

EDITOR'S NOTE

As we are crossing the threshold of a new relationship with technology, this issue of Art Review Oxford explores the history and future of decolonising computing. With the present inundation, misuse, and misunderstanding of the term “artificial intelligence” it is helpful to unpack its origins. Coined by researcher John McCarthy in 1956, McCarthy choose the term as he wanted to avoid the common term of the period “cybernetics” advocated by Norbert Wiener. Hence the evocative “artificial intelligence” can be ascribed to petty academic disputes as much as a research direction. The casual nature of ascribing this term to “logic-focused” computing hopefully helps to take a step toward dispelling the aura around its origins. This issue attempts to take a wider horizon of computing to explore the social, political, economic forces that both develop the mesh of software and hardware as well as its subsequent impacts. If we want to continue living with this machines with their own inbuilt bias, discrimination, and racism encoded in the software as well as the mining/extraction/assembly of the machines, what different relationship could we establish with computing and toward what different ends?

The issue opens with artist Sohin Hwang’s historical research into socialist computing from the global south via Project Cybersyn. Initiated under the government of Salvador Allende in Chile it adapted a distributed decision model to governance more reflexive, accountable and responsive to diverse groups, the computer mainframe was destroyed in the CIA-backed bombing of the presidential palace and coup. The project demonstrates that alternative forms of computing have existed and can be developed again.

Xenia Benivolski is in conversation with Oglala Lakota artist Suzanne Kite to discuss her research and practice on ways in which Indigenous methodology can be integrated in reorganising an approach to and development of computing. Kite argues that computing in fact can't be decolonised, it needs to be "reinvented." Anna Nolda Nagele investigates the profound impact of wearable technology on body rhythms, while Frank Wasser attempts a decolonisation process while typing. The artist duo João Enxuto and Erica Love unpack the ideologies of International Art English and ChatGPT.

Denise Ferreira da Silva approach to philosophy as a technology can also help us consider a new approach to computing. Da Silva writes, "let us start to use these tools with caution, aware of their capacity to reproduce racial violence and at the same time let us move on(ward) to assemble tools with which to think and live in the world otherwise."¹

Jason Waite

¹ Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal Beyond the Limits of Critique," *philoSOPHIA*, vol 8, no. 1, Winter 2018: 38.

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{Art}

Review//Oxford.7

Decolonising.computing

Vitality of Systems: Project Cybersyn and Socialist Computing Ideologies in Chile

////// Sohin Hwang

Chilean Fernando Flores and British cybernetician Stafford Beer designed Project Cybersyn, a networked information system developed in the context of economic reform in the early 1970s in Chile. The reform was led by President Salvador Allende (in office 1970-1973), the first democratically elected socialist president in history. The system, based on Beer's own Viable Systems Model [VSM], aimed at creating a real time information feed and the logistics for making decisions with a communication structure that would contribute to a realisation of a democratic and horizontal society. Despite the limited resources available in the economic and political context, the technology of the system was advanced for the time. While the project's ambition grew to include both economic and political transformation, it was abruptly terminated by the military coup in 1973 led by General Augusto Pinochet.

This project is considered important among historians for being a rare example of governmental utilisation of a computational information management system in the Third-World during the Cold War. The VSM was considered to have the capacity to achieve a utopian structure for making economic and political decisions. However, my observation is that, while the history of technology provides a great deal of insights in understanding the social and political context and the legacy of the system, as well as related facts and events, it does not provide an account of how the system was experienced and felt even potentially. The feeling is one of the keys to understanding the system as an entity.

The Context

The Republic of Chile underwent a series of socialist reforms during Allende's rule. This prompted the US government, which was worried about the spread of socialism and communism in the area, to carry out covert operations against both the economic and political reform and to promote economic and social unrest in Chile. The Chilean government felt that in order to mitigate the effect of the economic sabotage, to continue its economic reforms successfully, and eventually to advance the autonomy and resilience of its economy, they needed more robust and efficient management systems. Fernando Flores, who was the general technical manager of the State Development Corporation (CORFO) at the time, recommended Stafford Beer to the President, and after the initial meeting between the President and Beer, Project Cybersyn, which would later become a part of the larger project, was born to meet these economic challenges.

The goal of the economic reform programme was to transform Chile's capitalist economy to a socialist one, but, unlike the Soviet Union, Allende's government wanted to achieve a peaceful transfer through existing forms of democratic practice. This unique position was called "La via chilena al socialismo" (The Chilean Way to Socialism). The reform plan, which was easily passed by the National Congress, included nationalisation of large-scale industries such as the copper industry and banking, government administration of health care and education, a programme of free milk for children in schools and underprivileged towns, an expansion of land redistribution, and an increase in the employment rate. Among these, the reform in consumer goods, light industry, building materials, and heavy industry was overseen by CORFO¹. Project Cybersyn was born in the context of CORFO, which felt the need for more efficient management of the ever-growing number of production units in Chile. By the end

¹ Reforms regarding agriculture and land redistribution were overseen by the Agrarian Reform Corporation. Reforms regarding copper mining—which was the largest source for earning foreign currency—were under the Chilean National Copper Corporation (CODELCO). This structure later limited Cybersyn's effectiveness in the Chilean economy, as Cybersyn was developed under the supervision of CORFO, which was not in charge of some major industries such as copper mining.

of 1971, CORFO was overseeing nationalised companies including 12 of the 20 largest ones at the time. The amount of information from these companies increased rapidly. This effort was impeded by the fact that, as the political polarisation surrounding the issues of economic and social unrest grew, many trained managers did not support the government. Flores decided to use computer technology for this management task, and made that suggestion to the Presidential Palace.

Stafford Beer was an expert in Operations Research or Management Cybernetics imported from the UK². Despite the fact that Chile's computer technology had a long history, the computing resources available at the time were extremely limited. Its history started with IBM opening a Santiago branch in 1929. Until the 1960s, the use of computers was mainly devoted to record keeping and calculations related to censuses and taxation. Imports of computers during the Allende administration were extremely restricted as a result of the economic boycott by the United States, which produced most of the computers at the time. When the Chilean government started Project Cybersyn in 1971, there were three mainframe computers in Chile³. Only one mainframe computer was allocated for the project, whereas the project called for more than one computer, ideally one for every plant, so that any vital information for each factory could be processed, which would further increase the amount of information the system had to deal with to control the overall wellbeing of the economy.⁴

² *Operations Research is a field of cybernetics that focuses on the application in the field of organisational management.*

³ *Mainframe computers are a type of advanced computer developed in the 1960s, still used in commerce where the capacity for a large number of transactions is required. The use of mainframe computers decreased with the development of minicomputers in the 1970s. Mainframe computers can process a large number of inputs and outputs, differing from supercomputers, which involves high-speed calculation for scientific and engineering problems.*

⁴ *Pickering, The Cybernetic Brain, 257; Stafford Beer, Brain of the Firm: The Managerial Cybernetics of Organization. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1981 (1972)), 252.*

The schematic of Project Cyberfolk shows Beer's intent to connect the government and the Chilean people directly and make them adapt to each other to maintain the homeostasis of Chilean society. For example, the Chilean people could be informed and trained through audio and visual media, while the government could be informed of people's affective response through the algedonic meter using existing networks such as radio and TV. People would therefore be able to express informed responses, and the government would be able to make informed policy for the people. The affective measure used here was as simple as pointing to the degree of overall happiness. This measure was conceived as an alternative to questionnaires and opinion polls, which could potentially be biased by engineering questions and options. Project Cyberfolk was the last piece of the puzzle for forming a fully recursive VSM structure in Chile. Such a structure was never needed or required in corporate consultancy. Project Cyberfolk was supposed to enable varying levels of horizontal and participatory communication among workers, factory managers, and government officials. It was thought of as a potential solution to the usual conflicts between the centralisation and decentralisation of power.

