CREATING DANGEROUSLY

SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

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A POSTSCRIPT TO SHARJAH BIENNIAL 14

EDITED BY OMAR KHOLEIF

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THE DUTY OF CARE

In W.J.T. Mitchell's *Mental Traveler* (2020), the author and iconologist uses the framework of the memoir to create a concerted argument around divergent models of 'care'.[1] Historically, the concept of care has taken on patriarchal connotations. The notion of 'protection' or of 'prudence', as articulated by the likes of physicians, pharmaceutical companies and governments, emerge. At the same time, human beings, like artworks, are, as Kader Attia has explored, in constant need of 'repair'.[2] The reparative effects, of course, are determined by context.

For an artist, a maimed artwork might be sutured back to its original form; or, in some cases, the artist or the owner may wish to accentuate the archaeological aspect of the 'ruin', and with it, the attendant history that such an object has experienced over the course of a given period of time. Speaking of the living, Mitchell's argument is that as 'good citizens', we must engage in the act of 'care-taking'. He proposes that the moral core of 'social justice' is to live in a world where we hold a 'responsibility to one another'.[3]

Conservators, curators and art historians alike are informed in their schooling of the Latin origins of the verb 'to curate'. Historically, it means to act as a 'guardian' or a 'custodian', a 'caretaker'. Working with living artists, whether on commissions, exhibitions or with their archives, holds an equivalent sense of responsibility. Being a curator encompasses the nurturing and nourishing of ideas, providing artists with the critical and theoretical frameworks through which their ideas can take shape and form. Attendant to this are the practical measures, from budgeting, security and fundraising to, for some, acquisition and conservation.

The opportunity to co-curate *Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber* was, for me, an occasion to express both care and gratitude for artists whose art and opinions have shaped my formation. Equally, it was a ground on which to test out a constellation of ideas formed by my mentors, some of whom are mentioned on the accompanying catalogue's acknowledgments page. In the process of stitching together this *situated* tapestry, I was unfortunate to have fallen deeply ill.

Humiliated by my inability to exercise the full scope and capacities of my role, I suddenly came to learn that the act of 'caring' for artists can be a two-way street. Many of the individuals I had invited did not sit waiting for my discharge, but rather travelled to accompany me, sketching notes on the inside sleeves of books,

filling up notebooks, a responsibility that should have been mine. As I look back at the Biennial from the vantage point of a world that is still slowly easing its way out of a global health crisis, I am heartened by the memories. The strength that I gathered was bestowed upon me by the unbelievable generosity of artists who eschew convention, tradition and perception. Today, the letter 'C' does not simply evoke 'Cancer' or 'COVID-19', but the rewarding and multidimensional sphere that 'Care' offers us. For as Eden Ahbez wrote for Nat King Cole to connote in 1948, 'The greatest thing / You'll ever learn / Is just to love / And be loved / In return'.

FEBRUARY 2021

1 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Mental Traveler: A Father, a Son, and a Journey through Schizophrenia* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

2 Kader Attia, 'Repair: Architecture, Reappropriation, and The Body Repaired', published in 2013 on Kader Attia's website, accessed 1 January 2021, http://kaderattia.de/repair-architecture-reappropriation-and-the-body-repaired/.

3 '*Mental Traveler*: W.J.T. Mitchell speaks to Omar Kholeif about Madness, Cinema and the Panopticon', posted on YouTube on 23 February 2021, accessed 1 May 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyPG4GzoYgg.

MARCH: A POEM, A CONTEXT OR A DREAM

OMAR KHOLEIF

I wrote these words on 23 December 2018.

They comprise an internal monologue that was never intended to be read out loud. The words did not remain concealed.

They were spoken once at 10:15 am on Monday, 11 March 2019. They are presented here unchanged.

Have you ever been on your phone in a crowded place and, whilst texting, surfing, scrolling, skimming, found yourself just surging into euphoria only to realise that you are lost in a surfeit of nothingness? You've all but disappeared into your screen, become disembodied, a body without organs, floating in the intangible world of your screen?

You pause and scratch your head: start to ask yourself a series of existential questions about *your* lived experience, and begin to wonder if you are the protagonist in Albert Camus's *The Outsider* – are you bored, emotionless, detached and cynical? Will you not let anyone pray for you, even on your deathbed? Will you simply wallow in Camus's words in 'the tender indifference of the world'?

You seek solace through the ills of capitalism. You are the click-happy bait to the algorithm. You are in cruise control. On Amazon. Searching through your recommended purchases. It's the 23rd of December and you realise that Amazon won't deliver on Christmas Day. You start ploughing intangible objects into your proverbial basket and continue to the checkout zone until you find something that will arrive in time. An object that a drone will deliver before 25 December, whatever it is. It is Rachel Cusk's *Outline*, a book that you've seen on the shelves of Foyles bookshop on Charing Cross Road, but that you've never quite wanted to read; but now that it's the only thing you can get your hands on, you suddenly decide that it is a thing of value. That is, of course, until it arrives, and you find yourself hollowed because of its inability to satiate the nothingness that is there.

You skim the pages of the art history books that you acquired as a graduate student. You look to art as a form of therapy, hoping that it can produce love and empathy in you. But then you realise that reproductions lack the phenomenological qualities that you so desire. These images do not stir anything within you.

