of perception involving vision and sight. It denotes a subjective experience of light and its effects, such as the perception of colours, shadow and light qualities

(Ronchi 1970). When discussing light, we ought to be aware of the implications of this distinction.

Seeing light is a neuro-biological process. Light waves hit the light-sensitive retina at the back of our eyes where photo receptors respond to the signal and forward the information to our brains. How we in turn process, perceive, and understand light information goes beyond neuro-biological functions and moves into sensual affect and cultural apprehension. The psychologist James Gibson contends that the brain process following vision – our perception of the visual world – is a phenomenal experience. He also points out that we never see light itself, but only the effect it has on the surfaces of in our environment (Gibson 1950). Similarly, Ola Eliasson and Tor Nørretranders (2015) argue that “the only thing we do not see is light. We never see light as light, but always as something else: as something out there.” We perceive conceptions of our environment. We interpret what we see based on many factors including our sensual affect as well as our knowledge of what we have learnt through cultural fabrication so far.

Poetics of Light is a continued consideration of the artwork *Your Rumination* (2019) which was inspired by the aurora borealis phenomenon found at Norway’s arctic circle. This electrical phenomenon creates perceivable reddish or greenish *schlieren* of light in the night sky. *Your Rumination* initially recreates this colour experience as a spatial light installation, which has now been transferred as a cropped photograph into a visual narrative of abstract landscape tableaux. These tableaux invite us to question our knowledge through and of light, of what we are actually seeing. We may not see light objectively as *lumen*, but we can perceive and appreciate its subjective poetics as *lux*, which may be its only truth after all.









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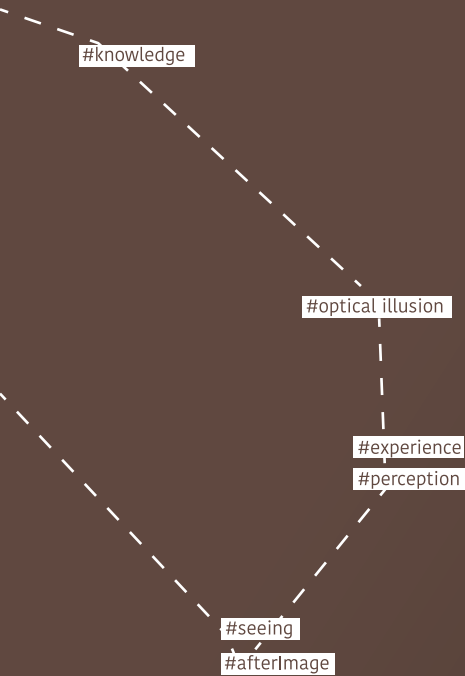
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Bio

Dr. Cornelia Erdmann is a German researcher and visual artist based in Hong Kong since 2006. With a background in fine art (MFA Public Art and New Artistic Strategies, Bauhaus-University Weimar, Germany) as well as in architecture (Dipl.-Ing. Arch, Bauhaus-University Weimar, Germany) she blurs the boundaries between creative disciplines, exploring modes of narrativity connecting subjective realities and objective spaces. Light is an integral medium of her research and practice. She specialises in site-specific installations and public art works that are found in private and public collections, and at light art festivals around the globe.

#light art





SloMoVo

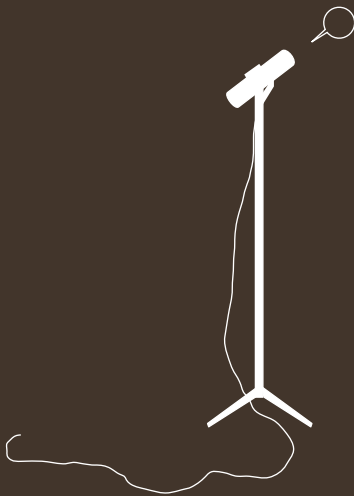
[Slow (Almost Silent) Voice Experiments]

David (Jhave) Johnston

70–73

SloMoVo is mostly inaudible voice/grunts/hums triggering synths generated in real-time. It is throat synthing: making silence into sound. Each word makes a mountain. Each breath begins a tide.

SloMoVo asks: how do tiny seemingly inconsequential gestures of our lives reverberate through networks? How potent is the seemingly impotent unheard voice when augmented with tech? What effect does the unheard or repressed or invisible have on the resonance of the universe? Is network technology and media software capable of expanding identity? What is the resonant frequency of society?



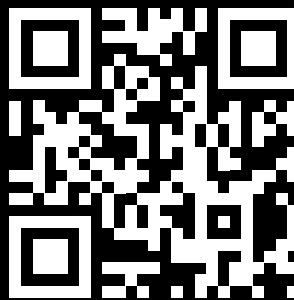
#alvin lucier

#tertiary orality

#voice augmentation

#wavetable synthesis

While in pandemic lockdown, I've been doing almost-daily voice experiments, linking a vocal mic to sensitive synthetic instruments to convert tiny humming fluctuations of my throat and other subliminal subtle almost-silent sounds of the body into drones and melodic fields. The idea originated with a few experiments replicating Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969) conceptual audio work using a Bluetooth recorder and speaker feedback.



Scan the QR code to watch the video and listen David's voice experiments.

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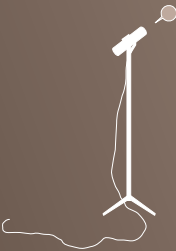
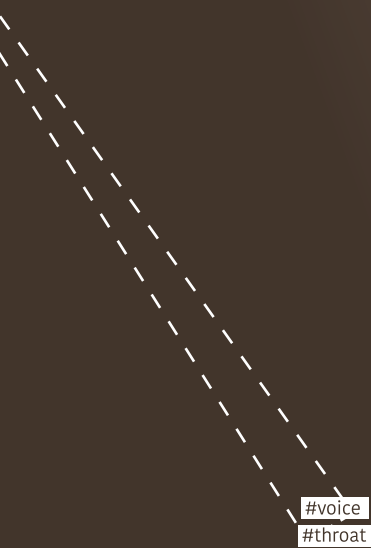
"SLoMoVo," Jhave, (2020), <http://glia.ca/2020/slomovo/>.

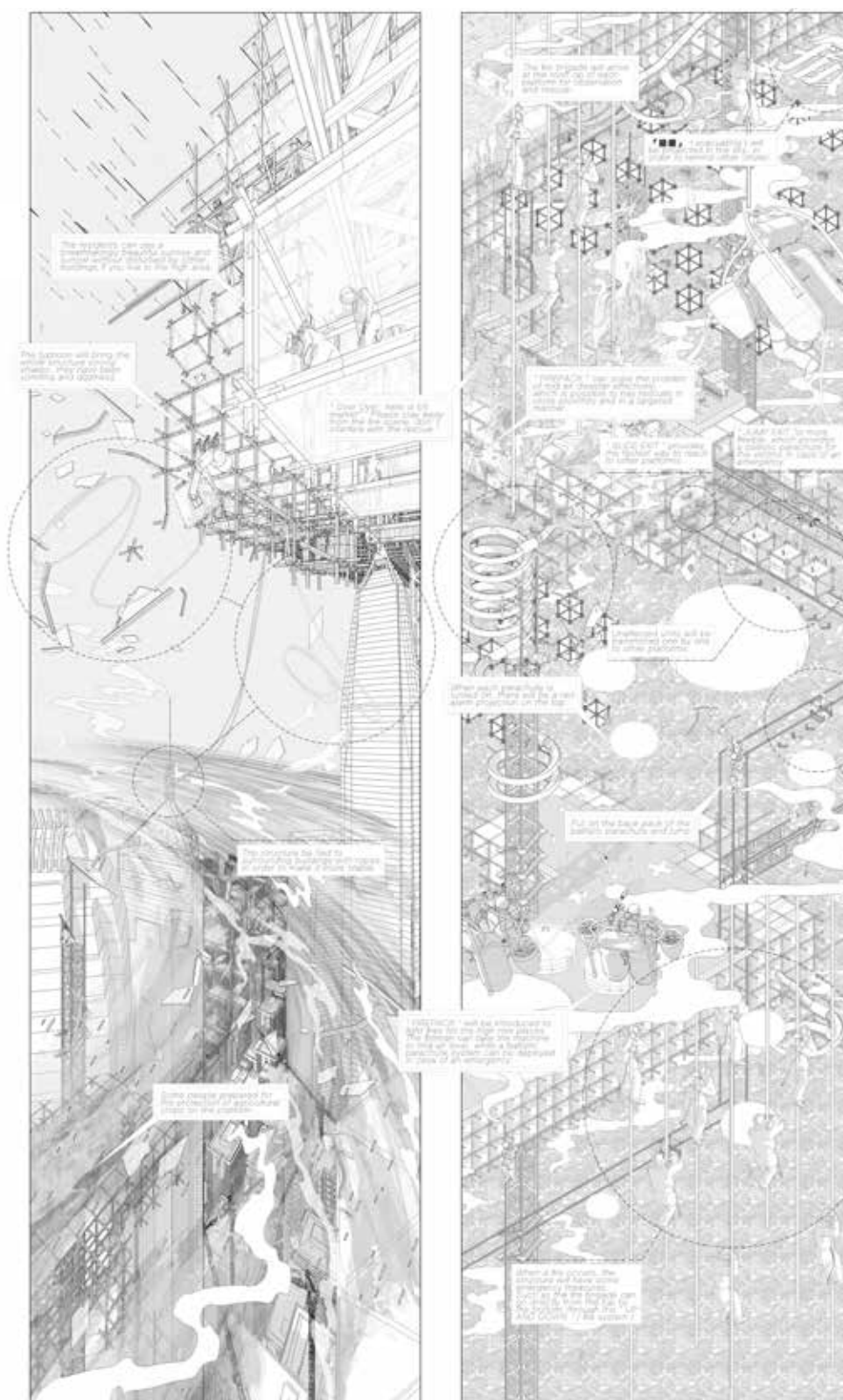
Bio

Dr. David (Jhave) Johnston is a digital-poet writing in emergent domains: AI, 3D, VR, and code. Author of the books *ReRites* (Anteism Books, 2019) and *Aesthetic Animism* (MIT Press, 2016). He can be reached online at www.glia.ca

#experiment







The *Fifth Region* draws its influences from a variety of sources. Firstly, its rich visual palette derives from popular culture and sci-fi cinema genres which project futures, such as the 1997 Luc Besson film *The Fifth Element*. Also, one finds pointed references to films which use Hong Kong as a speculative context for futuring, such as the 2017 film *Ghost in the Shell*. Related influences are drawn from *Manga* or *Manhua*, the visually rich narratives of which have developed into a specific genre in Hong Kong over the last century. Kwok has combined these influences together with elements from traditional Chinese graphic paintings and landscape representations which depict mankind's relationship to mountains, the sky and heaven, in ways that allow him to reorder the man-made world of Hong Kong, re-imagining it for the purpose of telling new stories.

Secondly, Kwok has also linked his approach to a critique of present-day projected futures for the city. For instance, the contentious "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" of 2018 proposes a new area of Hong Kong to be built on artificial islands to address future needs that are possibly spurious, while constant urban renewal and the rapid densification of Hong Kong's older urban areas continue to ravage other parts of the city. As Kwok explains, the point of departure for the *Fifth Region* is that although the city's numerous tall buildings are apparently efficient, they still need to rely on the ground to connect with each other. The *Fifth Region* therefore questions what the phenomenological, social and psychological consequences might be if another new region were to be created above the city, one in which people no longer need to reach the ground but still form an active part of society. How would this define lifestyles, behaviours, social orders and environmental ecosystems? How can we unfold its implications in ways that speculate, narrate and explore future possibilities?

Thirdly, Kwok draws from spatial narrative, an increasingly popular field of critical work by architects and designers that shifts design-thinking processes from the projective design of a "real" object towards the speculative. Spatial narratives posit the construction of imaginary visual worlds that engage critical discourse on design-related issues. Such speculative practices have an important role outlining different socio-cultural narratives. This approach is not new – the history of spatial narrative in architecture encompasses architects including Antonio Sant'Elia's *Manifesto of Futurist Architecture* (2003), Cedric Price's Fun Palace, Nigel Coates, CJ Lim, as well as the Soviet revolutionary architects of the 1920s and the later Paper Architects in the former Soviet Union. The seminal work of Archigram in the 1960s and 1970s and Constant Nieuwenhuy's New Babylon explorations remain highly influential.

Spatial narratives – as Lucas Kwok shows us – function as ciphers for what cannot be expressed through conventional design processes and their necessity is inestimable in these current times.