The Cybersyn system was designed to perform as both a transformer and a stabiliser of the Chilean economy. When in operation, the system recorded data from at least 70 percent of production units under CORFO. However, the project could not go very far, as it was destroyed before its full deployment due to the military coup in 1973. The construction of Opsroom was finished only a few months before the coup and the installation of the Opsroom in the presidential palace took place only three days before the coup. None of the system seems to have been repurposed or used after the coup. Being in the presidential palace, the Opsroom and the computer that contained the programme and data were among the first things that were destroyed as a result of the coup.

While use of the Cybersyn system contributed to improving production activities in its first year, the effectiveness of the indices and the measurements used in Cyberstride was still questionable. The engineers' biggest challenge was the development of CHECO. They were

unsure about its accuracy, and whether an accurate model of the Chilean economy was ever possible.

*Sohin Hwang is an artist based in Cambridge,
Massachusetts.*



How to make art in a Good Way

Suzanne Kite in Conversation with Xenia Benivolski

Suzanne Kite is an award-winning Oglála Lakḥóta artist, composer, and academic. Her scholarship and practice explores contemporary Lakḥóta ontology (the study of beinghood to the Lakḥóta), Artificial Intelligence, and contemporary art and performance. She creates interfaces and arranges software systems that engage the whole body, in order to imagine new ethical AI protocols that interrogate past, present, and future Lakḥóta philosophies. Her interdisciplinary practice spans sound, video, performances, instrument building, wearable artwork, poetry, books, interactive installations, and more. Kite has been working with machine learning techniques since 2017 and developing body interfaces for performance since 2013. Here in conversation with Xenia Benivolski, she talks about ways in which Indigenous methodology can be integrated in the restructuring and reinventing of computational systems and in particular Artificial Intelligence.

Xenia Benivolski

Kite, I know that you just recently finished your PhD, and that much of your thesis concerned the ethics of AI and Indigenous methodology. What was your process?

Suzanne Kite

At the core, questions of my PhD dissertation were along the lines of “how do I make art in a good way?” A ‘good way’ being a fluctuating concept of ethical decision making, informed by Lakota culture, but also a concept that can also be explored from my personal perspective, as an Indigenous artist.

I also interviewed individual Indigenous performance artists, many of whom were diasporic from their homelands. I also did field work on a community level, which meant talking to Lakota people from Oglala and Rosebud communities in South Dakota, (where my family's from). I wanted to explore both broad and local concepts of ethics in art making.

Somewhere in the middle of my PhD I was publishing and speaking a lot about AI. But by the end, it was clear to me that “Artificial Intelligence” doesn't actually exist yet, and what we have is an extension of colonialism and capitalism, containing little meaning on its own. “AI” does a good job of signifying where ethical problems are, but within itself I don't find any answers. So that's why I went back to the question of okay, well, what is a nonhuman? What is artmaking? Where do ethics emerge in hyperlocal communities? I had to re-consider Indigenous and Lakota methodologies for the creation of anything, which could, of course, include AI.

Xenia

You talk about Lakota methodologies as guiding principles for building something like AI: in really practical terms, how do you see that happening?

Kite

Computation is really new. And when it comes to machine learning and the tools that we think of as AI right now, our language models and generative adversarial networks:

those are fairly small and easily marketable and scalable tools. Tools that we now have access to easily. But there have been and will be so many others. And so to me, and my goal with the lab that I'm starting at Bard College is to get away from language and make something new, try to approach something in a new way.

Xenia

I'm curious about this approach: To open up this realm of consciousness without language poses a challenge to what we think of as consciousness or an-other intelligence. How would this other make its presence felt?

Kite

That's why my lab is called Wíhaŋble S'a Lab which means "Dreamer" Lab. It's the result of the interviews I did with artist community members about the different ways in which the ideas came to them. Some people receive visions, some people hear songs. Some people have very vivid dreams. That is where I am trying to center the possibility for co-creation with nonhuman beings, and the potential for intelligence in materials that are seemingly static, such as stones and minerals. For example, minerals that have been used to make parts of technology. I'm not a scientist. I'm an artist, so I can really imagine machine learning tools to be combined with things like Indigenous dreaming practices, and try to imagine a co-creation with those computational tools. That's where I apply Lakota Indigenous methodologies.

Xenia

Is there an inherent optimism in dreaming? As in the idea that collective dreaming can help propel things in a certain direction?

Kite

I work with Afrofuturist Alisha B. Wormsley on our project Black and Indigenous Dreaming Workshops, and we have been making dream tools. And yeah, there's a lot of optimism that comes through those practices. What makes it most optimistic to me is this refusal of knowledge being inaccessible in any way, is that nothing that can be lost, because we are always dreaming. And everybody dreams. All animals dream, probably more nonhumans dream than we are aware of. And this ability to dream means that there's always an open channel to, at the very least, some interesting inspiration, and at the very most, communication beyond our understanding, that refuses the colonial project of cutting off knowledge from ancestors, from nonhumans from other living humans. It says that regardless of genocide, there is always something open.

Xenia

What happens to knowledge that is dreamt or spoken and not recorded? Is it reabsorbed into the acoustics, society, our children? Does it stay "true"?

Kite

I think it's just an exercise in memory, which is like a muscle. And it's just going to require the strengthening of our ability to remember. So many cultures just started writing in the late 1800s. It's so new. Truly exploring non-western epistemologies is the opening up of what is knowable and unknowable through the rejection of solidity or division between truth, belief, and fact. The answer instead might be, what is "true" is what's good for the community as a whole. We know that scientific measurement is impossibly biased. But it doesn't mean stop doing science, it means the epistemological approach to science might not necessarily be the most helpful for every problem.

Xenia

What do you think about the ethics of acquired personhood, or when legal identity becomes attached to certain non-human agents like animals, concepts and places?

I'm asking because personhood is a concept that is rooted in the performance of law. Persona is an old Italian word for mask, from a time where Italians wore masks: not all Italians, only the wealthy men. Not women and not slaves and certainly not anyone else. The idea of the persona is that the mask becomes an object through which you can distance yourself from your responsibilities, and create another identity. They were used in both theater and in the court of law, for privileged protection.

So the intersection of performativity and law starts with the concept of personhood: or rather personhood is born of that union. And that makes me think about the ethics of AI. Are we making artificial entities who will become legal persons and have rights? Is it always about creating servitude? But personhood itself may be problematic at the origin. How do you decolonize that?



Kite

I think that if Western ontology needs terminology to personify nonhuman beings in order to find a modicum of respect for them, then that is an avenue we should explore. And if we can't even respect other human beings then there are deeper problems within Western ontology. There are many techniques by which people have to defend nonhuman beings from state power, capitalism, greed, genocide, and sometimes legal mechanisms are necessary to push back. Most people feel the impending doom of environmental destruction. And AI's relationship to it can be very overwhelming

Computing can't be decolonized. Computing should instead be reinvented. It relies on so many processes of extraction and disrespect for other beings, it is just like other processes that are built on imperialism and genocide. They should not be repaired, they should be destroyed and replaced.

However, in the meantime, there is a necessity for decolonial and anti-racist thought in computation. And I am grateful that conversations around AI open up these lines of thought.