As you skim the pages, you come across an idea. An idea that you decide you want to link back to something that you've read earlier, only to realise that you have forgotten what it is you have ingested. Are you only half-conscious?

Are you merely swallowing emptiness? You google a synopsis of the book that you are reading – Google now being your memory bank. You are too lazy to turn back the pages. Your brain no longer fires on all cylinders. It is transmuted; a large chunk of your brain is now amorphously tethered to the cloud – a poor metaphor for a series of cables that live beneath the sea or somewhere in the desert, which contain all the constituent pieces of knowledge that you are no longer able to recall.

•••

Have you ever thought that you need to slow down?

But *haven't* you slowed down already?

You are moving at a glacial pace.

You are functioning out of an automated body. A body that is no longer yours to control.

This body is a harbinger of a new world order, where your capacities of thought – to think the most basic of things – will be reduced to the whims of a pre-programmed machine? (*Emphasise*: Question mark.)

You read the words of the dead, an odd temporal lapse.

You are discomfited by the fact that you cannot find words amongst the living, or rather even within yourself to articulate the deep irritation that is clawing at you. Or even reason as to *why* you raise pen to paper or why you choose to speak at forums such as these.

Albert Camus's *Create Dangerously*, a manifesto in form,speaks to you somehow. It propels you forwards.

You ignore being criticised or attacked, and instead, fear being 'blamed for your silence'.

You will not be aloof. You know of silence's dangerous implications. You must go on living and creating. You find solace in the words, which more than fifty years later feel more relevant than ever.

> To create today is to create dangerously. Any publication is an act, and the act exposes one to the passions of an age that forgives nothing.

No matter how many ideologies are at stake, the strange liberty of creation is possible.

You believe Ralph Waldo Emerson that 'a man's obedience to his own genius is faith in its purest form'. You believe that artists must hold up their end of the bargain, their responsibility.

Is the strange liberty of creation possible?

You commit yourself to social justice. Art is a necessity. This is not a world of art for art's sake. We must contact, as Camus argues, the reality of our time; strive for something timeless and universal. Art is the space where we can imagine an alternative to our present reality. The tension between the present and the future, between what is and what can be, between suffering and its transcendence – this is where the seeds of art are planted and grown.

In *Água Viva*, the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector brings us an example of this – her emotional power is let rip on the first page, where she proclaims a fourth dimension known as the 'instant-now', a fleeting unit of time that continues to refresh itself with the new instant. Instants passing through the air that she breathes. She wants to possess the atoms of time and to capture the present, forbidden by its very nature: the present slips away and the instant, too.

I am this very second forever in the now.

Attempting to formulate a means to capture the potency of a moment before it slips through our hands, Lispector reminds us of art's potential to unpick the burdensome pain of time: that time which lies within the interstices; that time which feels so heavy; that time when you are waiting for life to begin.

I am reminded of a journal entry from 2018 – a diary that I keep in my sticky-notes function:

> I want to bear witness to something great, something monumental, something that moves the soul, but my mind and body remain unperturbed, or rather perturbed in their locked silence.
>
> I am trapped in a fishbowl, an echo chamber, watching the world go by, unable to touch it.
>
> It's so close, but I cannot crack the thick glass pane that separates me from an outside reality.
>
> I am trapped in the basement of my body.

When in the throes of despondency, I often turn to the writings of Jean Fisher, the voice of my mentor. Seeking solace, I run my fingers around the curves of her printed words; it is as if we are touching – saying, 'Hello!' Across time, we are molecular, atomic…

In *Toward a Metaphysics of Shit*, Fisher invokes the figure of the trickster – 'a protagonist in the global battlefield for the re-possession of a language of subjective agency'.

She proclaims that we are nothing but:

> *A continuous production of otherness* – creating disorder. Indeed, we might say that *disorder* not order is the norm of human reality.

We desire exchange. And humour that is universal. For it is the trickster, emphasising the shocking aspects of the familiar, that can break the binary vision. But how do we break binary division?

We have taken so much time, and still, we stand knocking on doors, waiting to be seen.

Turn a blind eye; open your eyes; sight *Unseen*.

I leave you with this question from my late Auntie Jean:

> Can art function as an effective mediator of change or resistance to hegemonic power, or is it doomed to be a decorative and irrelevant footnote to forces more powerful than its capacity to confront?

We give credence to the fallen souls.

WHILST EVERYONE *WAS WAITING*

ARAM MOSHAYEDI

On 23 August 2013, David Antin – the late artist and innovator of the talk poem, a kind of hybrid form of spoken-word, stream-of-consciousness monologue and real-time art criticism, to which today's genre of the lecture performance is almost entirely indebted – produced 'writing in the dark', a characteristically meandering piece that was delivered in front of an audience in San Diego, California, and subsequently edited for publication in Antin's typically anti-punctuational, anti-grammatical style. He died three years later at the age of eighty-four, having endured Parkinson's disease for as long as he could. Here is Antin, on that day in 2013, in his own words:

> how much of life is not contingent as poets artists we have to deal with contemporary contingencies they come up we deal with them badly or well but these contingencies are there and we cant control them but we can resist and im talking about charles and susan having to resist i resist being old i resist having parkinson's disease and i will resist until they kill me this is probably the best we can do is to fight a retreating battle in this sense art is a kind of war against annihilation we tend to struggle against annihilation we struggle for life we

> struggle for life whether were painting a simple glass or whether we're trying to map something unmappable whether we're presenting something different and totally beyond the range of our capabilities i usually feel that im working beyond the range of my capabilities so that im not surprised i feel that we do the best we can which as i've said before is all an artist can do is to do the best we can[1]

In the handful of years that followed the publication of 'writing in the dark', Antin continued to talk, write and edit, as a way of resisting the certainty of imminent death. The body of work he produced over his lifetime endures beyond the present further still. The inevitable persistence of artworks (however foreign a concept this is to the cycle of life) affords Antin, and artists such as him, a mode of communication that reaches beyond the grave and beyond the notion of time that makes death so tangible. Works of art make new time in this way – by not adhering to linear time; by never being concise, finite or resolute in their relatio nship to time. When an artist dies, this condition becomes all the more apparent.

The late Michael Asher's legendary post-studio seminars at the California Institute of the Arts, which ran from 1976 to 2008 in Valencia, California, sought to, in his words, 'take the clock out of the classroom' by subjecting a single artist's work to a rigorous and exhaustive six-hour-or-more critique. Given how little time the average viewer spends looking at a work of art in an exhibition today, the duration of Asher's post-studio class is tantamount to torture. In one's lifetime, how many times will an artist hear a curator ask, 'How long is it?' or 'Can you send me the link?' Questions such as these are the result of too little time. There are hardly enough waking moments to watch or to see – let alone to experience – the quantity of work produced by today's professional class of artists and those who have passed with varying degrees of recognition.

Yet despite a temporal deficiency such as this, the apparent shortening of attention spans – professional or otherwise – and the fickleness of tastes rooted in so-called appeals to timeliness or relevance or present-ness, artists make things that have the capacity to radically alter the experience of time and the currents or trends that appear to embody the attributes of history. The drawings and paintings of the late artist Huguette Caland offer a material encounter that resists time. This was the case in the years before she died in 2019, and it is even more apparent now in her absence from this world.

Endit, et eius eosapis quamus inusam evel mod

Caland's biographic details are an essential part of this experience – knowing, for instance, that she was the daughter of the first president of Lebanon following the end of the French mandate; that she allowed herself to be an artist only after her father's death in 1964; that she left her children and family in Beirut in 1970 to pursue an artistic life; that she was preoccupied with her physical weight; that she designed caftans for Pierre Cardin after the designer spotted her in one of his Paris showrooms when she was buying a tie for her husband Paul; that she again settled in Los Angeles in 1987 after the death of her lover George Apostu the previous year; that her exhibition history hardly compares to her output. These and other anecdotes like them are part of the life that Caland constructed for herself alongside her art practice. As an artist and a persona, she managed to elide the preoccupations of art's linear histories, whether the characterisation of Arab Modernism or a West Coast sensibility stemming from her time in Los Angeles. Evading research or scholarship until recently, Caland's work has also managed to elide the burdens of historical contextualisation. Her work falls outside the critical categories of art's global discourses and unbinds itself from the dominant trends of fashionable geographies, marketable identities and historical fetishes

that shape culture as an orderly affair. Caland never seemed to share a synchronous relationship to time; in the months that have elapsed since her death, her work has maintained the impasse that it did when she was amongst the living. Steadfastly promiscuous in her approach to artistic style, Caland maintains an irreconcilable difference with the linearity of art history. We simply don't know what to do with much of what she made.

The rate at which a lifetime of work unfolds is never clear. This is even more apparent when the art viewing experience is slowed down to the seemingly anachronistic velocity of paint on canvas, oil on panel or pencil on paper – materials that, by their very nature, defy relevance by quietly resisting. Caland's work wages a retreating battle against asymmetrical decay and the thrust of life towards death; conservation and preservation are necessary contributors to this process, and words and writing on Caland and her work offer a similar function. She managed to make new time by denying the clock of capital, by denying the clock of intellectual trends. Women artists, in particular, have tended to deny these clocks because the clocks have tended towards denial and omission. Caland's career trajectory and her wilful disregard for discursive frameworks form arguments for a theory of sensuality and sexuality through paint, for an erotics of colour and line. This maintains that Caland is still decidedly out of step, out of rhythm and out of time. She has taken the clock out of the scenario.

In some cases, recognition may come too late, if it comes at all. Perhaps the artists that seem to define today's current historical moment will be forgotten in the future. Perhaps the personal, local or individual concerns of one's practice that are applicable at the moment will have little weight tomorrow. Perhaps the style of one's brand of research or art-making will fall victim to the whims of institutional ideologies and biennial circuits. These are real concerns that artists confront each day. And yet, there is an endurance that unfolds according to a different clock, that manifests itself according to a different notion of historical time, that is decidedly incompatible with the discipline of art history or the field of curation. An artist such as Caland could only do her best, even if doing her best meant that she would show up late to the party.

1 David Antin, 'writing in the dark', *Golden Handcuffs Review*, no. 19 (Fall–Winter 2014–15): 58.

Images courtesy of the Estate of Huguette Caland.