The Imagination - Collage

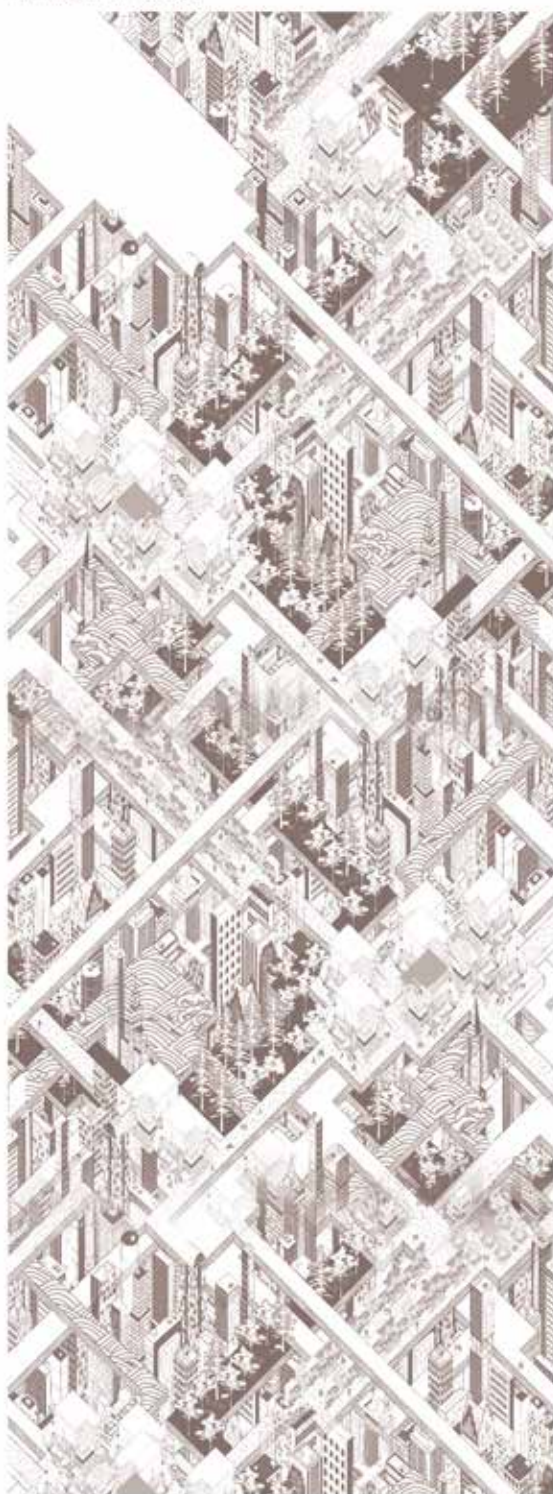


Figure 1: Chapter 1, *Escape And Create*. The story outlines the beginning of the escape to the not-yet-existing Fifth Region from the chaos and darkness of the street. *Source: Lucas Kwok.*





Figures 2-4 (opposite and this page): Chapter 2-4, *Migration; Challenge; Disaster, and Rescue*. Demonstrates a series of events and situations arising from living in the sky. These events highlight the wealth disparity between those on the ground and those in the sky; and give rise to new problems such as vertical littering as well as air and wind pollution as well as the safety problems that arise if there is an unexpected disaster up there. *Source: Lucas Kwok.*



Figure 5: Chapter 5, *New Region*. Shows the transition towards a new Fifth Region. This highlights the large scale and infrastructural necessities through a macro-scale view showing the older city landscape of the other four regions left behind. *Source: Lucas Kwok.*

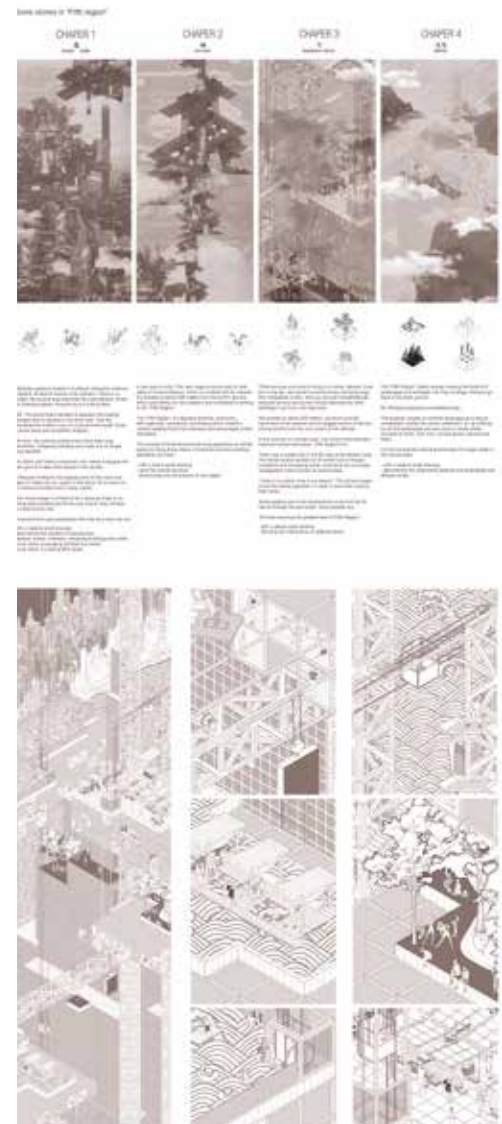


Figure 6 (top): Work in progress.

Figure 7: Chapter 6, *Artificial Nature*. Narrates the changing adaptation of the Fifth Region, highlighting how the people living inside the Fifth Region for some years already and how they are starting to yearn for a natural environment. This results in the formation of new modes of artificial nature and a new consciousness of how to construct nature. *Source: Lucas Kwok.*

Figure 8 (next page): Chapter 7, *Vertical Climate*. As the Fifth Region grows ever upwards an important part of the evolution deals with how a new vertical climate can be established to deal with living in the clouds, which includes for instance water harvesting from cloud water vapor. *Source: Lucas Kwok.*

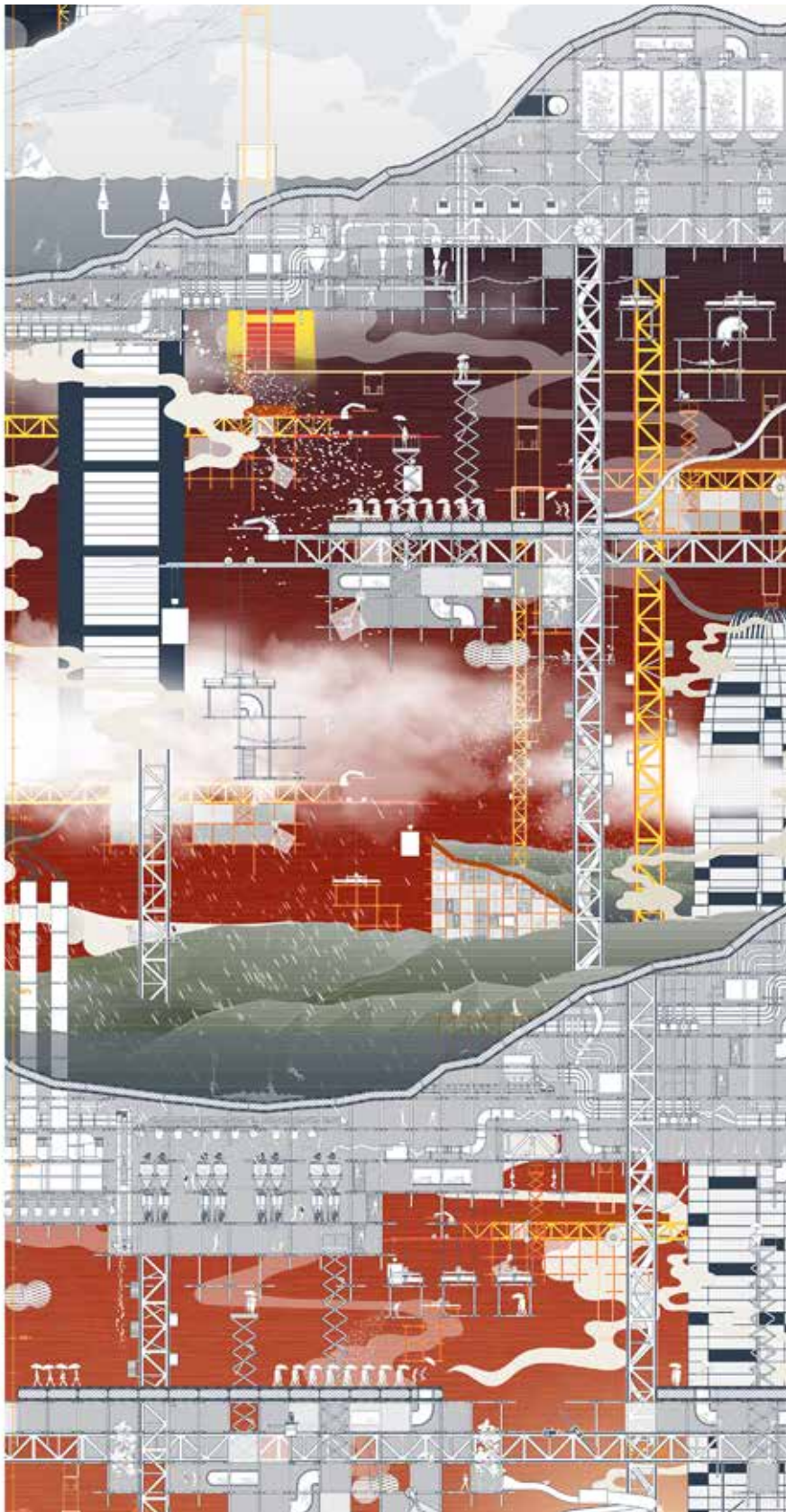




Figure 9: Chapter 8, *Newcomers*, as the Fifth Region evolves, newcomers (migrants) become part of the Fifth Region coming from other regions. Over time

the adaptation highlights how the challenges and problems would be solved, and the change of human behaviour would be estimated. *Source: Lucas Kwok.*

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Bio

Peter Hasdell is an academic at the School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He has taught architecture and design in the Bartlett School, KTH Arkitektur, University of Manitoba, Hong Kong University and others. He was formerly a researcher at Chora Institute of Architecture and Urbanism and the Centre for Architecture Structures and Technology and is the founder and director of Architecture and Urban Research Lab (A+URL) and In-Situ Project. His research focuses on metabolic architecture on the scales of the city (city as a life form, urban ecology), and as architecture (interactive and responsive architectures).

Kwok Chin-Fung Lucas is an independent designer born and based in Hong Kong. Alumni of the Hong Kong Design Institute, he subsequently received his BA in Design (Honours) in the Environment and Interior Design programme from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design in 2019 where he graduated at the top of his class. He currently works in a diverse range of interior, brand renewal, packaging, and graphic design fields. His work, which comprises of projects such as *Fifth Region*, *Be there, Soulscape*, and *Rays of Happiness* is reflected in careful and innovative work processes which have caught the attention of media including Soho House magazine, HKDIA, Perspective, RTHK, The locals and Design Xcel.

#design futuring

#speculative visualisation

#spatial

#city

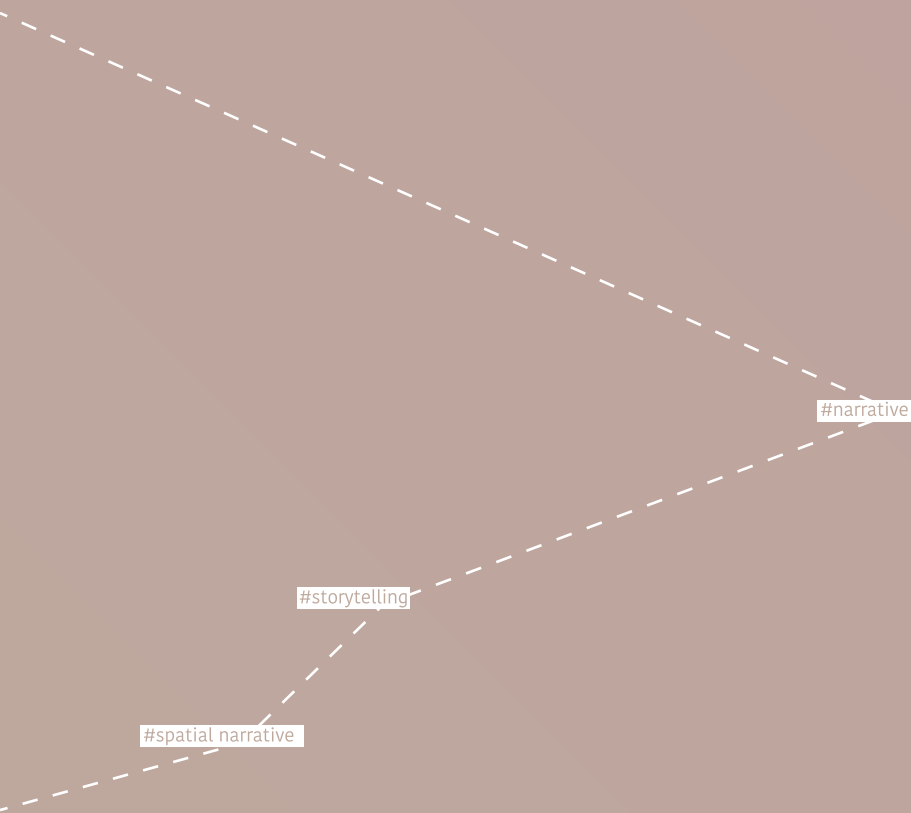


Image Protocol – A Tool for the Philosophy of Art

Nils Röllner

86–93

An investigation into illustrations of philosophical texts conducted by artist Barbara Ellmerer and graphic designer Vera Kaspar, two artists who documented their enquiries with ‘image protocols’. These protocols, in turn, led to a re-evaluation of the materials and means used in the process of artistic perception and production. This process remains structurally resistant to verbalisation but relies on individual calibrations between the perception of a given image and the means and materialities at the artist’s disposal (colours, brushes, paper, but also photography, scanning, printing).