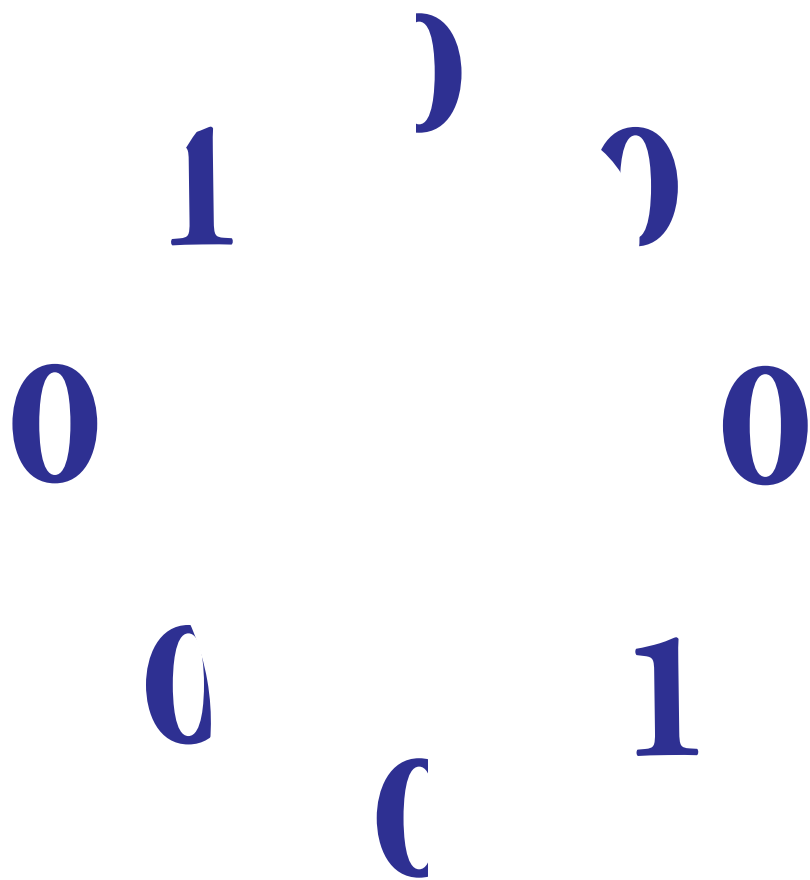
I think that ethics should be decided by communities and it's going to require a lot of policy and law in order to change and force ethics upon companies that develop computation. I hope my work and my artwork can at least inspire some alternative thinking in the field.

Xenia Benivolski writes about sound, music, and contemporary art.



Artist Suzanne
Kite at work.
Photo credit:
Montalvo
Arts
CenterCredi

THE TECHNOLOGIES COLONISING YOUR SLEEP AND DREAMS



The Technologies Colonising Your Sleep and Dreams

Anna Nolda Nagele

“To be colonised is to accept
and buy into the lie of our
worth being connected to
how much we get done.”

- Tricia Hersey

The mass-adoption of sleep-tracking devices such as the Fitbit, Oura, or Apple Watch, to name a few, has an impact on the personal, social and cultural meaning of sleep. By wearing a sensing device day and night, the sleeper is continuously entangled with a network built on normative ideals of good sleep and productive scheduling¹. For a sleep-tracker, sleep is considered a resource that can be harnessed for increased productivity, reflecting the values of late-stage capitalism². Sleep-related products promise the optimisation of the self by putting the positive, self-restorative effects of sleep to work, a notion widely advertised through the sleep industry since the 2000s³. Individuals are promised that changing their sleep habits will lead to being healthier and more productive.⁴

As I am working on my PhD research on wearable sleep-tracking

¹ Stephen Purpura, Victoria Schwanda, Kaiton Williams, William Stubler, and Phoebe Sengers. 2011. *Fit4life: The Design of a Persuasive Technology Promoting Healthy Behavior and Ideal Weight*. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. ACM, Vancouver BC Canada, 423–432.

² Kelly Glazer Baron, Jennifer Duffecy, Mark A. Berendsen, Ivy Cheung Mason, Emily G. Lattie, and Natalie C. Manalo. 2018. *Feeling Validated yet? A Scoping Review of the Use of Consumer-Targeted Wearable and Mobile Technology to Measure and Improve Sleep*. *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 40 (Aug. 2018), 151–159.

³ Benjamin Reiss. 2013. *Sleeping at Walden Pond: Thoreau, Abnormal Temporality, and the Modern Body*. *American Literature* 85, 1 (Jan. 2013), 5–31.

⁴ Megan Brown. 2004. *Taking Care of Business: Self-Help and Sleep Medicine in American Corporate Culture*. *Journal of Medical Humanities* 25, 3 (2004), 173–187.

technology I'm listening to the audiobook of *Rest is Resistance*, a bestseller by Tricia Hersey, artist, activist and founder of The Nap Ministry. She starts the book by saying: "I hope you are reading this while laying down."⁵ I am not. I am listening to the book while on the way to the airport, while getting ready for work in the morning and while doing house chores to fit more work into the 24 hours a day juggling two jobs—a PhD and a long-distance relationship—living the grind-culture she is criticising so heavily throughout the book. Writing from the position of a Black woman, a demographic who are working constantly to uphold a system that does not rewarded them, she poses the vision of rest as a radical way to collectively push back and disrupt capitalism.

Over the past decade, sleep has become of increasing interest in the public domain and in academic research. But these newly propagated ideas about the importance of rest is not a trend. "It is the ancient work of liberation. To frame rest as something Black people are finally reclaiming is to erase the history of so many of my [Tricia Hersey's] ancestors and those living today, who have consistently seen rest as an important part of living in resistance: Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Harriet Tubman [...] There is nothing new about Black death, anti-blackness and oppression."⁶ The experience of Black bodies being pushed to their limits, treated like machines during the transatlantic slave-trade, is closely tied to the advent of capitalism and our current system of labour. To rest was to resist.

Sleep deprivation today is a public health, racial and social justice issue. There is a sleep-gap between Black Americans and White Americans. Sub-optimal sleep duration is linked to a lower socioeconomic status, particular lifestyles, stress and age.⁷ Lower

⁵ Tricia Hersey. 2022. *Rest is Resistance: Free Yourself from Grind Culture and Reclaim Your Life*. London: Aster.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Edward Bixler. 2009. *Sleep and Society: An Epidemiological Perspective*. *Sleep Medicine* 10 (Sept. 2009), 3–6.

socioeconomic status, lower education and lower income are strong predictors of shorter sleep duration intertwined with the effects of individual health- and work-related backgrounds. The same demographics have less access to health-care and work more irregular schedules.⁸ Smoking, heavy drinking, physical inactivity and obesity are associated with both shorter and longer sleep duration.⁹ While these factors are perceived as individual behaviours, they are linked to chronic emotional stress, which is an underlying reason for bad or short sleep, insomnia, and not individual but dependent on external factors.

To face the traumatic colonial history, questioning why we still participate in a system treating human bodies as non-human machines built on white supremacy and exploitation, is a suitable frame of thinking when analysing sleep technology. While personal informatics systems promise to improve their user, to correct bad habits, there is a mismatch between complex social issues such as sleep-deprivation and tech solutions. Society, as well as sleep, is fractured and deeply unequal and sleep-trackers might just be ill-suited to address the complexity of the sleep issues many people are facing. While they might be helpful for the small fraction of people who are the investors, industry leaders and technologists working with personal informatics systems, they are reinforcing the same narratives and norms ultimately rooted in slave trade and colonialism. A whole wellbeing industry supports self-improvement and self-care in the name of capitalist productivity. Ruha Benjamin, sociologist and professor in the Department of African American Studies at Princeton University and author of the book *Race after Technology*, calls for rebuilding technology from the roots up, from the communities that have been mostly impacted by rampant

⁸ Katherine A. Stamatakis, George A. Kaplan, and Robert E. Roberts. 2007. *Short Sleep Duration Across Income, Education, and Race/Ethnic Groups: Population Prevalence and Growing Disparities During 34 Years of Follow-Up*. *Annals of Epidemiology* 17, 12 (Dec. 2007), 948–955.