PAST LIVES

CHRIS McCORMACK

Clarice Lispector, writing about her physical recovery after a fire broke out at her apartment on 14 September 1966, observed:

> [W]hen they removed the stitches from my hand after they had operated between the fingers, I screamed with pain. I screamed with pain and anger because the pain was an insult to my physical integrity. But I was no fool. I took advantage of my pain and screamed at the past and present. I even screamed at the future, dear God.[1]

This description, first published in one of Lispector's *crônicas* – a newspaper column for the *Jornal do Brasil* – came to mind frequently during the expansive, tripartite-curated Sharjah Biennial *Leaving the Echo Chamber*. Her scream, aimed at an obliteration of trauma across time and precipitated by the sense of her physical rupturing, captures some of the intensity of the Biennial, which dilated histories of past, present and future pains. Lispector's burnt hand in recovery, her writing hand, might convey attempts to find ways to suture pain into the mark-making of language or to cauterise exhaustive cries across time.

A week after returning from Sharjah to London, such ruminations dissolved when my father died from dementia. The turbulent proximity of events stripped my memory of the exhibition, leaving a scattered looseness across the present, as if looking back to the scorched-desert horizon line of Sharjah. To write this, to stitch together a reprieve through analysis and reflection, is also to return to the exhibition through new-found intimacy with familial loss and its constitutive possibilities. If the echo chamber of the title is commonly that of voices harmoniously agreeing with one another – a temporary or continuing protectionism whilst blinkering discord – might it also

be where we find voices of those who have died or been struck from the record of history? The screams across time, of which Lispector speaks?

Omar Kholeif's *Making New Time* made a set of propositions that touched on these displacements of historical and political narratives and traumas. These subjects were informed by an awareness of the temporal lags and state-controlled access to online content and news; yet they also quietly proposed how the violent outward flow of social media might be apprehended or reconsidered. Kholeif's exhibition positioned questions along this often un-cathected axis of personal and state-led reconciliation, clearly rendering where the disavowal or often fraught inclusions of the overlooked, the exploited and the obscured lives can be traced. Led by historical re-picturing and performance works, the Biennial struck a path out from these often suppressed histories of rage and compulsory silence.

The striking work by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Once Removed* (2019), relays the life of Bassel Abi Chahine. He believes himself to be the reincarnation of Yousef Fouad Al Jawhary, a fighter who took part in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) militia from the late 1970s to the early '80s during the lengthy Lebanese Civil War. As a Druze, Chahine speaks at length during the film about his belief in reincarnation and in the transmigration of souls across generations. Indeed, Chahine often slips between his dual first-person perspective, covering details about his current and past life, often making interchangeable revelations. For instance, he discloses that Al Jawhary 'did not wear these badges until 1980' and points out the location where he was hit with shrapnel before dying on his way to Damascus at the age of seventeen.

In addition, since 2000, Chahine has gathered and been given rare objects that provide an unparalleled overview of living through and fighting during the Lebanese Civil War. Chahine's archive thus becomes the limited site of anamnesis that would otherwise be struck from collective consciousness. Indeed, Abu Hamdan approaches the subject with exacting scrutiny, providing photographic and archival material to cement this otherworldly eyewitness testimony and offering insight into histories otherwise erased or silenced. Abu Hamdan films himself and Chahine in silhouette, their physical presence producing lacunae into the construction of recollection, casting shadows that obscure the visual material under discussion.

The reincarnation of Al Jawhary's life enables a voice otherwise lost in present-day state-sponsored education. This dead voice, now alive in the body of Chahine, arrives as an unremitting stain or haunting, to lay claim upon otherwise revisionist strategies that try to expunge trauma from state records. Chahine collapses time frames even further, wearing the clothes from his former life and photographing himself as though a soldier from that time.

Kire Babanoski, the writer of *The Threats of Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters for the European Security*, contemplates:

> …the actual way that foreign terrorist fighters should be treated after returning to their home countries, since the processes of their de-radicalisation, resocialisation, rehabilitation, reintegration and inclusion in the post-penal treatment are particularly difficult, complex, multidisciplinary and filled with challenges due to the socio-political, cultural and security conditions in the countries.[2]

By speaking of fighters and state-declared terrorists in metaphysical ways, Abu Hamdan complexly raises the question of who has the right to return home after war. Moreover, he questions whether those crossing borders into enemy territory should be stripped of their birth-right citizenship, their *jus sanguinis* or 'right of blood'. The question of how citizenship is granted, removed or denied forms the basis for Abu Hamdan's engagement with generations of lives reverberating over state-sanctioned identities. More directly, Abu Hamdan suggests that the end of war aligns with how specific details pertaining to sectarian conflicts are suppressed in the interest of national security. These not only reflect the tightening of lines that secure boundaries between countries, but cut upwards, crossing time and lifespans. In Abu Hamdan's hands, it is as if reincarnation becomes a final refuge from capito-surveillance models of state control. By physically framing the impossibility of seeing these histories, we are left with partial views and the undead speaking for us.