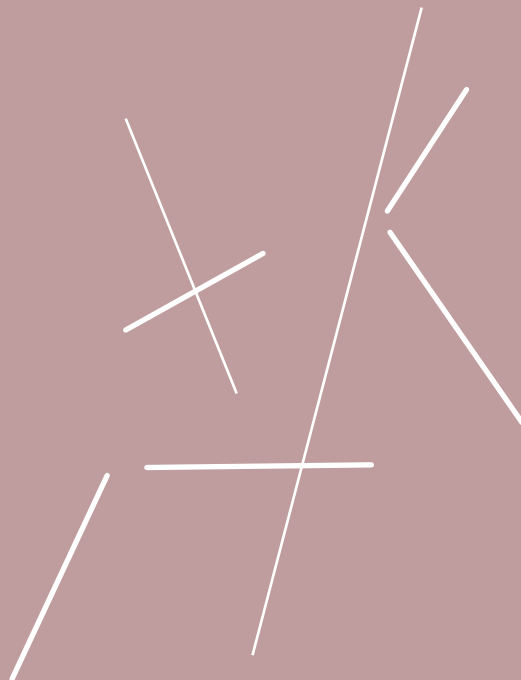
#iconography of philosophy

#diagrammatic reasoning

#materialities in art

#charles sanders peirce

#susanne k. langer



“In the first place philosophy of art should, I believe, begin in the studio.”

Susanne K. Langer (1953, ix)

With this premise Susanne K. Langer opens *A Theory of Art* (Langer 1953, IX), thereby marking a conflict between the individual process of art production and the discourse on art. In Langer's philosophy critics facilitate communication between artworks as singular expressions and concepts which allow general reasoning. The *Image Protocol* is a tool in this framework. It documents the process that leads to a final artwork (target image) in the following way - given a historical image, artists will document how a) they perceive the historic image; b) which aspects capture their attention; c) how this attention shifts; d) how they arrive at their target image.

Using Dieter Mersch's reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein (2015, 134f) the image protocol is conscious of the difference between *saying* and *showing* (pointing), which can be clarified as a difference between the discursive and the individual production of knowledge. The protocol avoids verbal interpretation. Verbal notes in the protocol merely serve as contact points with the discourses concerning historical images and the relevant text reference. A 'formular' contains basic information concerning the historical images according to scientific standards. Regarding the *Iconography of the Consolatio*, it is a text of late antique philosopher Boethius which was frequently copied and illustrated between the tenth and sixteenth centuries as documented by Pierre Courcelle's (1964, 1967) seminal monographs¹. The illustrations show a female figure which represents 'Lady Philosophy' and a male figure representing the author Boethius.

A research grant by the Swiss National Science Foundation for the project *Iconography of the Consolatio* allowed for the development of the protocol, which was used as a tool and employed

in two settings. Firstly, graphic designer Vera Kaspar employed the *Image Protocol* as a device for documenting a process of understanding the historic image by concentrating on the composition, especially the ways in which artefacts in the historic image guide the viewing process. This led Kaspar to produce a series of abstract images. Secondly, artist Barbara Ellmerer concentrated on the material features and the appearance of colours in the historic images. This led to a discontinuous process of synthesising today's means of image making with the appearance of the historic image.

Eighteen *Image Protocols* are the result of the grant. They are documented in digital form (www.iconographyofphilosophy.ch/bildprotokolle/).

For the philosophy of art, the *Image Protocol* gives evidence of a clash between a process that is driven by abstraction from the materialities of given images – using Frederik Stjernfelt's (2007) reading of Peirce, this is a process which could be referred to as 'diagrammatic reasoning' – and other processes that are orientated more towards the materialities which make an image appear (in Peirce's terminology: an orientation on token). These processes remain structurally resistant to verbalisation but rely on individual negotiations between the perception of a given image and the means and materialities at the artist's disposition (colours, brushes, paper, but also photography, scanning, printing). The observations from the *image protocols* therefore lead to the thesis that one aspect of artistic work is communication between distinct materialities. Discussing this question will contribute to a re-evaluation of the notion of feeling, which Langer's philosophy of art emphasises. This understanding draws attention to the way the means of perception (like cameras and scanners) structure perception and production in the arts.

Over the sixteen months of the research project the image protocol changed in nature. At the beginning

it was a tool that structured the research. Later, during conferences and workshops with experts in the relevant discourses it became an interface, which prepared and enabled understanding between artistic practice and scholarly argumentation. Now, reviewing the image protocols for this submission, they reverse my understanding of

historical distances. I regard them as recipes for traveling into the future of historic artefacts. In this future, the illustrations of the *Consolatio* are not only documents of the past but could also be understood as invitations to denaturalise established forms of image-making today.



Figure 1: Anonymous, 11th/12th century. Madrid, B.N. 10109, fol. 2 r, Courcelle 1967, pl. 28. *Source: Nils Röllner.*



Figure 2: Vera Kaspar, 2018. Image Finding, VK IP1: Underlining shows corresponding angles. *Source: Nils Röllner.*

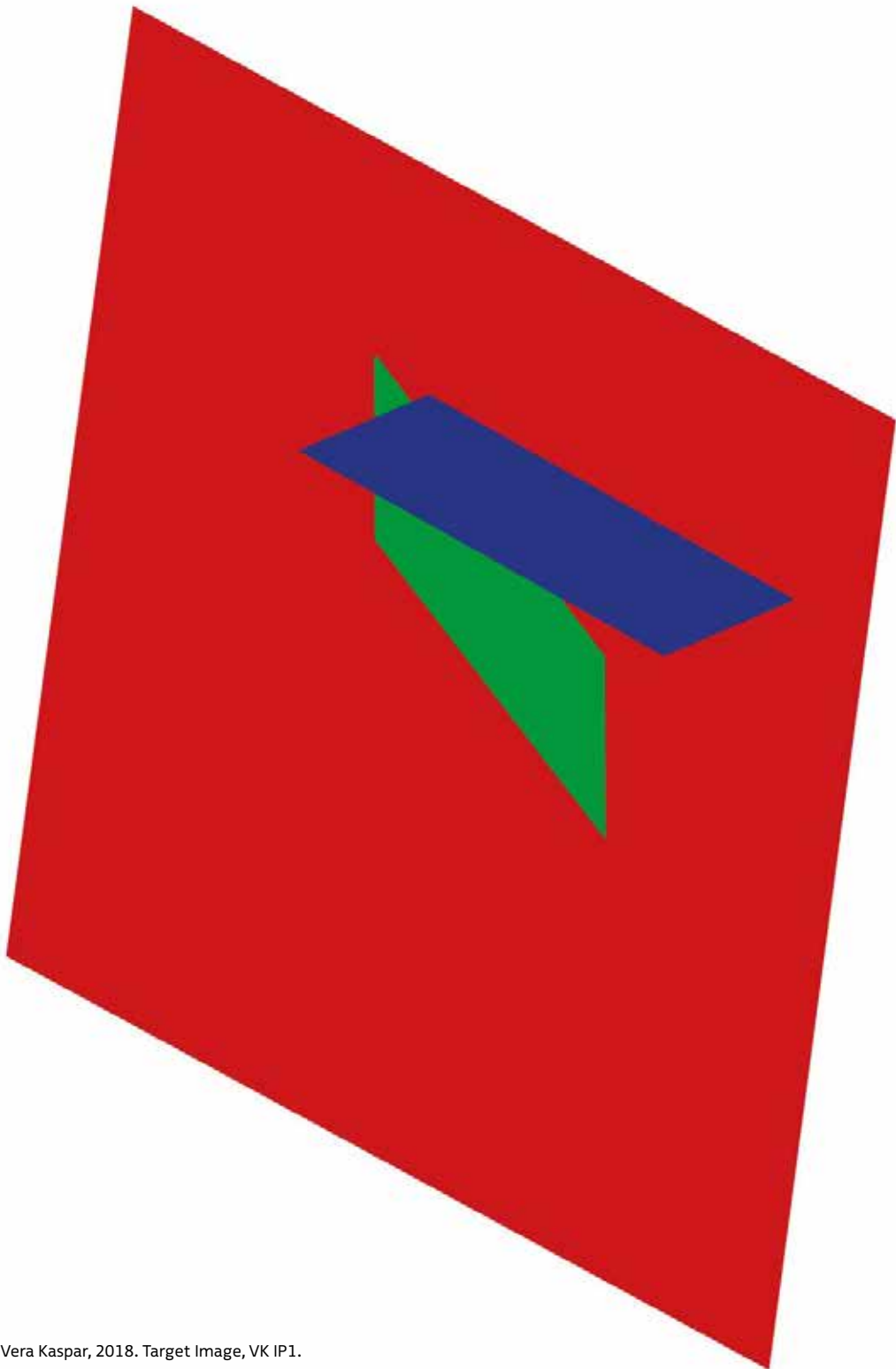


Figure 3: Vera Kaspar, 2018. Target Image, VK IP1.

Source: Nils Röllert.



Figures 4–8: Barbara Ellmerer, 2018. Image Finding, BE IP1. Source: Nils Röllner.



Figure 9: Barbara Ellmerer, 2018. Target Image, BE IP1.

Source: Nils Röllner.

Notes

1. Publications on philosophy and visual arts like Röllner 2021, Mantoan/Perissinotto 2019, Berger 2018, Merjian 2014 document a revisitation of the field "Iconography of philosophy" to which Courcelle in the 1960s, Brandt (2000), and Braun (2010 (c. 1994–1996) have contributed seminal works.