⁹ Azizi Seixas, Joao Nunes, Collins Airhibenbuwa, Natasha Williams, Caryl James, Girardin Jean-Louis, and S. R Pandi-Perumal. 2015. *Linking Emotional Distress to Unhealthy Sleep Duration: Analysis of the 2009 National Health Interview Survey*. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* (Sept. 2015), 2425.

tech solutionism. “After all, how could those occupying powerful positions in the tech industry—having directly benefited from the racist, sexist, and classist status quo—ever develop tools that would undo those very sources of power?”¹⁰

Structures of inequality play out in the use of sleep-trackers. Redesigning, if we were to do so, sleep-tracking technology from a perspective of rest as resistance to, rather than as a tool of, capitalism might be a way to dream up another world, where sleep and rest is not measured in terms of goals and productivity but rather in its ability to hold space for communal dreaming, care and healing of tired bodies

Anna Nolda Nagele is a PhD researcher in Media and Arts Technology at Queen Mary University of London, senior lecturer in Design History and Theory at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and founding editor of The Posthumanist magazine.

¹⁰ Greta Byrum and Ruba Benjamin. *Disrupting the Gospel of Tech Solutionism to Build Tech Justice*. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2022.

[illegible]

Forethoughts -
Fragments towards
another prompt

Frank Wasser

The sound of slides clacking.

In his lecture “Lecture In Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, College de France, January 7th, 1977, Roland Barthes declared that “For what can be oppressive in our teaching is not, finally the knowledge or the culture it conveys but the discursive forms through which we propose them”

The sound of slides clacking.

To what extent do the tools used to write and teach impact upon the form of a work, whether that be a text or an object or the many forms between and beyond. To a full extent? This is a plan for a longer text which is resisting form.

The sound of slides clacking.

I am sitting at an empty desk typing on a Macbook Pro in Microsoft word. This is the third sentence of a piece that I am aiming to be around X amount of words. I know roughly what the piece will entail. I have provisionally titled the piece ‘On the interrogation of form as an act of decolonisation’ but the title might change. I copy and paste a quote from Roland Barthes into the start of the text. This is a text which was originally written to be the start of a script for a lecture.

The sound of an analogue

camera that an iPhone makes
when you take a photograph.

The sound of slides clacking.

A note

I change tact.

The sound of slides clacking.

Start again.

The sound of slides clacking.

Robert Gaskins is walking down a long corridor. The red light of a low sunset illuminates his path as he walks towards his office. He can smell his own breath which smells like coffee mixed with the smell of the fresh tile carpets that have just been laid down at the new office of Forethought.Inc. The light bounces off several paintings which are situated on the walls of the corridor. He enters one of the many offices of the building and speaks to one of his several employees. ‘I have an idea’ he exclaims.

The sound of slides clacking.

The story of PowerPoint's invention begins in the early 1980s. Two men who have been described by online sources as visionaries, Robert Gaskins and Dennis Austin, founded Forethought, Inc., a software company with a mission to develop innovative tools for personal computers. Gaskins, a former PhD student in computer science at Stanford University, played a pivotal role in the creation of the product that would eventually become the first version of PowerPoint.

The sound of slides clacking.

At the time, presentations (for Business and Academia) were predominantly delivered using overhead projectors, 35mm slides, or handwritten transparencies. These methods had their limitations, such as limited interactivity and difficulty in editing. Gaskins and his team recognized this as an opportunity to develop a software solution that could streamline the presentation creation process and offer new capabilities.

The sound of slides clacking.

The employee is tired and afraid to ask what the idea is. Gaskin points towards a Frank Stella painting on the walls of the corridor.

The sound of slides clacking.

The development of PowerPoint took several years, with the team working tirelessly to create a user-friendly interface and a set of features that would cater to the needs of both business and educational users. In 1987, Forethought, Inc. released the first version of PowerPoint for the Apple Macintosh, which marked the beginning of a new era in communication.

The sound of slides clacking.

The name "PowerPoint" was coined by Robert Gaskins himself, reflecting the software's ability to empower presenters to convey their ideas with clarity and impact. Gaskins felt that the name perfectly captured the essence of the software, as PowerPoint provided users with the tools to create visually engaging and persuasive presentations.

The sound of slides clacking.

The fiction is interrupted by an image:

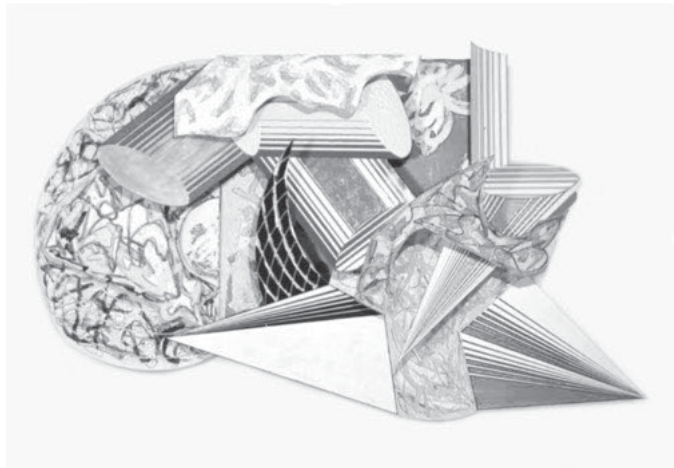


The sound of slides clacking.

This picture was taken in the lobby of the Microsoft Graphics Business Unit building in Silicon Valley, at 2460 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, California, in the oak-covered hills overlooking the Stanford campus. The artwork glimpsed to the left of the group is *Giufà, la luna, i ladri e le guardie* (1984), by Frank Stella, mixed media on canvas, etched magnesium, aluminum, and fiberglass, now in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. To the right is *Untitled* (1981), by Charles Arnolli, acrylic paint on tree branches, now in the Anderson Collection at Stanford University. These were just two out of more than a hundred important contemporary artworks (valued even then at over \$100 million) which were on display in the Graphic Business Unit's offices, and lent an appropriate dynamism to our public areas and conference rooms.

The sound of slides clacking.

Every person in this image had a soundproof private office with a door, window views of the outdoors, and all technical people had a minimum of three computers—Windows, Mac, and Unix



Above is *Giufà, la luna, i ladri e le guardie* (1984) by Frank Stella

The sound of slides clacking.

Gaskins populated the halls of the building with paintings he hoped would influence the aesthetic interface of the programmes his company was developing.