Similar evocations of how the dead are constituted in the living are found in the installation *Aging Ruins Dreaming Only to Recall the Hard Chisel from the Past* (2019), produced by Otobong Nkanga in collaboration with Emeka Ogboh. In a walled, untended garden located on the grounds of Bait Al Aboudi, we hear an incantation of voices struggling to speak and search

for breath, as if trying to articulate words or forge meanings. Emitting from a hulking, desiccated palm tree, Nkanga calls on the spirits of forebears as if conjuring the un-silent remains of voices still hanging in the air. 'You think a dead tree is dead', the voice whispers, 'I'm still alive'. The ominous sensation of this possessed tree, however, gives way to a joyous symphony of voices, including a recording of an Emirati 'rain song' performed by children living in Sharjah, along with what sounds like a crackling wood fire.

As if providing an alternate ecology of tidal flows and weather, Nkanga's recording seems to recite messages that might connect us to lives estranged or to those who are dead. These messages amplify places where we might consider the reprisals of colonial damage and the cost of lives bound and murdered in slavery. These subjects are suggestive of some of Christina Sharpe's theories of weather and its metaphor as an unchanging climate of antiblackness and violence. For example, Sharpe considers the climate under which Black lives exist, charting the recordings of Black men fighting for breath under police neck-holds in the US and finding disturbing parallels with the asphyxiation of Black bodies held as slaves in ships travelling to the US from Africa via Europe. Nkanga returns to these ideas of breath as life force with supernatural dread and gnomic vision: 'I dreamt of the drizzle…I knew trouble was coming'. The weather, it seems, represents a portent of warnings across time, a purposeful drift of narratives that collide and break up over different time zones and captured testimonies.

Nearby, several circular craters, framed by mounds of sand and dug into the earth, had been filled with seawater. Small pools are now all that remain; the evaporated traces of saltwater band in mineral white lines, capturing the sun's slow-burning arc across the

sky each day. A series of life-sized light boxes against one wall is rendered in the tonal shades of the sunset. The works indicate both the end of the day – of a day's work finished – and its foreboding inverse of a ceaseless, global screen of constant murmurings and fears. Indeed, quietly running under these works are the splintered remains of colonial presence. Here, Nkanga obliquely provides a channel of sound that was never heard and has seemingly escaped its order.

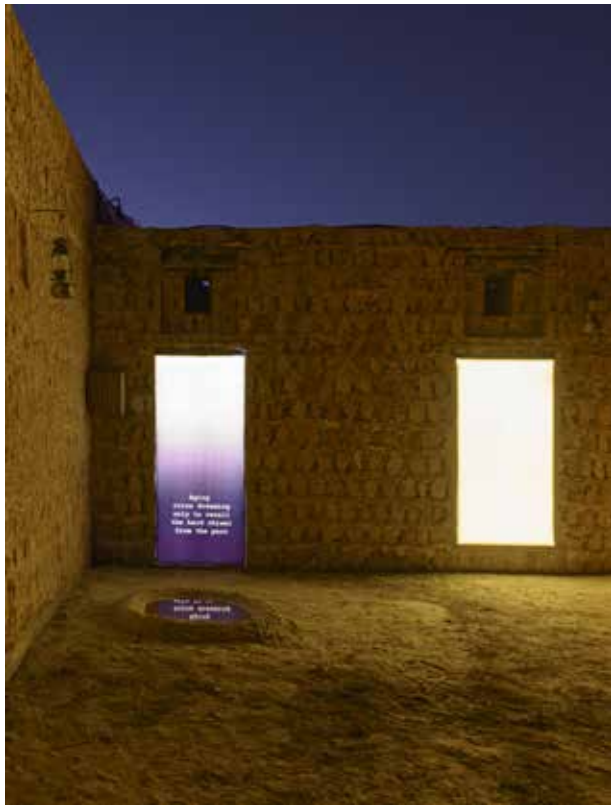
Paul Ricoeur, in his book from 2004, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, considers the two intentionalities that differentiate eidetic recall: 'the first', he claims, is 'that of imagination, directed toward the fantastic, the fictional, the unreal, the possible, the utopian, and the other, that of memory, directed toward prior reality, priority constituting the temporal mark par excellence of the "thing remembered", of the "remembered" as such'.[3] The tension between what is remembered accurately and that which has been incorrectly conceived is here distinguished by Ricoeur as phenomenologically resting on the faults and limits of memory. Yet it is perhaps the work of Kholeif's *Making New Time* to enable these very faults to appear as actual and vivid parts of history without needing to produce empirical methods of how one arrived at

these 'facts'. Indeed, it is this double focus – of the 'thing' before and a future not-known, which obscures remembering, itself – that is evoked through a section, largely of paintings, in the Sharjah Art Museum. Kholeif's choice of works by Huguette Caland, Semiha Berksoy, Lubaina Himid, Bruno Pacheco, Marwan and Anwar Jalal Shemza loosely cohere around how bodies are depicted: from the corporeal intensity of Marwan, to the spectral scumbles of Berksoy, to Pacheco's paintings of luminous balloons that take on the monstrous weight of stone, their subject caught in a celebratory ode to a Sisyphean task.