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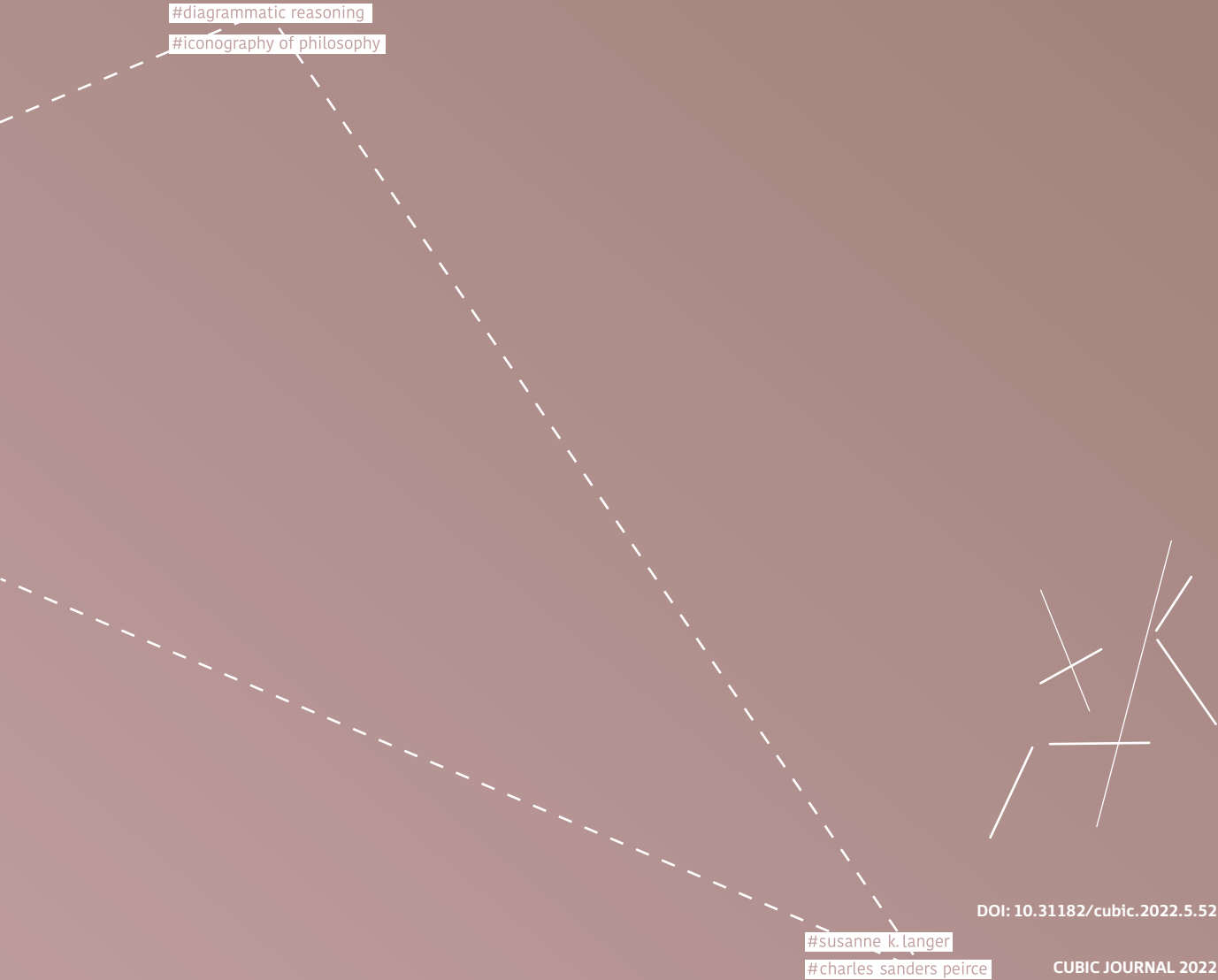
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Bio

Dr. Nils Röllner is a professor at the Zurich University of the Arts. His research focuses on the relation between text, image and philosophy (Iconography of Philosophy). Recent publications are: "Hermes", in *Beat Streuli – Fabric of Reality* (Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers, 2019), "Oswald's Hubble", in *Critical Interface Studies 002* (2019), also in Geissler, Beate/ Sann, Oliver (Hg.), *Oswald Wiener – The Bio-Adapter* (Berlin: Kadmos); "Organon", in Berardi, Donatella (Hg.), *Art, Self & System* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2019).

#materialities in art



Public Art, Representation, and Questions of Revising the Past

Jenny Roesel Ustick

94–109

Operating from the position of an artist with a mature practice in creating public art, this essay chronicles and contextualises the development of a series of works that consider the history, symbolism, interpretation, and evolving understanding of specific historic public artworks. There is a paradox in my development as a muralist: my significant experience while being affiliated with and working on behalf of a prominent community-based non-profit arts organization, where I repeatedly faced constraints upon the content and attitude of the work being created, earned me the notoriety and reputation that facilitates for-profit work that critiques design-by-committee at best, and malignant censorship at worst. Works in the series deal with the intersections of gender and race in the content of public artworks in tones that range from reverent to harshly critical and – in some cases – suggestive of reparative action.

#public art

#gender

#race

#censorship

#murals



Doing Right by People and Place

ArtWorks is a non-profit arts organization in Cincinnati whose mission is to provide employment opportunities for young people aged fourteen to twenty-one to assist in the creation of public artworks with professional artists like myself. I served as Project Manager on over ten mural projects before transitioning to independent work in 2017.

ArtWorks has done their research as an organisation, employing the language and philosophy of controversial urbanist Richard Florida from his bestseller *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). They have studied mural arts programmes in Philadelphia and Chicago and have become very successful at positioning the organisation as a major driver and contributor to urban revitalisation, all while working to remain conscious of characteristics that might invite criticism or do harm. The work they have done has earned them and its artists attention on the world stage – and well deserved. But Cincinnati is also emblematic of the problems outlined in Florida's own *The New Urban Crisis* (2017), and in the critiques and interrogations of authors like Bures (December 2017), Malanga (winter 2004) and Sussman (May 2017).

When gathering information for a mural, one might engage with communities experiencing generational economic inequality and disagreements about how and whether to provide equitable access to resources. The most common requests of any mural are that it be uplifting, inclusive, apolitical and joyful, which is sometimes a tall order, especially where there is pain, friction and few good-news stories. That friction can emerge within the painting process as well. I have been asked midstream on a mural to make unapproved race-based design revisions, change entire scopes of work, and lend an ear to communities that seem to need someone to listen more than they need a new mural. (Images 1 and 2).

Considering Correctness

My 2013 mural was an inflection point in my work. The piece honoured a set of mosaics created by artist Winold Reiss for Cincinnati's Union Terminal in the early 1930s. The mosaics are to many an unassailable example of perfect public art. However, Reiss excluded women from the murals depicting Cincinnati industry, though women appeared in Reiss' source photographs and in many workplaces (Hurley, 1993). I sought to correct this omission in my design. Additionally, I proposed to depict people of colour in leadership roles, rather than exclusively as low-wage workers. My direct illustrations of those concepts were rejected for different reasons. I subsequently created a new design that focused only on the hands of various people depicted in Reiss' original murals, while adding new hands that represented women and people of colour in leadership roles in their professions. The design was approved, and I managed to meet my objectives of representation.

After participating in the 2017 Women's March on Washington (Image 3), and observing, making, and wearing the ubiquitous Pink Pussy Hats, I became interested in the genealogy of the symbol, studying links to the *bonnet rouge* of the French Revolution (BBC News, January 2017; Coutts, October 2018).

That spring, as I attended my first mural residency in Buenos Aires, I created murals using pink knitting stitch motifs (Image 4) in an immediate response to the political situation in the US. I also brought curiosity, a hand-knitted and felted Phrygian cap (Images 5 and 6) and nascent research about the use of the symbol in the United States and other countries like Argentina. I had wanted to know why the Liberty Cap was widely used in early American symbolism but fell out of use and view. This is where race and gender converged in my work again, as I learned that a symbol that is both everywhere and nowhere in American visual

culture – the *Statue of Freedom* (Crawford, 1863) – was the product of a series of rejected and revised designs by the artist.

Overseeing the overall construction of the Capitol Dome was Jefferson Davis, the then-Secretary of War and eventual president of the Confederacy. Davis rejected the use of the Phrygian cap because of its representation of emancipated slaves, though it was slaves who finally cast the statue in bronze. Davis demanded Crawford revise his design (architect of the Capitol) to show *Freedom Wearing a*

Feathered Roman War Helmet. I posit that the statue is a unique form of Confederate monument and should be amended. That is what some of these works imagine: a fantastical approach to artistic restoration based in social justice and protest, the consideration of which could not be timelier.

It also aims to de-weaponize women's bodies in the justification of racial violence, as well as consider what our national symbolism should be going forward.

Figure 1 (opposite, top): Jenny Roesel Ustick, *The Hands That Built Our City*, 2013. Novacolor acrylic on masonry, 13.7 x 21.6 m. This work was inspired by and in honour of the glass mosaics by Winold Reiss at Cincinnati's Union Terminal. Rather than reiterating the white patriarchal value structures depicted in the original mosaics from the 1930s, I created a design that removed hierarchy among figures, while elating representation of women and people of colour.

Figure 2 (opposite, bottom): Jenny Roesel Ustick, *The Hands That Built Our City* (detail), 2013. Novacolor acrylic on masonry, 13.7 x 21.6 m. This panel depicts the hand of an employee of the facility within the building where the mural is painted.







Figure 3 (opposite): *Many marchers wore Pink Pussy Hats*, Women's March on Washington (January 21, 2017). *Source: Shari Kerrigan.*

Figure 4 (top): Plaza Gurruchaga, Villa Crespo (detail), 2017. Sinteplast on stucco. Created in collaboration with Toia Grehan (Argentina) and Kiik Create: Manoela Madera and Gray Edgerton (USA). Facilitated by Alicia Candiani of La Fundación 'ace el Arte Contemporáneo y el 'acePirar Programa Internacional de Residencias Artísticas (International Artist Residency Program, Palimpsest Mural Residency), Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 2017. The outcomes of this residency and resulting projects evolved and were evident in the murals, paintings, and prints that follow. *Source: Jenny Roesel Ustick.*



Figure 5: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Run It Up* (detail), 2017. Felted wool, wood, and plaster. This hand-knit, felted cap is displayed on a tilted Liberty Pole. It acts as a complicated flag, representing the hope for freedom that is haunted by the possibility of surrender. The phrase “run it up” and its equally complicated multiple meanings serve at once as a plea to decency, a cynical dismissal, and a celebration of power and greed.



Figure 6: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Run It Up* (detail), 2017. Felted wool, wood, and plaster.

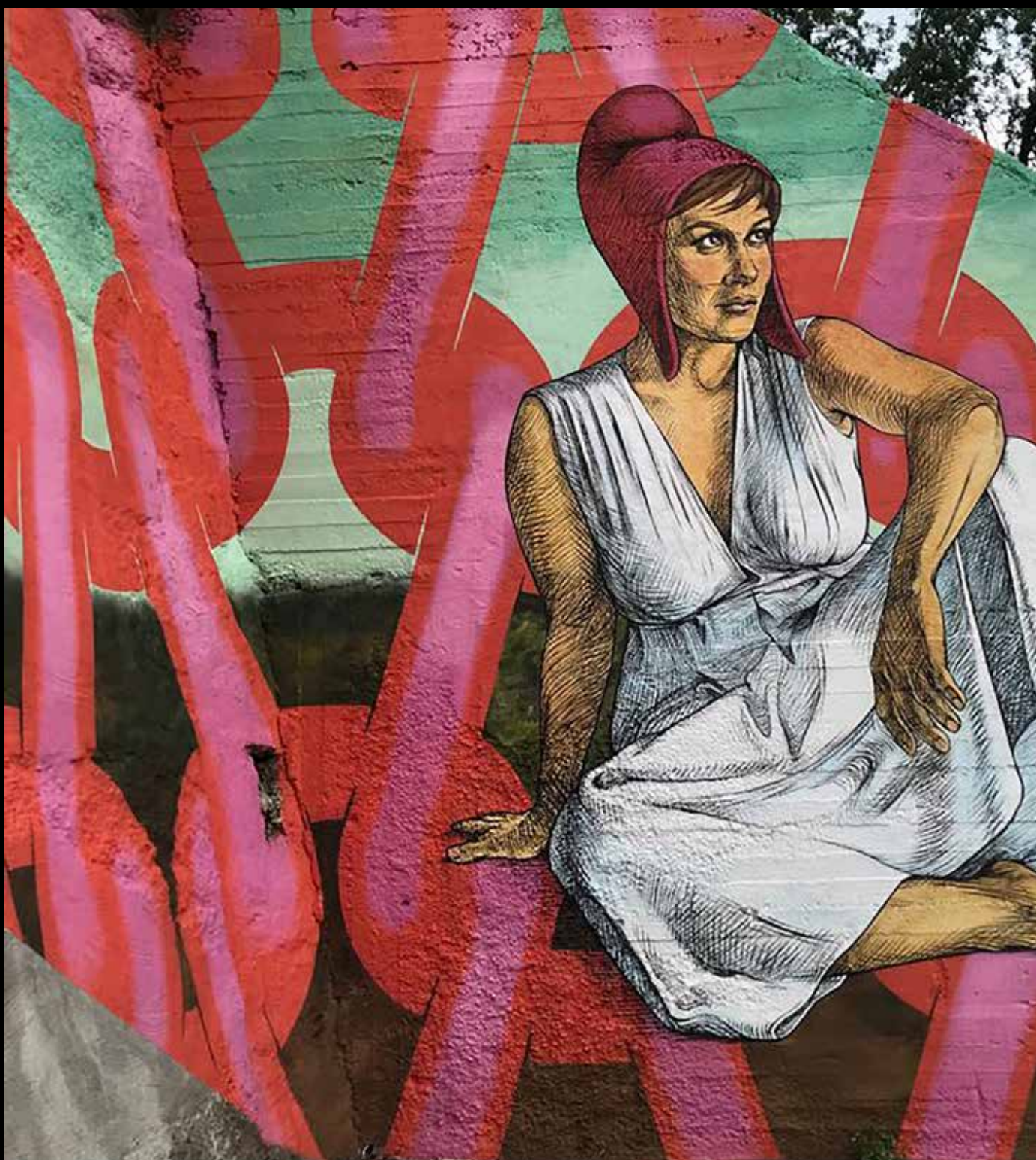




Figure 7: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Reconstruction I* (detail), 2018. Acrylic on mixed masonry wall. Part of the Graniti Murales Residency with Art Project Graniti. Graniti Sicily, Messina, Italy. The background contains a stretched version of the Winslow Homer painting *The Brush Harrow* from the Reconstruction period following the American Civil War. The background is overlaid by a network of knitted stitches that were developed as a motif in 2017.