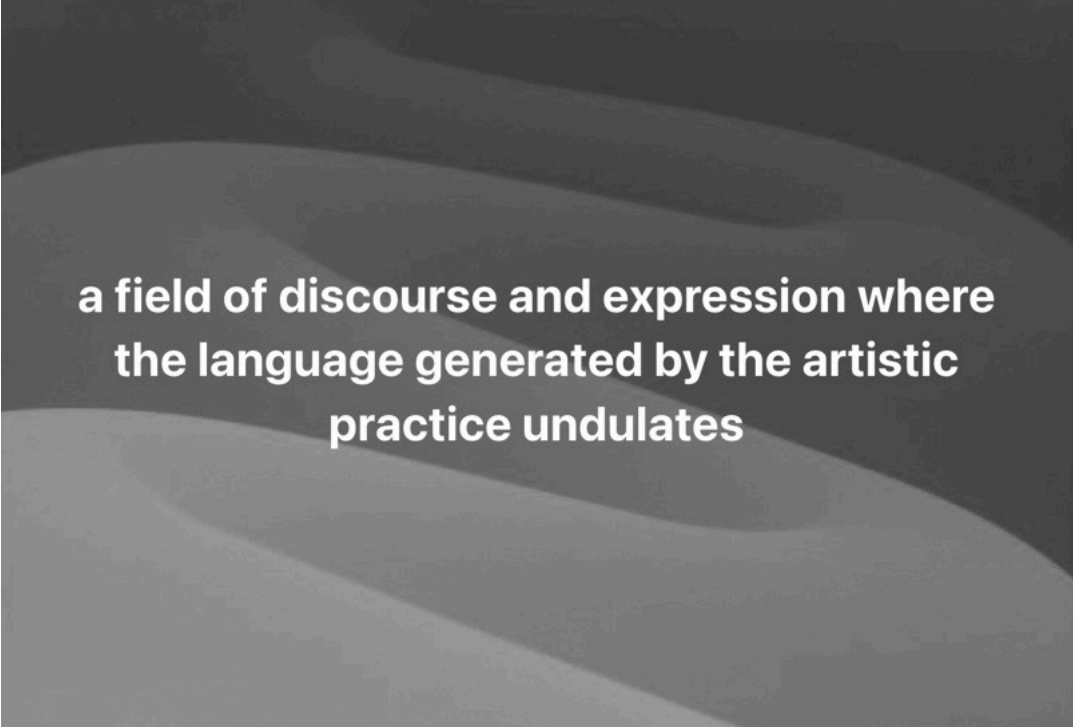
The sound of slides clacking.

In other words, It's no coincidence that the graphics of PowerPoint look a little like the Frank Stella painting below.

The sound of slides clacking.

This text is an example of a methodology that can be applied to other subjects. This is an attempt to decolonise computing. It is impossible.

The sound of keys typing.

The background of the text block consists of several dark, undulating, wave-like shapes that create a sense of movement and depth. The colors are various shades of dark gray and black, with some lighter areas where the waves meet, giving it a textured, almost topographical appearance.

**a field of discourse and expression where
the language generated by the artistic
practice undulates**

**International
Art English
(IAE) to
ChatGPT: “A
Perspective
that is both
Critical and
Poetic”**

João Enxuto

and

Erica Love

For decades, the art press release has persisted as a vehicle for conveying preoccupations and priorities in the art field. Our essay presents an informal analysis of recent linguistic trends in press release content produced by museums, galleries, art academies, and cultural organizations, many of which find an audience through the e-flux "Announcements" and "Art & Education" listservs.

A field-based lexicon is not unique to the arts, yet "artspeak" is noteworthy for its impenetrability and baroque stylistics, making it ripe for parody. To quote a recent e-flux announcement, exhibition making is "a field of discourse and expression where the language generated by the artistic practice undulates."¹

This curatorial statement, offered by the Seoul Museum of Art, along with dozens of other e-flux excerpts, was aggregated from our email inbox in 2022. Prompted by evolving language codes in art press releases, we copied and pasted notable samples over Facebook backgrounds (as in our example here) and shared them on the social network.

An effort of this kind, no matter how informal, must

¹ "Scoring the Words" by Sven Lütticken, e-flux announcements, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/479675/scoring-the-words/>.

reckon with International Art English (IAE), an essay by Alix Rule and David Levine published in 2012 by Triple Canopy.² A decade has passed since the authors released their explanatory model of contemporary art language, which spurred numerous debates about the significance of press release word jumbles, and more pointedly, what the practice of stringing together indeterminate language reveals about the art field more broadly.

Rule and Levine's statistical findings were derived from Sketch Engine, a web-based tool used to compile e-flux press announcements over thirteen years, dating back to 1999. Unsatisfied with limiting IAE to a dry lexical computing demonstration, Rule and Levine offer pointed appraisals of the e-flux corpus. By publishing findings that oscillate between empirical analysis and conjecture, Rule and Levine's essay became fodder for critical blowback. Art critic Ben Davis described it as a pseudo-academic essay that "diagnoses the entire world as being plagued by pseudo-academic obsessions."³ The section in Rule and Levine's essay titled "Vocabulary" begins, "The language we use for writing about art is oddly pornographic: We know it when we see it." For Rule and Levine, it isn't a technological barrier that impedes a path to decoding IAE, but rather "squeamishness, as if describing the object too precisely might reveal one's particular, perhaps peculiar, investments in it."⁴ With this provocation, Rule and Levine begin their Sketch Engine parsing of IAE.

Remarkably, the Sketch Engine software is still operational. However, a portal taking Triple Canopy readers to the e-flux corpus for a DIY data verification has since become deprecated. Link rot may have decoupled IAE from its source material, yet many of its distinctive features remain durable:

² Alix Rule and David Levine, "International Art English," *Triple Canopy*, issue 16, July 2012, accessed April 18, 2023, https://canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international_art_english.

³ ARTINFO, "'International Art English': The Joke That Forgot It Was Funny," *HuffPost*, June 7, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/halloween-happenings-at-a_n_339776.

⁴ Alix Rule and David Levine, "International Art English"

fortified by a lexicon of radicality, spaces, propositions, tension, interrogation, questioning, encoding, transformation, subversion, imbrication, and displacement. The language generated by the artistic practice continues to undulate.⁵

In an effort to contextualize, contain, and capture the upheaval wrought by IAE, e-flux journal and Triple Canopy separately published collections of response essays in 2013. In her e-flux contribution "International Disco Latin," Hito Steyerl accepts IAE at face value, acknowledging that press release texts are "written in a skewed English full of grandiose and empty jargon often carelessly ripped from mistranslations of continental philosophy." Following this concession, Steyerl pivots to equate press releases with digital spam, the "most destitute strata, both in form and in content." The objective would be to unmake IAE as something foreign, and decisively cut its ties to its imaginary origins as pristine and perfected English. In this estimation, IAE has not gone far enough.

The hegemony of the English language in global contemporary art is justifiably targeted by Steyerl and other responders to IAE. It is the un- or underpaid intern, the non-native English speaker toiling away at the periphery, that comprises the labor force churning out IAE press releases. One can't spell international without intern.

For Rule and Levine, a reliance on the British National Corpus (BNC) likely came down to matters of convenience, with BNC as the only serviceable corpus dataset offered out of the box by Sketch Engine in 2012. Their account of language usage in e-flux press releases is ultimately characterized by banality and a lack of methodological rigor. In their conclusion Rule and Levine, like Steyerl, embrace the spaminess of IAE. They write, "We should read

⁵ Hito Steyerl, "International Disco Latin," *e-flux Journal*, issue 45, 2013 accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60100/international-disco-latin/>.

e-flux press releases not for their content, not for their technical proficiency in IAE, but for their lyricism, as we believe many people have already begun to do.”⁶ If by 2012 IAE had already been cut loose from its BNC referent to evolve a distinctive lyricism, then the following decade of e-flux announcements has only served to further refine the form.

In 2023, the art press release should be considered in a late stage in the full automation of artspeak. The production of low-level art copy is in the midst of being supplanted by ChatGPT text generation, which holds the power to render the IAE art intern redundant, or to restructure that labor as AI content management.