Along this flow of paintings is a room of Himid's work, which sees the artist's return to reconstructions of painterly imaginations of the British Empire with her recasting of the work of James Tissot. The French artist is largely known for his paintings of 'high society', which took residence in London over the latter part of the nineteenth century. Himid revisits Tissot's work and imagines Black bodies replacing the lives of white ones. As if these were the lives of those who were born into societies impoverished, or born or sold into slavery, Himid wishes to recast these narratives and picture parallel time frames. In one such work, *The Captain and the Mate* (2017–18), the artist reimagines what in Tissot's painting are two women flattering the attentions of the shipmates, neither of whom takes the elevated place of being represented in the title of Tissot's work. However, Himid recaptures them as two men and two women embracing. If the shifting power dynamics are coyly presented with the captain's stray eye, which forces a clear tension in the tableau, Himid sharply encapsulates the subversive possibilities of what is happening, both above and below deck.

It is this tension, of what is out of the sight and reach of memory, that feels at stake in many of these works – our collective screams perhaps finding ways forwards and back. Indeed, whose voice in this echo chamber is being heard? The chamber of the Biennial's title largely evokes the filtered bubbles of social media and online communication, interactions that are typically staged from the bedroom – a further chamber – cutting through the place of solitary thought, private lives and passionate encounters. The bedroom has now become a place that compresses work and sex, online or offline, eating and sleeping, into one rented and restless spot. Our places of sleep increasingly encompass all aspects of our daily lives, particularly so for those living on lower incomes and in cities, whilst the burgeoning number of life/work spaces indicates that these

Captions: Dollabor as nos cusapiendi optaqui Dollabor as nos



cusapiendi optaqui tem. Captions: Dollabor as nos cusapiend.

boundaries have been rubbed away. (One only needs to look at the so-called 'coffin homes' in Hong Kong to see evidence of this trend.)

For five consecutive mornings, I had breakfast at Sharjah's Radisson Blu hotel, a totem of concrete and glassy flooring. I ordered *chapatis* and watched them bake in a clay oven. Each morning, the same man, barely registering my presence, kneaded and slathered oil over the dough before dispensing it into the heat-searing pit. As the heat bent light across his face into a shimmering mirage, he stared out into the distance. His exacting stillness of movement noticeably made a point through which the rest of the hotel moved upon and moved through, and exited elsewhere.

Our combined tourist restlessness swept in and out, whilst this minimal, repetitive action of making food folded time into stasis: as if looking through time, his stillness became a needle, a lens, a stitch through which to witness our time and experience. His hands and the heat embodied a dextrous inversion of Lispector's burning and scarred hand, a hand that was later described as resembling a blackened claw for the rest of her life.[4] Returning to London, I held my father's hands, cold and still. I wonder how we might all scream like Lispector.

1 Clarice Lispector, *Selected Crônicas*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New Directions, 1996), 72.

2 'The Threats of Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in European Security', *Journal of Applied Security Research* (2019): 10–27.

3 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6.

4 '[T]he left hand was a miracle of elegance', Lispector's friend Olga Borelli wrote. 'At work, agile and decided, it seemed to compensate for the deficiencies of the other, hard, with badly controlled gestures, with burnt fingers, bent back, deeply scarred'. In Benjamin Moser, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 284.

MANIFESTO

A SERIES OF FIRST-PERSON STATEMENTS THAT TOGETHER HAVE A CUMULATIVE EFFECT

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Imagine going back in time twenty years and telling yourself there's this magic thing called Wi-Fi, which you can't see or smell or know about, yet without Wi-Fi, your day is ruined. You can't think properly, you get nothing done. You become bored and anxious without it. Wi-Fi rules your life.

I don't read as much as I used to.

It mildly horrifies me when I read a book and partway into it, I think, 'Hey, this is what my brain used to feel like'.

I think reading books has become almost a form of temporal ecotourism.

I do believe that reading fosters a sense of individualism.

And I believe that the Internet fosters the sense of being one unit amongst 7.5 billion units.

I miss my pre-Internet brain.

I no longer remember my pre-Internet brain.

I find that if you really want to torture somebody, tell them you just went on holiday to someplace lazy, and casually drop the information that you spent the entire time reading.

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I wonder if email is basically nothing more than an emotional slot machine.
I find it drives me crazy that when I'm away from email, even for a bit of time, I fantasise that the best email I've ever had is sitting in my inbox and inaccessible to me.
I often find myself rereading emails I've already sent, and I wonder why I do this.

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I think that real time no longer feels either real, or like time.
It bugs me that I can't tell if the Internet has made me stupider or made me smarter.
I miss people at dinner parties spouting bullshit and urban legends at the table.
I find it fascinating that people enjoy photographing their salads, and I am happy that the need to photograph our salads has made chefs try harder; but there's something sad that happens when you photograph your salad…it's like you turn your salad into a ghost.

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It's freaking me out that I've somehow damaged my sense of time, that time is now passing so much more quickly.
I miss doing nothing.
I miss feeling clueless.
I miss being bored.
I agree to the above terms and conditions.
I'm sad that my sense of time has gone screwy.
I'm sad that ten years ago now feels like ten minutes ago – and that ten minutes ago now feels like ten years ago.
I think it's not an illusion; I think time really is moving more quickly.
I get nostalgic for continuity.
Basically, I miss time.