Figure 8: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Crux*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 162.4 x 162.4 cm.



Figure 9: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Right Side, Wrong Side*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 162.4 x 162.4 cm.



Figure 10: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Reconstruction II*, 2018. Acrylic on panel.





Figure 11: Jenny Roesel Ustick, *Warrior*, 2019. Limited edition screen print, 66 x 50.8 cm. This depiction of Columbia is derived from the Boston Massacre monument at Boston Common, also referred to as the Crispus Attucks monument cast and dedicated post-reconstruction, in 1889.

#murals

#publicArt

#censorship

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Thomas Crawford, *Statue of Freedom*. 1863.

Bio

Jenny Roesel Ustick is associate professor of practice and foundations coordinator in the School of Art at DAAP, University of Cincinnati. She holds an MFA from the same program and a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati. Ustick has become one of the most prominent muralists in her region and has painted around the US. Internationally, she has painted murals in Argentina and Sicily, and continues to expand her reach. Ustick's solo and collaborative studio works have been exhibited in numerous galleries and museum venues that include the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, the Dayton Art Institute, and the Cincinnati Art Museum. Ustick has contributed essays to *The Cincinnati Anthology* and *Still They Persist: Protest Art from the 2017 Women's Marches*. Her work has been featured in *American Quarterly*, the *Huffington Post*, *Hyperallergic*, and *La Sicilia*, as well as several local publications.



DOI: 10.31182/cubic.2022.5.53

CUBIC JOURNAL 2022

#race

#gender

An Encounter in Hong Kong Streets, 60 Years Apart

S. Louisa Wei (text)
Phil M.F. Shek (images)

110–123

Hong Kong has a history punctuated by waves of immigrants and influxes of expats, especially during years of wars, famine, and drastic social changes. The wide wealth gap among different classes contributes to the diverse cityscapes within walking distance of one another. Street photography in the international and multicultural metropolis has continued to fascinate photographers – some sojourning and others rooting. With two sets of photos – from British traveller Nick Howard and Hong Kong native Phil M.F. Shek – laid side by side, this essay questions the meanings generated through the juxtaposition of these images. Since the photo sets were taken in the 1950s and the 2010s respectively, does the time gap make a statement about Hong Kong today?

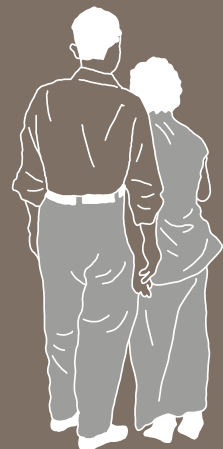
#nick howard

#phil m.f. shek

#hong kong image

#street photography

#documentary photography



This photo essay is inspired by an unlikely encounter of two sets of snapshots in the streets of Hong Kong, taken nearly sixty years apart. The eight monochromic and two-colour photos by Nick Howard captured the city and its people between 1957 and 1958 on 35mm black-and-white and reversal colour film. Howard was a British native who arrived in Hong Kong as a navigator on a Merchant Navy ship¹. He subsequently continued his journey from Southeast Asia to South America before returning to complete his education and becoming a lecturer at Sheffield University. Phil Shek's ten coloured photos were taken between 2014 and 2015 with digital cameras. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Shek grew up in the 1980s and took his first photography lessons in the early 1990s when the Hong Kong economy was soaring. He considers his aesthetics as being rooted in Hong Kong's localism and multiculturalism. All photos in this essay have not been published before, not because they lack artistic qualities, but because, as I hope to prove, their moments are yet to come.

In April 2015, Howard sent me his Hong Kong collection, starting with the image that caught my eye on Facebook. These were the images which, in his words, had some "artistic merits."² The details preserved in all depths of fields stunned me. A curiosity towards and compassion for the subjects shone through these images, reminding me of Hedda Morrison's Hong Kong collection from between 1946 and 1947 (Stokes 2009). The works by both Howard and Morrison fulfil the basic concepts of "documentary photograph" with "people in a public place" (Jardin 3); such visual records of the everyday lives of people in Hong Kong are as valuable as documented moments of catastrophe, even though the former had less circulation in public media before the era of social media. Without Morrison's professional training, Howard's snaps seem more spontaneous. Nevertheless, as Roland Barthes (1980, 4) states in *Camera Lucida*, to pin down the meaning of

photography and to classify it as amateur or professional is challenging (1980, 4).

My communication with Nick Howard started on April 7, 2015, and his last email to me was on August 7, 2016. During the last year of his life, he was fighting cancer. He wrote to me on good days and sent me pictures that he took in Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Cuba.³ When Shek first saw Howard's works, he commented: "It is like *The Double Life of Véronique*."⁴ The 1991 film by Krzysztof Kieslowski features the parallel stories of two identical-looking women living in France and Poland. Looking through one hundred scanned prints by Howard and hundreds of digital images of his own, Shek found a picture to "match" every shot by Howard. As a professional photographer, Shek has exhibited his works in collections according to techniques or themes. However, he had never thought of exhibiting his street snaps as they are his own "visual diaries." He enjoys examining his daily snaps, finding details captured by his camera but omitted by his eyes. He examined Howard's photos in the same way, feeling touched by the signs, buildings, people, their expressions, and motions that happened before his time. "Hidden narratives" began to emerge during this reviewing process, testament to the striking power of the photographic medium to document the past.

Shek observes a mild sort of orientalism in Howard's images, but I believe "snapshots" may be considered to "resist incorporation into colonial narratives" (Widdis 2018, 181). With this difference in interpretation in mind, I turned to Howard's biography. Phil Turner describes Howard as an eyewitness to "revolution around the world in the 1950s," encountering a bloodless coup in Indonesia, the Argentinians' support of Eva Peron, and Bay of Pigs attack in Cuba (Turner 2016). When he arrived in Hong Kong in 1957, the city did not have a political drama for him to capture. In place of an artistic ambition or an ideological

motivation, Howard's endless days "staring at empty horizons" formed his unusual creative urge: "when we reached a harbour, I was enthralled by the people around and carried a camera with me everywhere." His fellow Chinese crewmen pointed out to him "the best places to visit when ashore," so he had "considerable self-confidence" when roaming the streets of Hong Kong.⁵

Howard had wanted to give his Hong Kong images back to the Hong Kong people before his passing. When we juxtapose his and Shek's images of people in Hong Kong streets sixty years apart, the city's drastic changes are apparent. Howard photographed the people in Hong Kong a decade after World War II, an innocent age when life was still hard for most people. By contrast, Shek, in his recent photos evokes a pervasive fin-de-siècle atmosphere. Each set of images has its complexity and ambiguity, but they exhibit a striking similarity when compared to one another. Professional and amateur photographers in Hong Kong used to pursue artistic expression as the highest ideal. Today, however, we value documentary photographs as an equally significant heritage. The miraculous encounter of Howard and Shek is a reminder that yesterday will wait for us somewhere tomorrow.

Acknowledgements

In memory of Nick Howard (1933–2016).



Figure 1: Nick Howard, *Little Helpers*, 1957/58.





Figure 2a (previous page, top) Nick Howard, *Mother and Daughter*, 1957/58.

Figure 4a (top): Nick Howard, *Men at Kowloon Dock*, 1957/58.

Figure 2b (previous page, bottom): Phil Shek, *Mother and Daughter, Lai Chi Kwok Road, Kowloon*, 2015.

Figure 4b (bottom): Phil Shek, *Women at Star Ferry Pier, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon*, 2013.

Figure 3a (previous page, middle left): Nick Howard, *Party in the Yard*, 1957/58.

Figure 3b (previous page, middle right): Phil Shek, *Party at My Garden, Kowloon Tong*, 2014.



Figure 5a (top): Nick Howard, *A Couple at the Mid-level, Hong Kong Island*, 1957/58.

Figure 5b (bottom): Phil Shek, *A Couple at the Peak, Hong Kong Island*, 2013.







Figure 6a (page 117, top): Nick Howard, *Looking at the Ship*, 1957/58.

Figure 8b (opposite, middle left): Phil Shek, *Hanging out after School*, Lai Chi Kok Station, Kowloon, 2014.

Figure 6b (page 117, middle left): Phil Shek, *Man Looking Away*, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, 2015.

Figure 9a (opposite, middle right): Nick Howard, *Rickshaw Man*, Tsim Sha Tsui Bus Station, Kowloon, 1957/58.

Figure 7a (page 117, middle right): Nick Howard, *Boys after School*, 1957/58.

Figure 9b (opposite, bottom): Phil Shek, *Recycle Woman*, Wan Chai, Hong Kong Island, 2013.

Figure 7b (page 117, bottom): Phil Shek, *Boys at Sheung Shui Station*, Kowloon, 2013.

Figure 10a: Nick Howard, *Fashionable Ladies*, 1957/58.

Figure 8a (opposite, top): Nick Howard, *Game after School*, 1957/58.

Figure 10b: Phil Shek, *Shopping Ladies*, Shun Shui Po, Kowloon, 2015.



Figure 11a: Nick Howard, *A Flipped Umbrella*, Kai Tak Airport, Kowloon, 1957/58



Figure 11b: Phil Shek, *A Flipped Umbrella, Mong Kok, Kowloon, 2014*

Notes

- 1 According to Phil Turner, the British Merchant Navy was non-military and crewed by a few British officers and Chinese men doing all the work.
- 2 Howard used these words to describe the photo he sent to me on 12 April 2015, in an attachment titled "Notes to Louisa".
- 3 In bad days, he was in and out of the hospital, Phil Shek and I bought air tickets to see him in November 2016, but he passed away in September. We still travelled to Sheffield. We met his wife Jenny, listened to his interview with BBC, and went through his papers held at Sheffield University Library. This essay is in memory of the sixth year of his passing.
- 4 These words and later quotes from Phil Shek are from exchanges we had over email and messages.
- 5 See note 2.

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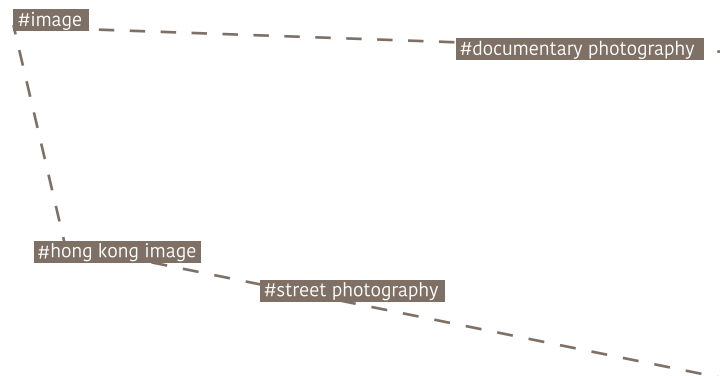
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Bio

Dr. S. Louisa Wei is an associate professor at the City University of Hong Kong and a documentary film director. She writes extensively on women's cinema and Chinese-language documentaries as an academic and critic. Her documentary films have received positive reviews and reportage from major media like *The Hollywood Reporter* and BBC.

Phil M.F. Shek is a photographic artist who focuses on the documentary attribute of the photographic medium. In his work, he explores the photo medium's potentials from traditional aesthetics to immersive digital technology. He is now an instructor of photography and visual communication in the School of Creative Media at the City University of Hong Kong.