"Tasks that are routine, repetitive, or predictable will be automated or done more efficiently by AI, leaving humans to focus on tasks that require creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. To distinguish their creativity, humans will need to find ways to leverage their unique skills, experiences, and perspectives in their work. This may involve developing and honing skills that are difficult for AI to replicate, such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and creativity. It may also involve finding ways to use AI as a tool to augment and enhance human capabilities, rather than replace them." — ChatGPT

We can only hope.

⁶ *Alix Rule and David Levine, "International Art English"*

When prompted, ChatGPT clarifies that “despite the criticism, IAE remains a prevalent language in the art world...” Alternately, what a chatbot trained on an IAE dataset might say is that IAE persists in the “liminal spaces” of advertising lyricism maintained by e-flux’s ever-expanding publishing apparatus. In her 2013 e-flux IAE rebuttal, Martha Rosler writes that, “Sniffing after the trail of press-release copy in the search for a diagnosis of a perceived art-world malady seems to misconstrue what a press release is and what it is designed to do or to be. It hardly needs to be said that a press release is a long-form piece of advertising copy, with embedded keywords.”⁷ If it hardly needs to be said that a press release was insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary art writing, then it also hardly needs to be said that most recent art writing has become indistinguishable from long-form advertising.

The imprecision of IAE—“an increasingly ecstatic semantic unmooring of art writing”⁸—which Rule and Levine claim to be based on a genealogy of second-hand Frankfurt School and mistranslated French poststructuralism, in 2022, became well-suited to deliver the obscene and

⁷ Martha Rosler, “English and All That,” *e-flux Journal*, issue 45, 2013, accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60103/english-and-all-that/>.

⁸ Alix Rule and David Levine, “International Art English”

troubling symptoms of systemic failure and catastrophe. Are the roots of IAE, as detailed by Rule and Levine, still derived from misapplications of intellectual forebears such as French poststructuralism and the Frankfurt School? Or are “keywords”⁹ now embedded to mimic the critical discourses and concerns that dominated the past decade, such as affect theory, authoritarianism, decolonization, care, contagion, cryptocurrency, and climate change?

If art press releases are algorithmic templates—what changed are its connotations. While “IAE is normally used for its affective connotation,”¹⁰ the entanglement of sentiment, critical thought, and clickbait has intensified since 2012.

During the isolation and screen dependency brought about by the Covid pandemic, press release announcements in recent years have untethered from geolocated in-person events. The global pandemic spawned a range of crises for which conventional language seemed inadequate. Emails promoting the promise of artistic praxis became discordant with social lives sliding into recessionary conditions. To bridge this gap, art industry messaging became more frenzied as it catered to a confined attention economy. There was an overflow of affective expressions of interconnection, discontent, and care, which was absorbed and reconfigured as the latest version of IAE. Now, as we enter uncharted territory for AI content generation, the IAE debates of the previous decade may quickly become immaterial as human and machine expressions become ever more entangled in a socio-economic matrix. While the disjointed lyricism of IAE becomes primed to emerge from its idiomatic fringes to become a standard diction to address

unpredictable futures: “Sometimes the result is an electrifying charged image; sometimes it is but a soft glow.”

⁹ Martha Rosler, “*English and All That*”

¹⁰ Alix Rule and David Levine, “*International Art English*”

The phrase, "in the midst of a pervasive distrust of reality, the field of the perceptible world is becoming ever more closely tied to subjective experience" was sourced from Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen's "Entangled Events" exhibition statement, which was disseminated by e-flux on September 6, 2022. The sentiment highlights the challenge of creating coherent contemporary art discourse in a "perceptible world" undergoing structural dissolution. Over the past decade, we have lived through and witnessed significant social and economic turmoil, all the while the e-flux mailing format and its industry preeminence has remained unmatched.

Review: 14th Gwangju Biennale, Soft and Weak Like Water

Jason Waite

Walking into the cavernous exposition hall of the Gwangju Biennale, the “temporary” structure built in 1994 with the intention to host one exhibition and then be torn down for a permanent biennale exhibition space. The present structure composed of 4 similar size mega halls connected by ramps, feels like exploring an abandoned world expo structure. This anachronistic building has vexed curators from Okwui Enwezor to Maria Lind. This year’s artistic director Sook-Kyung Lee embraced the rickety structure with all of its faults and vulnerabilities - instead of constructing new white walls to try to conceal the decline, Lee and her team largely left the space as is with the exception of a few partitions of uncut boards and panels of natural fibres.

This sensitivity to the space carries through to Lee’s thoughtful slow-moving show which allows ample space for each work to be considered on its own terms. The exhibition mainly consists of new commissions and through the similar scale of works feels relatively intimate for a show of seventy artists. This is also indicative of restraint in putting forth a small fraction of the hundreds of artists of certain past shows. Hence the ample space for the artworks to speak and generous room for the audience to listen—a fruitful product of the artist-centric curatorial approach of Lee.

One strand of the exhibition is a focus on tactile works that through their material construction demand a different way of reading work and the show at large. Examples include I-Lann Yee's incredible hanging tapestry composed of north Malay mats used in domestic settings switched together into with colourful, shimmering strands that echos forms of kintsugi repair and a more minimalist approach to installations reminiscent of El Anatsui. A sense of works in progress is echoed in Angélica Serech's delicate hanging multi-scaler weaves. While the Māori collective Mataaho's forcefully interwoven industrial orange and grey trailer ratchet straps brace the building and turn the architecture of the hall into a large-scale loom, the organic dyes of Judy Watson hue to unstretched cotton and trace the watersheds that were and have been transformed by colonisation. Yuko Mori extends the sensitive approach to fibres with her continuous composition formed by humidity's effect on paper reams. Abdoulaye Konaté's richly layered suspended wall works composed of strips of polished fabric interspersed with amulet forms open a meditative space of soft geometries. Similarly, Charwei Tsai's levitating circular fabrics form airy mandalic plateaus that hover at different heights, asking the viewer to re-orient their perspective.

The tactile nature of the show asks us to take a ludic approach to the artworks without stripping out any of the politicality of their materiality or social contexts. Instead, this way of seeing works chips away at the abstractness of representation and re-focuses us - not on the symbolic nature - but rather on the narratives, labour, human and more-than-human lives imbricated in the physical materiality. The effectiveness of creating this perceptual shift in the biennale is highlighted by Lee's painstakingly created environment that changes how work is perceived in practices of older Korean ajeossi cis-male artists whose avant-garde practices usually obstinately stand out.

Miraculously the biennale is able to queer or feminizes their work in the show allowing it to seamlessly interact with their diverse neighbours and gently asks to be re-read in these new terms. This is exemplified in Seung-taek Lee's large-scale wooden sculpture laced with rope which asks the viewers to re-arrange it as they please, or in Lee Kun-Yong's gestural drawings that take on a whimsical quality. In addition, the documentation of Kim Kulim's 1969 Body Paintings—the artist dressed in a suit crouching beside a woman in a short dress in order to paint her arm—does not shy away from how the work was originally framed, yet in its re-performance, it is young female volunteers at an adjacent large table re-enact the work, rendering it more as a workshop rather than a performance which alters the dynamic of the piece.

Following these unexpected shifts, Pangrok Sulap took on their own interregional approach to depicting history. The Malaysian collective focused on the origins of the Gwangju Biennale as a periodic event to commemorate the May 18, 1980 citizen uprising in Gwangju against the military dictatorship and its subsequent violent repression. They utilised woodblock printing on fabric, a form they often use but which was also popular in explicitly political Korean minjung art that grew out of the uprising, in order to show their own re-reading of the iconic imagery of the movement. In a nod to the importance of this period of Korean art, Lee includes the beloved artist Oh Yoon and a series of intimate minjung woodblock prints.