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I find it comforting that if you ignore an email in your inbox long enough, you can simply delete it and no harm is done.
I spend a lot of time wondering whether the Internet is ultimately going to favour the individual or if it will favour the mob.
I wonder if it's heresy to our specieshood to no longer want to be an individual.
I think it is embarrassing to be a part of a generation.
I find it odd that Americans used to care about things, and then they just stopped caring.
I think that confusing chaos with liberty is just plain embarrassing.
I suspect that giving everyone in your country a criminal record makes them much easier to control.
I think technology more often than not favours horrible people.
I think bored people crave war.
I believe that fate is for losers.
I have noticed that knowing you believe in something stupid somehow makes that thing far more exciting to believe in.
I wonder if it's smart to assume that technology remains the only link to enlightenment.
I wonder if automated governments are inevitable.
This is not my thought, but it is a good one: religion is

what keeps poor people from killing rich people.
I wonder if non-political art can still be called 'art'.
I wonder if political art is merely politics.
I wonder if maintaining your country's border isn't so much that you're protecting your politics, but rather that you're protecting your country's brand.
I believe that anonymity is the food of monsters.
I miss the centre, but I wonder if the centre is for losers.
Let me ask a question: If the Brexit vote were to happen again tomorrow, do you think the vote would still swing the same way? Highly doubtful. We seem to be at a magical new stage in this thing called 'democracy', where we may have to rethink core tenets about the wisdom of the 50 per cent plus one vote.
The majority, so it seems, can no longer be trusted. It feels like what we need for democracy at the moment is some kind of electoral morning-after pill.
Can you imagine? *Guess what, Britain…you don't have to Brexit after all!* [Insert massive sigh of relief.] *We'll be holding a revote tomorrow.*
Phew.
But maybe not. Maybe a double vote on an issue would simply lead to the exact same percentage of results, albeit with more voters. And maybe a double vote would lead to a triple vote – and so on. So where would one draw the line?

Here's another question: Will we be voting online in twenty years? Of course, we will; nobody doubts that. But right now, we vote in a mode so archaic (depending on your jurisdiction: paper, pencils, cardboard boxes, scrutineers) that it feels like we're comparing centuries, not technologies – Punch and Judy shows versus Netflix. So, how do we get from here to there?
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I think that unless you have a genuine skill, like performing appendectomies, or unless you make something that can't be downloaded, like furniture or a cake, then you're doomed to become a member of the new global monoclass, cobbling together a living from small, skill-free gigs.
I think being middle class was fun.
I suspect that a fully linked world will no longer want or need a middle class.
I think that in the future, every day of the week will be Thursday.
I think that in the future, everyone will wear Halloween costumes 365 days a year.
I believe it is impossible for old technologies to solve the problems created by new technologies.
I believe that people make bad decisions when technologies change too quickly.

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'Press pound now'. Hello. I'd like to speak with a human being, please.

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I think it's human nature that we finally get the answer to pretty much any question for free, anywhere on the planet, with no judgment; and in response, we become mildly bored.
I like that we think of 'the cloud' as a benevolent cartoon character.
I like that most people don't know or care about the cloud's infrastructure.
I think that poverty without a good Wi-Fi connection would be truly horrible.
I think that poor celebrities are depressing.
I secretly daydream that the cloud will one day allow me to have a conversation with myself.
I believe that wanting to be forgotten is no longer an option.
It makes me happy that my data stream doesn't judge me.
I see that everyone talks about their data, but what does data even look like? And even if you saw it, would you know what to do with it?
I think data is the new time.
I think the cloud is the new infinity.

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To be honest, I want nothing more than to get shit-faced inside a driverless car.
I like that there's no shopping on *Game of Thrones*.
I think that lonely, isolated people consume more than happy people.
I like to think about prisoners in the American penal system using the Internet to shop on Amazon. I wonder if they represent the future…if, in the future, all of us will be in jail shopping online.
I think that if we get bored of shopping, then we're really in trouble.
I think that healthy people are bad for capitalism.
I think unhealthy people eat more, drive cars more and pump way more money into medical infrastructure.
I sometimes feel as if we live in a world run by billionaires who were born in caves.
I wonder if, from a certain standpoint, we can say that sharing is merely ownership for losers.
I sometimes wonder if capitalism kills you; but first, it puts you to sleep.

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I wonder if the urge to be an individual is a form of brain mutation enjoyed by only about 15 per cent of humanity, and that the natural state of the human mind is to be a non-questioning part of the herd.
It worries me that sometimes I look out at the world and it looks like clip art.
It saddens me that I can't remember when it was that I stopped enjoying speaking on the telephone.

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I find it bizarre that ten-year-olds in the United States know the difference between 'cc' and 'bcc'.
I find myself hating technology when I phone someone, and I have to keep pressing 'zero' over and over and over in order to bypass endless decision trees.
I wonder if machines are talking about me behind my back.
I'd like to speak with a human being, please.
I wonder if, given the chance to, machines would make better choices than humans.
I wonder: What if it turns out that machines actually like human beings?