#people

#nick howard

#phil m.f. shek



DOI: 10.31182/cubic.2022.5.54

CUBIC JOURNAL 2022

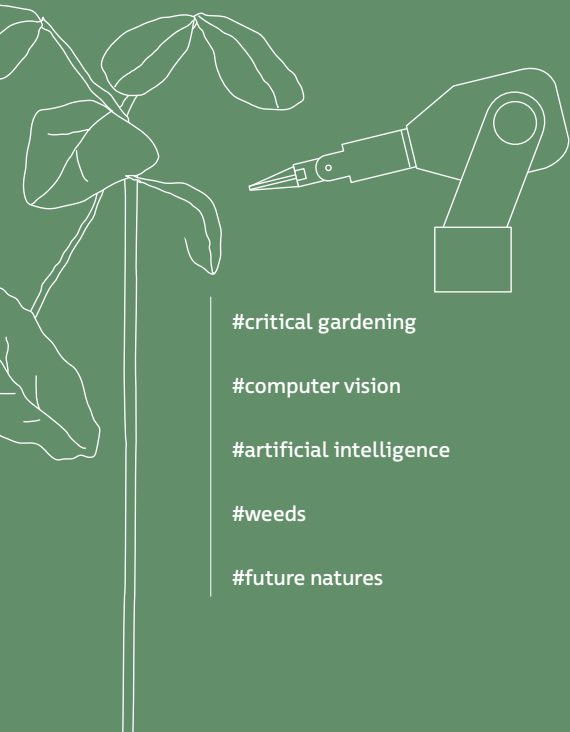
The Algorithmic Gardener's Field Guide to Pulling Weeds

Shannon McMullen
Fabian Winkler

124–135

Teach a robot to pull a weed. What sounds like a straightforward task comprises an intricate set of actions and complicated ideas of nature. Translating a culturally-defined, ambiguous object ('a weed') into successful machine code directions requires human-machine negotiation and reveals emerging nature-technology relationships.

The field guide provided here contains instructions for a Taurus dexterous robot, commonly employed in tele-surgery and roadside bomb diffusion. The soybean plant, also addressed in the code and images, is an intentional choice based on the combination of agro-environmental, technological and political issues involved in its cultivation globally. As an artistic experiment based on existing technologies, this visual and prose-based algorithmic narrative asks readers to think about how culture and politics are embedded in computer code, and how both algorithms and data structures may manifest themselves in future environmental and agricultural realities.



#critical gardening

#computer vision

#artificial intelligence

#weeds

#future natures

For over a decade we have worked in a collaborative art and research practice we define as *critical gardening*. Inspired by cultural and science studies scholar Chandra Mukerji's study of the gardens of Versailles in the seventeenth century (Mukerji 1997), critical gardening is based on the idea that gardens express ideologies, power structures and cultural concepts. Gardens are active sites for shaping narratives about nature, culture and technology. Through our location at a large research university in the Midwestern United States with strong engineering and agriculture programs, and surrounded by fields of industrial farming, the soybean plant - a contemporary nature-technology hybrid - has become a "central evocative object" (Turkle 2007) in our art practice. This one plant is at the centre of a complex web of interrelated issues that we have critically explored in our works:¹ from historical agricultural and industrial utopias in Henry Ford's *Farm Chemurgy* (Shurtleff & Aoyagi 2020) and his famous *Soybean Car* (the Henry Ford) to contemporary intersections of nature and technology in GMO research; from transnational trade relationships and issues of national security (Pollan 2008) to environmental challenges caused by monocultures and climate change.

The work presented on the following pages grew from imagining the future of robots in farming, following an opportunity to work with an anthropomorphic robot. The two-armed Taurus robot with its stereoscopic computer vision, precision pincers and high level of dexterity is commonly employed in tele-surgery and road-side bomb diffusion (SRI International). At around the same time we started experimenting with the Taurus robot, we were intrigued by an advertisement for Hallex GT, the first "herbicide with the work ethic of a machine," (Syngenta United States) as advertised by agricultural technology company Syngenta. We wondered: how might a robot be taught to identify and pull a weed? From the very beginning of the project, we were fascinated by the complexities and cultural idiosyncrasies

involved in trying to define a weed and the possible pitfalls (more so than the promises advertised by Syngenta) of translating it into computer code. In thinking about weeds, we were influenced by the work of Austrian artist Lois Weinberger – who creates gardens with weeds that reflect cultures, political systems and environmental conditions (Weinberger 2009) – and the writing of cultural geographer Tim Cresswell, who explores a materialist and experientialist understanding of weeds as metaphors (Cresswell 1997). In this context, conceivable divergent outcomes of the robotic weeding process – including what might be construed as mistakes and failures – could provide insight into cultural and social tensions in the production of technical objects.

Our goal was to foreground the otherwise invisible algorithmic instructions that manifest themselves through the robotic actions. In this process we found the work of computer scientist Paul Dourish helpful, investigating code in both cultural and technical contexts as "a site of material, textual, and representational production." (Dourish 2016). The conceptual code in the form of a visual and prose-based algorithmic narrative introduced on the following pages is the result of these investigations. Choosing this alternative and experimental format, we ask the reader to think about how culture and politics are coded into algorithms and data structures, and how computer code may manifest itself in future environmental, robotic labour and agricultural realities (Rhee 2018)². Part 01 of this work explores algorithmic seeing with a focus on the difficulties of translating a culturally ambiguous concept into certain algorithmic "truths" that the robot can use to distinguish between wanted and unwanted plants (Kimmerer 2013).³ Questioning the construction of "truths" and investigating human-guided machine learning, it shows that human bias can turn to algorithmic bias through the choice of training data sets (O'Neil 2016). What is wanted in one context may not be wanted in another. Part 02 centres on the

act of gardening, investigating further our human and (as an extension) algorithmic understanding of plants, for example in the final decision about what to do with the pulled weeds. While our goal was to spotlight the consequences of and dilemmas within otherwise invisible robotic action code, we deliberately meant our algorithmic narrative to elicit questions, rather than provide definitive answers. We hope that by asking those questions, we inspire readers to think about future natures and the role that algorithms and machines may play in them. What will make these future natures desirable and what will make them less desirable? (Dunne & Raby 2013)

In the summer of 2020, we worked with Purdue Department of Theatre graduate students Elizabeth Heaney, Bryan Montemayor and Skyler Tipton on a voice track for the video companion to this field guide to create a dialogue of human and machine voices while showing the Taurus robot identifying and picking weeds in small mobile gardens of soybean plants.

Acknowledgements

The technological steps alluded to here are McMullen_Winkler's interpretations of the explanations offered by industrial engineering PhD student Glebys T. Gonzalez in October 2018 and the experiments in image processing carried out for this project by electrical and computer engineering ME student Arjun Narang in 2016. We thank them for their generous contributions and willingness to participate in this project. Also, this work would not have been possible without the continued support of Dr. Juan Wachs and Purdue University's Intelligent Systems and Assistive Technologies Lab.

All abstractions, omissions and oversimplifications are the fault of the artists alone.



Figure 1: The Taurus dexterous robot prototype addressed in the following algorithmic narrative is equipped with stereoscopic computer vision, two dexterous arms with seven degrees of freedom, and precision pincer appendages able to grip, pull and cut. *Source: Shannon McMullen & Fabian Winkler*



Scan the QR code to watch the video and listen to the song discussed in this contribution.


```
1 // Look at the garden. What do you see?
2 Create an image data set by recording a garden of
3 soybean plants and weeds over a specified period of time.
4
5 Go through the camera images pixel by pixel, line by line
6 separating background pixels from weed pixels by comparing
7 their color.
8 // What is a plant (background)?
9 // What else do you see in the background?
10
11 Based on this separation, have humans edit and confirm the
12 weed pixels and the background pixels.
13 These labels will be called "ground truth."
14 /* The truth is that plants can be many things. They can be
15 beautiful or architectural. They can provide food or
16 shade. They can be delicious or poisonous. Plants help
17 the earth breathe.
18 */
19
20 Split the labeled images into two groups:
21     a training set and
22     a testing set.
23
24 Discover relationships that define weed pixels:
25     use structured prediction on the training set to
26     label weed pixels based on the distribution of
27     features around them.
28 /* Do you recognize any weeds? A weed is an unwanted plant,
29 or a plant out of place. A weed might also be considered
30 invasive and take over your garden – and your neighbor's
31 garden. A weed is sometimes a metaphor; so is a plant.
32 */
33
34 Use the trained prediction algorithm on the testing set
35 and compare the predicted labels with the ground truth
36 labels.
37 If there is a high level of success in identifying weeds:
38     proceed to Part 2.
39 Else:
40     repeat lines 11–27 until you are very certain and the
41     humans approve
42
43 /* Do you see a weed?
44 Are you sure it is a weed? How sure are you?
45 A bouquet of weeds is not considered a welcome gift, but a
46 bouquet of wildflowers well might be.
47 */
48
49
50
```


Part 2

Algorithmic Gardening

```
51 // You are now ready to work with live plants.
52 Use depth information from the stereoscopic camera to
53 position correctly labeled pixels in 3D space and create a
54 point cloud model of the weed.
55
56
57 Generate the coordinates of a picking point for the weed
58 by comparing the 3D point cloud model of the weed against
59 a model with an annotated picking point.
60 // Humans will help you here, by supplying models of weeds
61 // with the best points for picking them indicated.
62
63
64 Use a path planning algorithm to move the most
65 advantageously positioned arm to the picking point.
66 While doing so:
67     minimize energy expenditure,
68     follow the smoothest path available and
69     avoid navigating through the soybean plants.
70 /* Pulling weeds is a tricky business. Grabbing them under
71 the leaves at the base where the stems emerge from the
72 ground is best. But, if you pull too fast, with too much
73 force, and the ground is not soft, you will only snap the
74 greens from the roots. In many cases, new stems and leaves
75 will sprout from the remaining root.
76 */
77
78
79 Close grippers around the picking point, pull up and move
80 the arm to a defined drop point for the weed.
81 Avoid moving through the soybean plants.
82 Wait for further instructions.
83 /* What should you do with the weeds that have been pulled?
84 Are they:
85     trash?
86     compost?
87     food?
88 Fresh dandelion greens, for example – untainted by
89 herbicide or lawn chemicals – are tasty and nutritious in
90 salads. Bunnies love both the leaves and the yellow
91 flowers and so do insects and pollinators.
92 */
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
```



Notes

- 1 For an overview of McMullen_Winkler's artworks exploring the soybean plant as evocative object see: McMullen_Winkler. Gardens and Machines. Accessed 13 November 2020. <http://www.gardensandmachines.com>
- 2 In this sense, our work could be considered an engagement with the robotic imaginary as defined by Rhee. Her work critically examines the gendered and racialised ideas of care labour informing robotic development in the context of the United States.
- 3 This book provides a deep understanding of the complexity inherent in relations between nature, science and culture.

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Bio

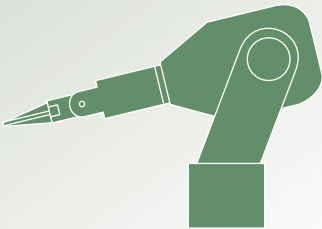
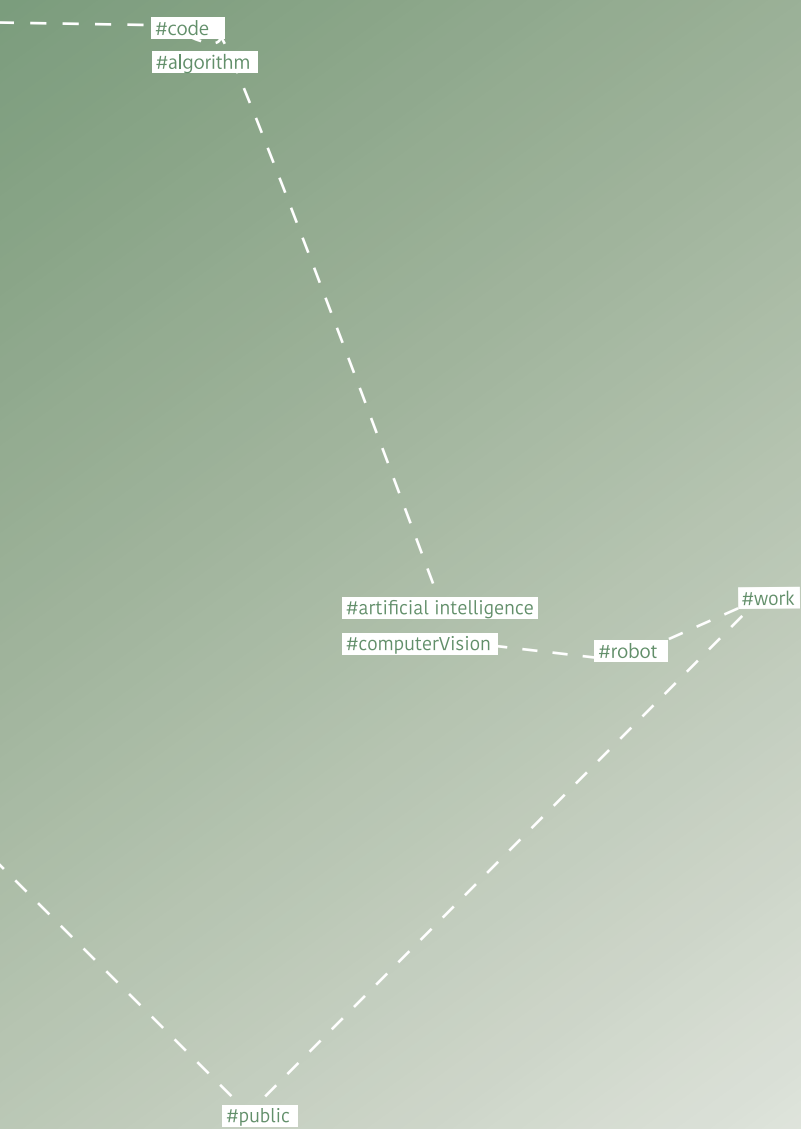
Shannon McMullen, PhD and **Fabian Winkler, MFA** are interdisciplinary artists and researchers working together as McMullen_Winkler. They combine their backgrounds in new media art and sociology to produce collaborative artworks at the intersection of nature and technology, a research and creative practice they define as critical gardening. Shannon McMullen holds a joint faculty appointment in Art and Design and American Studies at Purdue University. Fabian Winkler holds a faculty appointment in Art and Design. Both teach in the Patti and Rusty Rueff School of Design, Art and Performance at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN, USA where they co-direct the area of Electronic and Time-Based Art.