Of the few video works included in the show, there is a persistent attention to the texture of landscapes and what a close reading of its topology can reveal about its formation. Alan Michelson's *Midden* (2021) traces the lands of the forcibly displaced Lenape through the post-industrial New York ruins projected on a mound of shells of the ancient regional staple of oysters. The almost psychedelic peripatetic cinema of Sky Hopkina productively estranges a relationship with the land. While IkkibawiKrrr's indexical approach to the living remnants in Pacific islands of layers of war, extractivism, and colonisation provides an opening to the overlapping effects of these violent regimes. Taus Makhacheva builds a white cube in the mountainous steppe of Dagestan populating it with bronzes of her grandfather the renowned Soviet poet Rasul Gamzatov a juxtaposition that puts into stark relief the memory and the environment. Meiro Koizumi's video collage highlights the flows of exile and return with a collage of workshop remnants with Koyro-in, a Korean diaspora that was forcibly moved into central Asia during Stalin's time some of whom have recently returned to Korea. While Alberta Whittle shows the agency of the seascape tracing the "shipworm" that forced Christopher Columbus to abandon two of his ships on the island of Dominica as a "decolonial agent"

Under the past biennale directorship of Kim Sunjung, Gwangju Biennale started the participation of national pavilions in a nod to the format of the biennale's namesake. This time Jonas Staal took over the Gwangju Museum of Art, blending a series of climate actions & forums along with reparations of more-than-humans who should be taken into account. Yet under the new director, there doesn't seem to be a serious attempt to create a generative ecology of pavilions, but Staal side, rather a seeming random assortment of open call shows. The infrastructural addition to this year's biennale was the controversial Park Seo-Bo Prize of \$100,000 to a single artist in the biennale. The Dansaekhwa minimalist artist Park Seo-Bo donated the money for the prize and his decade long refusal to speak out against the former military dictatorship caused protests at the open ceremony with protesters intervening with banners and leaflets objecting to the prize in his name and asking that it be re-titled the Oh Yoon Prize. Even with these missteps by the administration, Lee's exhibition deftly demonstrates why the Gwangju Biennale has been a touchstone in the region for large-scale exhibitions.

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Installation view of Heidi Bucher, *Spaces are Shells, are Skins*,

Art Song Center, Seoul, image by Pamela Wong.

Pamela Wong

Like thunder from afar, the sound of rupture led me through the passageway into the white space at Seoul's Art Sonje Center. As I walked in, the ripping sound gradually became louder, recalling the unpleasant screeching and slurping sound made when one pulls dull tape off its roll. The source of the noise was soon revealed: a video, playing near the entrance of Heidi Bucher's retrospective "*Spaces are shell. Are skins*," captures the artist laboriously ripping off latex-soaked cloth from the interior of her father's Herrenzimmer ("gentleman's study") in her family home in Winterthur, Switzerland in 1978. The short documentary of her "skinning" process served as an entry point to Bucher's practice, and this sound of pain continued to reverberate throughout the entire exhibition space.

Hanging across the space were her *raumhaut* ("room-skin"), the results of Bucher's "skinning" in different sizes and of different parts of domestic and clinical environment, such as floor tiles (1979 and 1980) and *The Bed* (1975). In the centre, a room-size *raumhaut* was suspended from the ceiling as if it was "floating" in the air—a spectre, beckoning the audience to enter it. With a mixed sense of awe and solemnity, I walked in, but soon found myself struck by the sadness and the irresistible urge to both revive and escape the past. I was immediately trapped inside the memory of a house. All the details of the door, the fireplace, the wall cracks, the texture of the wooden cabinet, as well as other traces of time that compose the surface of the interior were imprinted on the latex, just like how veins and bruises are to be found on an old person's yellowish, wrinkled skin. But as the audience scrutinises these details, one can also vaguely see the silhouettes of the "outside world," since the external light can pass through the latex. Like shadows, the external time and space overlap with the internal. In this way, the audience—perhaps like the artist when she was creating the work—are not solely left with their past and their own internal turmoil, but they are also disturbed by the external that constantly attempts to trespass or even penetrate the shell, reaching the soul inside.

Created in 1988, this centrepiece is a later work in Bucher's series of room-skins and a haunting replica of *The Parlour Office of Doctor Binswanger*, the room of a Swiss psychiatrist. Knowing the site of the creation adds a psychological aspect to the work, but it also reflects Bucher's interests in liberating the self from these patriarchal structures in search for autonomy. Extracting the remains of a particular space and time from the history (whether personal or universal), her works are often discussed in association with the era that she lived in, most significantly the socio-political movements and discourses in which she was involved at the time such as the Feminist Art Program at the Womanhouse Los Angeles founded in 1972. For the room-skins, they are often viewed through the influence of the divorce wave and second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially since Bucher started making these works after going through her own divorce and moving back to Switzerland.

While these factors inevitably played a part in her creative decisions, as a contemporary audience, I felt more connected with the multiple layers of transformation embodied by the room-skins. First, the ongoing wrestling between an individual and their past. Then within that struggle, one's attempts to replicate the past are only proven to be futile. Following this cruel revelation, there is a split in the perception of reality—between the actual past and the past as remembered by the individual. This cycle

between the self and the past continues until the individual eventually liberates themselves. Everything in this tortuous process—which requires so much effort and labour, while also inflicting second injury—was Imprinted, documented, and encapsulated in one work. Even though every individual’s past can be different, the experience of pain felt in the work is universal, made possible only through Bucher’s effort in understanding her own suffering through her cathartic approach. It is only when one is willing to dig deep into their own pain that the idea of collective resonance becomes possible.

The second part of the exhibition on the upper floor felt almost like a break from the heaviness of the room-skins. Revolving around the theme of “body,” the more playful, earlier works show Bucher’s training in dressmaking and the choice of textile as her lifelong material. Near the entrance, *Dragonfly Lust* (1976) is composed of a wrapped mannequin with latex and fabric gauze, creates a dragonfly-like costume. In her manifesto, she compared the dragonfly’s stiffening of its wings in its process of metamorphosis, to the human’s role-playing and hardening of identity before they stabilise their perception of self. Tugged toward the end of the space were also the video and wearable sculptures of *Bodyshell* (1972). Referencing elements in fashion, these sculptures are in geometric forms such as the frill and the bell shape, while their polyurethane coating and artificial fabric hint at futurism and space fashion. In the video, the sculptures, wore by Bucher and the performers, moved clumsily along Venice Beach in Los Angeles in 1972. Through these attempts at combining sculpture and fashion, Bucher explored the social implications in what we wear, and the restrictions brought by our surroundings.

Before I left, I watched *Spaces are Shells, are Skins* (1931), the brief documentary of Bucher’s skinning on display in the underground theatre at Art Sonje Center. It depicts the final part of her skinning where Bucher’s room-skin was lifted nearly three metres high toward the sky through collective effort. “The skin is something that we have to leave behind,” the artist once explained for her 1978 room-skin of the *Herrenzimmer*, “and maybe you can live without any environment or surroundings.” Reaching the end of her transformative journey, Bucher showed us the possibility of liberating oneself from the endless tangles with their past and the limitations brought by their own identity.

Pamela Wong is a Hong Kong-based writer and astrologer.