Their work has been shown internationally at venues such as the National Museum of China, Beijing; International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, NL; Science Gallery Dublin, Ireland; Art Center Nabi, Seoul, Korea; ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany and the Spark Festival, Minneapolis, USA. They have also published articles in *Leonardo* (MIT Press), *Plurale – Zeitschrift für Denkversionen* (Berlin, Germany), *Media-N* (Journal of the New Media Caucus), *Senses and Society* (Berg Publishers) and *The Environmentalist* (Springer, New York). Their large-scale investigation of *Images of Nature* at the intersection of art, engineering and science was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation.

#weed

#criticalGardening

#future natures



Rhizomatic Telling –Recognising the Mechanism of *Small Stories* in a Community Organisation Process

Jen Yoohyun Lee

136–143

As an unforeseen pandemic disturbs our livelihoods and forces us to change our boundaries, small talks arise and disperse in fleeting moments within and beyond physical perimeters. The notion of singular truth (*metanarrative*: Lyotard 1984) has evidently been overridden in this time. *Small stories* (Bamberg 2004, 2006; Georgakopoulou 2006; 2007) are heavily embedded as part of the trajectory of social interactions. As fragments of talk-in-interactions, they are recontextualised and reaffirmed as narratives along multiple threads of conversations across time. Presented in this article is a microstudy implementing the lens of small stories on communication activities taking place among members of a specific location-based community. This is a part of the ongoing PhD research on bottom-up community organisation through the alignment of community-specific narratives and positioning of socially engaged art practitioners. The microstudy on communal conversations on an instant messaging app looks into how multiple realities are reconfigured by virtue of multiple tellers and modes of telling.

#small stories

#telling

#narrative mechanism

#multiplicity

#community organisation

In its contemporary form, knowledge outshines science because the point of legitimacy is always in flux. Consensus – the mode of legitimization – is variegated depending on the customary knowledge. That is to say, points of understanding and consensus are determined by cultures and contexts. Acknowledged upon the assembly of cultures and contexts, narratives become the quintessential form of customary knowledge (Lyotard 1984). This humanistic mode of knowing and doing focuses on the process that evolves through interactions (Gadamer 1997). The narrative turn of the 1970s and 1980s acknowledged that human subjectivity imposes itself on facts taken to be objective. Nevertheless, studies in the realm of social science involving narratives readily take account of those elicited independently in clinical situations, in which the narrators are provided with the opportunities for reflection and the composed accounting practice. This article takes the perspective of social constructionism that realities are collectively cultivated from interactions between multiple social actors (Fairhurst & Grant 2010). It is also in assent with Michael Bamberg's (2006) perspective that narratives from interview settings are hardly everyday phenomena and that the process of retelling – packaged and performed – lead to inevitable distortions and prematurely settled truths. Stressing the value of evolving decentralised knowledge construction processes, the emergence of narratives in interaction involves acquainting oneself with different others and an affirmation of differences. This provides a context for the reassessment of power dynamics and pluriversal knowledge construction (Escobar 2018).

The idea of narrative as talk-in-interaction (Georgakopoulou 2007) leads to the recognition of small stories in our daily experience, which defy the prematurely fixed overpowering perception supporting and supported by big-scale narratives. Small stories (Bamberg 2006; Georgakopoulou 2006; 2007) are found as part of interactions, that is to say, not freestanding as a self-contained

unit, and readily available for recontextualisation with a sense of immediacy. How do multiple threads of narratives arise, circulate and disperse in our everyday life? How do these influence our understanding and construction of communal identity? What will become visible when everyday communicative interactions are examined through the lens of small stories?

This microstudy looks at a community located in a suburban area of South Korea. This particular community is presently undergoing a shift in identity and a number of individuals deliberately constructed an online platform to connect with all the community members. In order to read how community-specific narratives are formed, an overview was made of a series of communicative interactions taking place on an instant messaging app amongst some 360 members in a period of four months. The study examines how the aspects of communication that are considered mundane and everyday aspects which are not normally regarded as being particularly interesting or tellable, co-articulate strands of narratives and form bottom-up decision-making processes in community organisation. Amongst miscellaneous threads of conversations such as sharing of news, requests for other residents, enquiries and cacophonic discussions, the narrative for the need to re-name the community and how they would like to design the process for change has been co-articulated as a strong continuous thread of discussion across fragments of messages. The community members discussed how the change of community name would help them regain their sense of ownership and self-confidence. Based on the discussion that unfolded through the exchange of messages, the community members have since been coordinating a series of procedures for the residents to submit new name suggestions, organise a committee within the community and re-design multi-level decision-making processes. The decision-making on this matter is currently going through an iterative process.

A partial visualisation of coded messages discloses multiple, yet consistent threads of narratives submerged in streaming messages generated by multiple individuals (Figure 1). Different colours exhibit different narrative threads. Blue represents the narrative thread on re-naming. At this point, what becomes apparent is that the unnoticed small stories in the passing form a rhizomatic structure of temporary consensus within the community. As the study continues to follow the unfolding as well as co-construction of narrative threads composed of small stories, a number of analyses, such as thematic analysis and sentiment analysis, will be conducted to better understand the mechanism of small stories and their social implications for community organisation. The overall goal of this research is to understand the dynamics of narratives, power and knowledge and to apply the lens of small stories to the cultivation of sensitivity for context-specific socially engaged art practice.

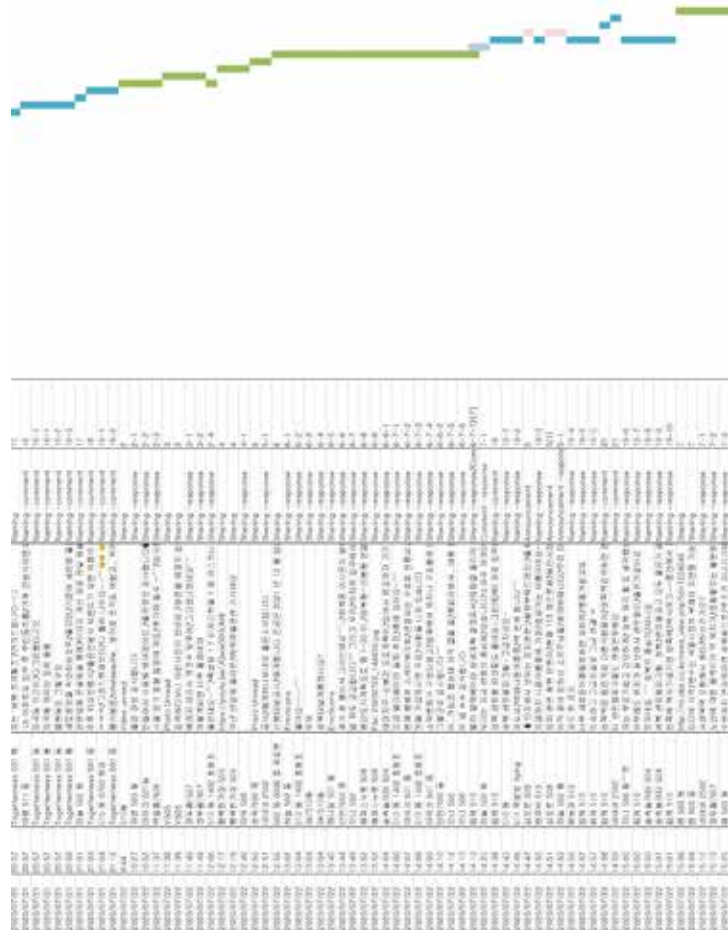
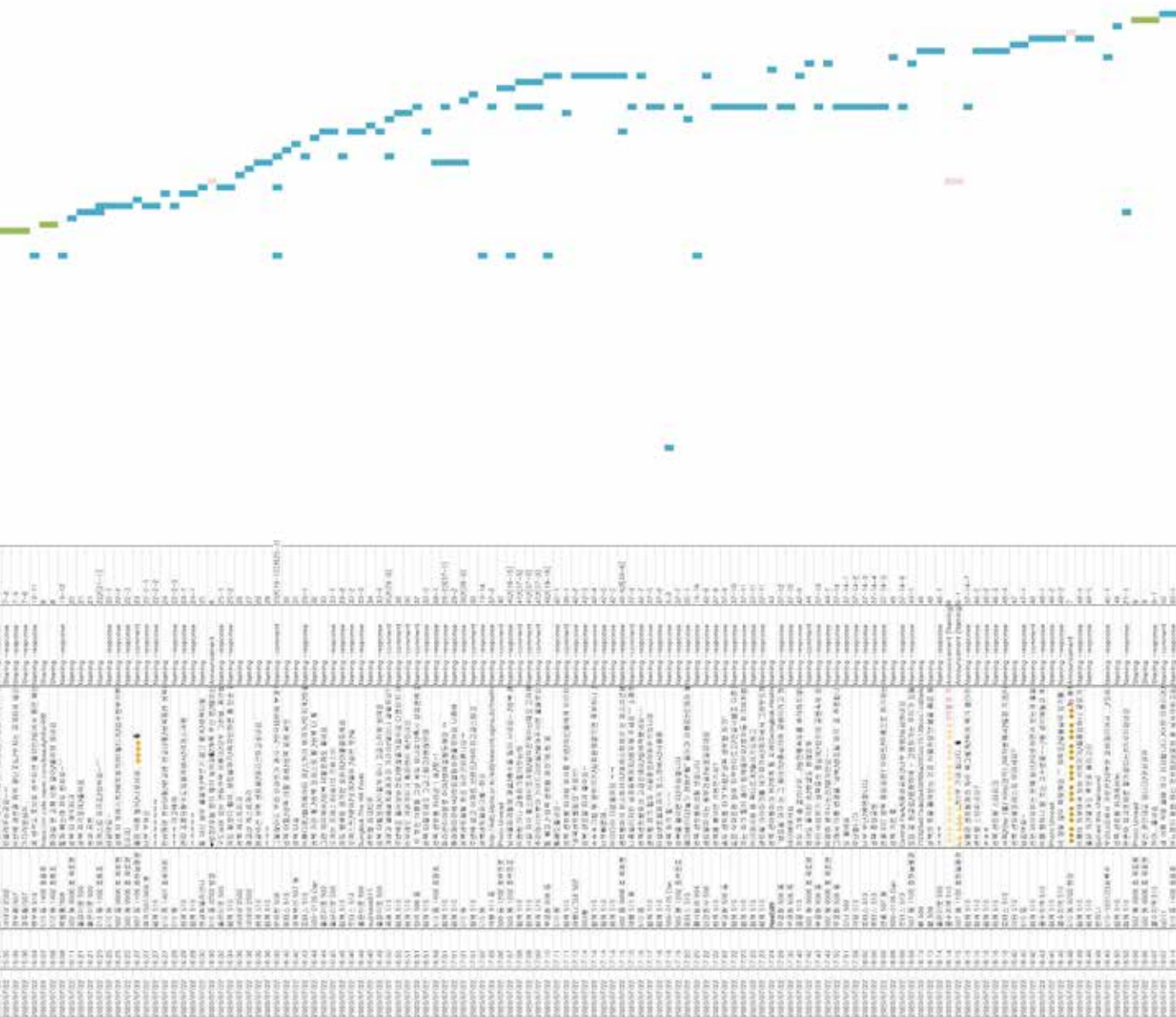
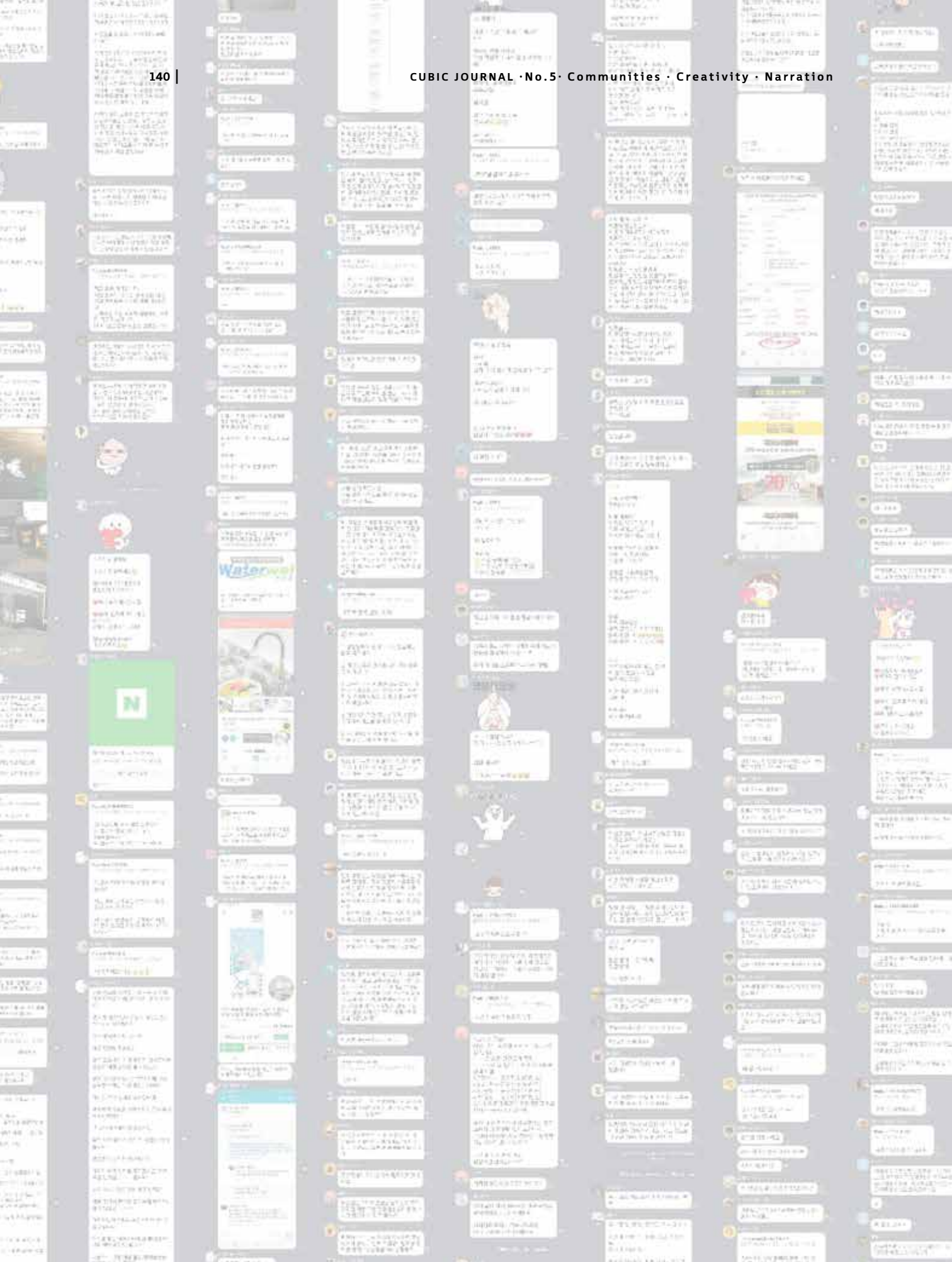


Figure 1: Colour-coded messages disclose multiple yet consistent threads of narratives arising amongst local residents in an instant messaging app. The upper and lower diagrams are different parts along the timeline of the same horizontal diagram. *Source: Jen Yoohyun Lee.*





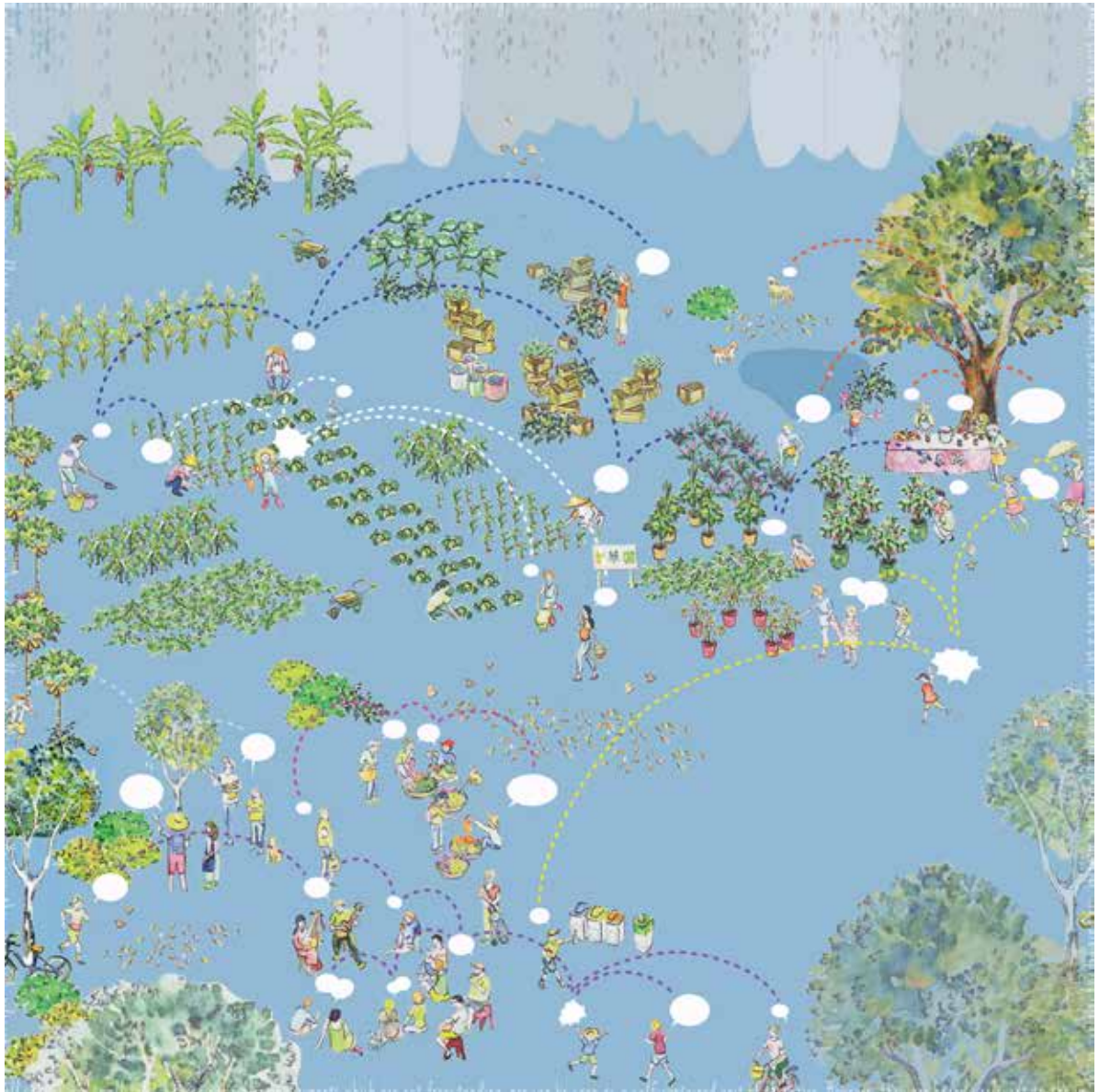


Figure 2 (previous page): Messages exchanged amongst local residents in an instant messaging app. *Source: Jen Yoohyun Lee.*

Figure 3 (top): Conceptual visualisation of small stories dynamics occurring in a location-based community. *Source: Jen Yoohyun Lee.*

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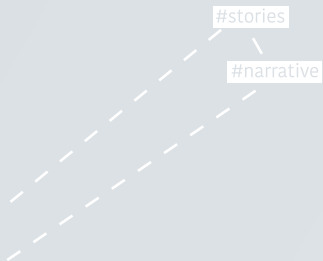
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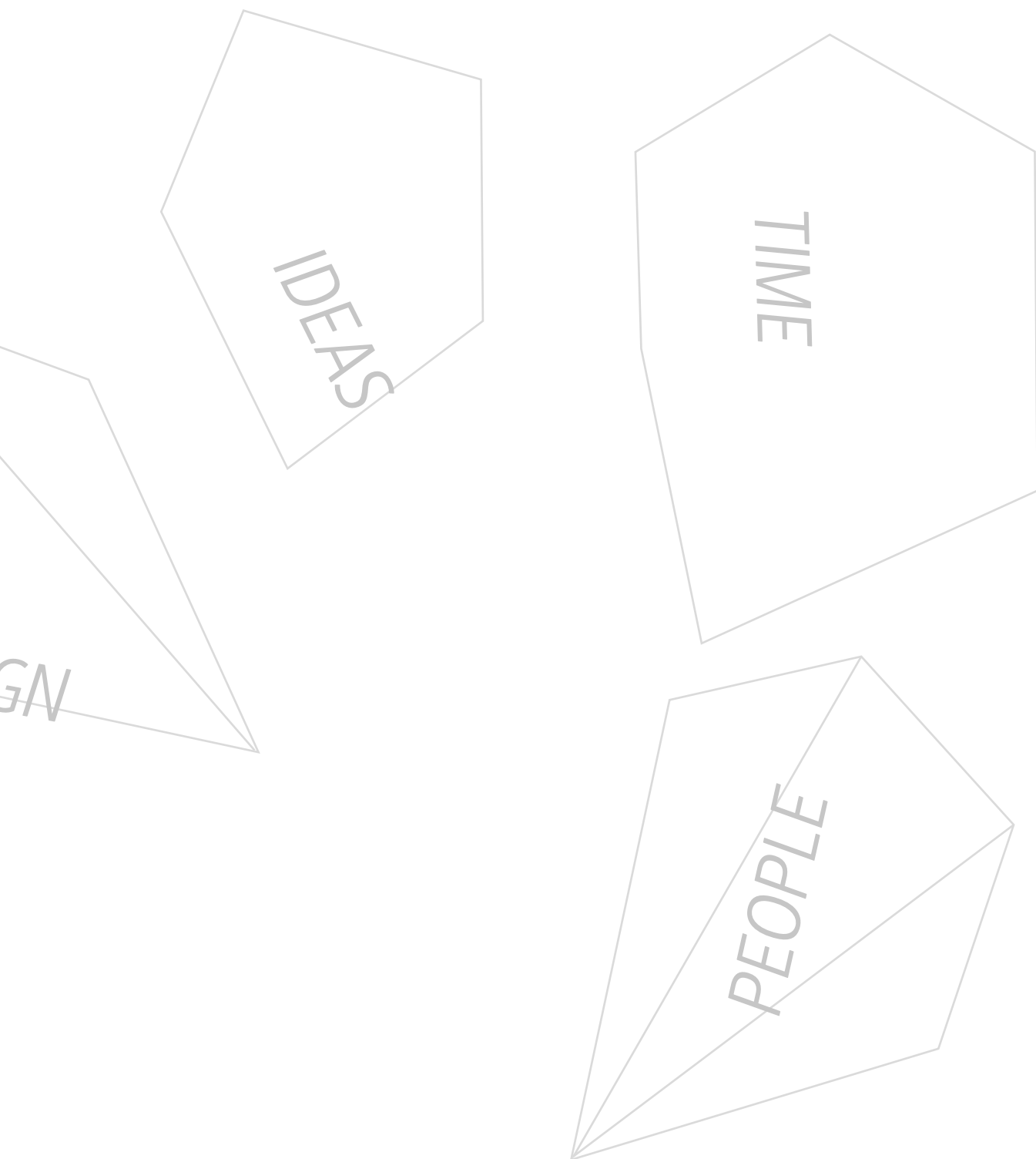
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ISSN: 2589-7098 (Print)

ISSN: 2589-7101 (Online)

ISBN: 978-94-92852-63-2

Publisher

Jap Sam Books, Prinsenbeek, the Netherlands

www.japsambooks.nl

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Cubic Journal operates on a double blind peer review process, unless mentioned otherwise. All work is checked against plagiarism before publication.

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