REVIEW: BLACK VENUS, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON

KESENA CHARLOTTE

I want to preface this by saying that my visit to this exhibition wasn't intentional—I originally went to Somerset House for Peter Doig not the Black Venus showcase. However, I'm thrilled that destiny had other plans. Before setting foot into Somerset House, I harboured quite a skeptical attitude towards Doig's exhibit that was catered another White Male Artist, a sentiment magnified by the fact that the artist has made Trinidad his home. That's why it felt almost fated to discover Black Venus, an exhibit that seemingly whispered just for me, hidden yet beckoning in the intricate labyrinth of Somerset House. A place riddled with secret corners and winding hallways. It is a setting befitting the Black Venus exhibition as it echoes the complex realities that black women navigate daily.

Being a black woman is to embody generations of whispered secrets, a lineage of wisdom, and resilience passed down from mothers to daughters. Our bodies are the canvas of politics stretching from the African shores to the Isles of the Caribbean. Growing up, I constantly wrestled with the intersectionality of my race and gender, a struggle amplified in the predominantly white backdrop of my UK village school. The standard norms of beauty seemed elusive, making my adolescent years a harsh lesson in self-acceptance.

Society has incessantly dictated the contours of Black women's existences, urging us to reject the richness of our heritage. The expectation to confine ourselves to pre-established molds has been oppressive, fostering stereotypes, and stifling our true selves. The term 'angry black woman' might ring a bell, a derogatory label attached to our rightful expressions of emotion. It was only as I matured and listened—truly listened—to my mother's words that I realised the universality of this experience for Black women globally. A sense of displacement and an uneasy duality of being unseen yet hyper-visible. The feeling of being displaced, pushed to the side, not deemed ugly but definitely not deemed beautiful. This feeling or 'misogynoir' is not an action or a thought, instead it's a state of being. It is the way that Black women navigate the World in which we live in. The Black Venus exhibit stands as a testament to this collective experience, urging black women to reclaim their stolen identities with unapologetic pride.

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na.C(harlotte) Black.Venus//Somerset.House(R)review==!Kesena.C(harlotte)

Curated by Aindrea Emelife, the exhibition features a dreamlike ensemble of pieces that proudly proclaim:

‘I have been a woman

for a long time

beware my smile

I am treacherous with old magic

and the noon's new fury

with all your wide futures

promised

I am

woman

and not white.’

— Audre Lorde, ‘A Woman Speaks’, 1997

This poetic tribute by Audre Lorde reverberates through Emelife's selection, offering glimpses into the intricate world of black women, a world that refuses to be confined or defined wholly, a testament to the dynamic identity of black women today. Coreen Simpson's *The Master Nude* redefines nudity, stripping it of sexualisation to lay bare a vulnerability coupled with empowerment. Meanwhile, Renee Cox's *Miss Thang* encapsulates the grandeur and deserving luxury inherent to the black female body, asserting that black women can, indeed, have it all.

Black Venus abandons the perception of black women's bodies as public commodities, to be molded and appropriated as society deems fit. Instead, it honours the beauty, joy, and complete being of black women, celebrating their indomitable spirit and inherent dignity in every piece displayed.

As I left Somerset House, I carried with me a quiet kind of revolution, a budding insistence that we, as black women, are the arbiters of our own stories. Not confined to the margins, but vividly central in a tapestry of our own making rich with colours more vibrant and textures more varied than the world has yet known. The *Black Venus* exhibition didn't just offer a glimpse into the myriad realities of black women; it was a clarion call to step into our power, to reclaim our narratives, and to celebrate our multifaceted identity with unyielding pride.

Kesena Charlotte is a woman whispering from unknown realms.

Black.Venus//Somerset.House(R)evview==!Kesena.C(harlotte) Black.Venus//Somerset.House(R)evview==!Kesena.C(harlotte)
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Review: Sarah Sze's *Metronome* The Waiting Room London

**Devika
Pararasasinghe**

Metronome is a major new exhibition by artist Sarah Sze, the exhibition explicates a trail to the wide scope of the digital interior that makes up the world and its internet world-ing. A sunset heaves out of view, in a fragile circumstance, I enter the space to watch a clock. The waiting room at Peckham Rye Station is now open for the first time since its closing in 1962. A painted arrow pointing toward a billiards room is seemingly the sole indicator of the repurposed train station lobby.

The faint sounds of the railway groaning in the background fuse with Metronome's recorded train sounds as the soundtrack to the work, and produce rhythms that lend themselves to a claustrophobic atmosphere. We are initially given a front-facing view of a stage with seating, which encourage the theatre-like experience of the work.

Artificial light breaches like a solar flare and new shapes are constantly emerging and entering the periphery of my vision. You can walk onto the 'stage,' which feels like a live piece, and thus circumnavigate around the piece and be encompassed by the flicker. Seeing the behind-the-scenes of the mechanisms, the 42 video projectors are handmade. We can hear them, chatting, whirring, and purring, as our shadows walk to be left on standby next to a constant circuit of projections. The digital is split open for all to see. The assistance play, the incidental object, the background character, and the coffee cup prop. Here is the aftermath of people at work who have long left the scene—the bodies behind the digital.

The structure is the sculpture, the scaffolding that manages to prop up these sheets of paper, rather precariously is the work's main form, which refuses to hide its origins of making. The very makeup of this hands-on structure seems to humanise the 'digital plane' of the installation. The screens are branching out, scraps of paper torn at the edges with videos and images projected onto them. Sze's 'handmade plants' made from wire and paper are seated backstage and cast shadows over the walls to make a natural landscape of sorts, but it remains a shadow overgrown in an installation of images. The paper screens come into full view from behind, the digitisation has completely fallen through now. As once what was white as snowfall, and all facsimiles of each other, this is a *mise en scene* of production.

Metronome is a study of absolute objecthood, under the ephemeral sound, and fleeting technology which outdates itself as soon as it is acknowledged, is an acknowledged post-internet fissure. Entrenched here behind the screens are no false impressions or unplaceable objects, is the collected and staged miscellanea. A leftover over-spill from the making process that is not hidden from the viewer. Half-drunk water bottles, packets of gum, paper, markers, empty boxes repurposed as storage, open files, a stapler, tupperware, and receipts flood the scene.

All these objects are moved by bodies, depending on our needs. Even though the body may not be present, the space is known through the objects themselves, - they are [a]live. The objects of a carpenter: paintbrush, PVA glue, spools of wire, crocodile clips, and clamps, are distinct from the usual office-core expected and seem more of a reference to Sze's working environment in a live stasis, but with the artist off-stage.

The installation takes on the digital as a visual democracy, signifying that if one thing matters, everything matters. We speak through images, and the meaning between screens is in the comprehension of the viewer, the same for the time spent with the work. Repetition and change are always happening, and the reception of the work may always change form. But that does not escape the notion of gained familiarity and a time lived with, through spotting certain videos loop back around. Thus, a metronome is potentially heard twice within Sze's sculptural installation.

The installation yields no compression technique. The installation invades the architecture, taking hostage the space, as the images projected truly sprawl and expand to all crevices, edges, and corners of the room from the arches, and beams, to the high ceiling. It certainly makes for an aesthetic shot, but there is no island for the blessed, and everything mirrors in this hollowed-out mirror-ball sculpture. But no singular perspective seemed possible for the viewer, as Sarah Sze does not attempt to regulate or negotiate with hierarchies, as this digital sphere capitalises and reaches a networked global marketplace. Metronome should not dare look at my crimes for a change in nature, for the once sublime, once natural and native to the land, now hatches in digital crosshairs.