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I think that at the moment, AI is just you and the cloud doing a small dance together with relatively simple algorithms. But soon enough, everyone's dance with the cloud will be happening together in a cosmic cyber ballroom, and everyone's data streams will be communicating with everyone else's streams, and these data streams will all be talking about *you*: What did you buy today? What did you drink, ingest, excrete, inhale, view, unfriend, read, lean towards, reject, talk to, smile at, get nostalgic about, get angry about, link to, like or get off on? Assemble these quotidian data hits with corporate, governmental data banks, and you end up becoming something that's humblingly easy to predict, please, anticipate, model, forecast and replicate.

Then tie this new machine-intelligence realm in with some smart 3D graphics that have captured your body metrics and likeness, and a few years down the road, the physical version of you will become somewhat beside the point.

A dematerialised, parallel you already exists out there in the cloud – but instead of being good or evil, it's mostly just machines telling other machines that you recently purchased a piqué polo shirt in a hue flattering to your skin tone.

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Here's something I find odd. Let's say you wake up one morning and go to work on a big project with an approaching deadline – so you spend all day working in front of a screen, with a few breaks to get a snack. Then you go to bed. And technically, with the exception of going out for snacks, your day was entirely AI.

I think too much leisure time is a terrible idea.

I think it's good that billions of people spend huge chunks of their time online. I think that billions of people being out in the real world doing things would be a disaster for the planet.

I wonder if there's no next big thing. I wonder if Google and iPhones represent the peak of humanity's tech capability, and for the rest of human history, the best we can hope for is slightly better versions once a year.

I find it kind of exciting to sit in a chair and wonder what amazing and life-changing new technology is hurtling towards us like a meteorite.

I think the future loves us, but I don't think the future needs us.

I'm unsure of whether the present is either too interesting or too boring.

I look at movies and TV from the 1970s and 1980s, and I feel sorry for the characters, for how

little technology they had.
I wonder where personality ends and brain damage begins.
I find it weird that people want to be interviewed. I wonder what it is that one can learn about oneself in an interview and only in an interview.
I wonder if we will ever invent a pill that makes us feel more like ourselves.
I wonder what it would feel like to be myself, except only more so.
I wonder what the inside of my head would feel like if I didn't speak any language.
When I'm having an argument with myself, which of my two voices is the real me?
I believe the opposite of fame is no longer anonymity.
I think the opposite of nobody is no longer somebody.
I believe the right to be invisible is a fundamental human right.
I believe we need to invent new ways to disappear.
I wonder why being an object is always portrayed as a bad thing.
I wonder if there are situations where being an object is good.
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Hi! I'm all that toxic crap you store underneath the kitchen sink.
Hi! I'm that useless trip you took to Europe last April.
Hi! I'm all those herbicides, fertilisers and pesticides out in the garage!
Hi! I'm that tub of margarine you threw away in 1987!
I find it weird that we don't mind pumping detergents and solvents into the planet's ecosystems, just so long as we've added a bit of dirt and shit in with them.
I wonder if nuclear winter will fix global warming.
I wonder if animals look at human beings and recognise that our souls are damaged.
I wonder about God.
I wonder if God is bored with human beings.
I wonder if we should bring back God, just so we can kill him again.
I wonder if the present and the future have now morphed into the same thing.
I find myself uneasy with the increasingly inescapable idea that the Internet is the real world, just as much as this thing out here we like to call the real world.
I feel like I'm dissolving into something else, but I'm unsure what it is I'm dissolving into.
I think the downside of being connected is that you're always connected.

I think the natural human attention span is about the length of a Beatles song.
It concerns me that my life no longer feels like a story.
I wonder what it means that my life once felt like a grand narrative – with a beginning, a middle, a denouement and a moral – and now, I feel like just one more individual person-unit living with 7.5 billion other person-units.
I think my blog is futile. I think all blogs are futile.
It worries me that my life has become a sequence of dopamine hits I get when I open a fresh email or watch a really good YouTube video selected just for me by YouTube's spookily accurate algorithms.
I believe that when life becomes a series of tasks, one's sense of time begins to shrink.
It concerns me that I find going backwards to my former laptop or former Wi-Fi speeds intolerable.
I find it a small blessing that there's still a part of me that wants to fly in planes that have no Wi-Fi.
I think that the end of the world is actually kind of corny.
I look at my life and I wonder if there is something I could do to make myself be and feel more free. What would that be?
I believe that art is up for grabs, again.
I believe that there is deep shit beneath the shiny shit.
I think sharing is the only way out.
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I find it perplexing that our current collective desire as a species is to invent something smarter than ourselves in order to get us out of the mess we've created for ourselves.
I find it naive we assume that the Singularity – if and when it emerges – is going to be a benevolent father figure, like a 1970s TV dad.
I suspect that the Singularity – if and when it emerges – is going to be a screaming, crying baby who lashes out at anything that annoys it.
It freaks me out that everything that is happening to all of us is happening to us so quickly.
It freaks me out that acceleration is accelerating.
I find comfort in the fact that everyone on Earth is feeling the same way I do.
I miss time, the way it used to feel, Time Classic™.
I want my time back.
I think that we people here in this room today are the last generation that will die.
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But enough about me. What about you?
Let me talk to you.
Let me tell you that you are beautiful.
Let me tell you that I find comfort that we all chose to be here, today.
Let me tell you that all of you are real.
Let me tell all of you that all of your lives have meaning.
Let me tell you that in your deeds and through art, you will all live forever.
And let me thank you.
Thank you.

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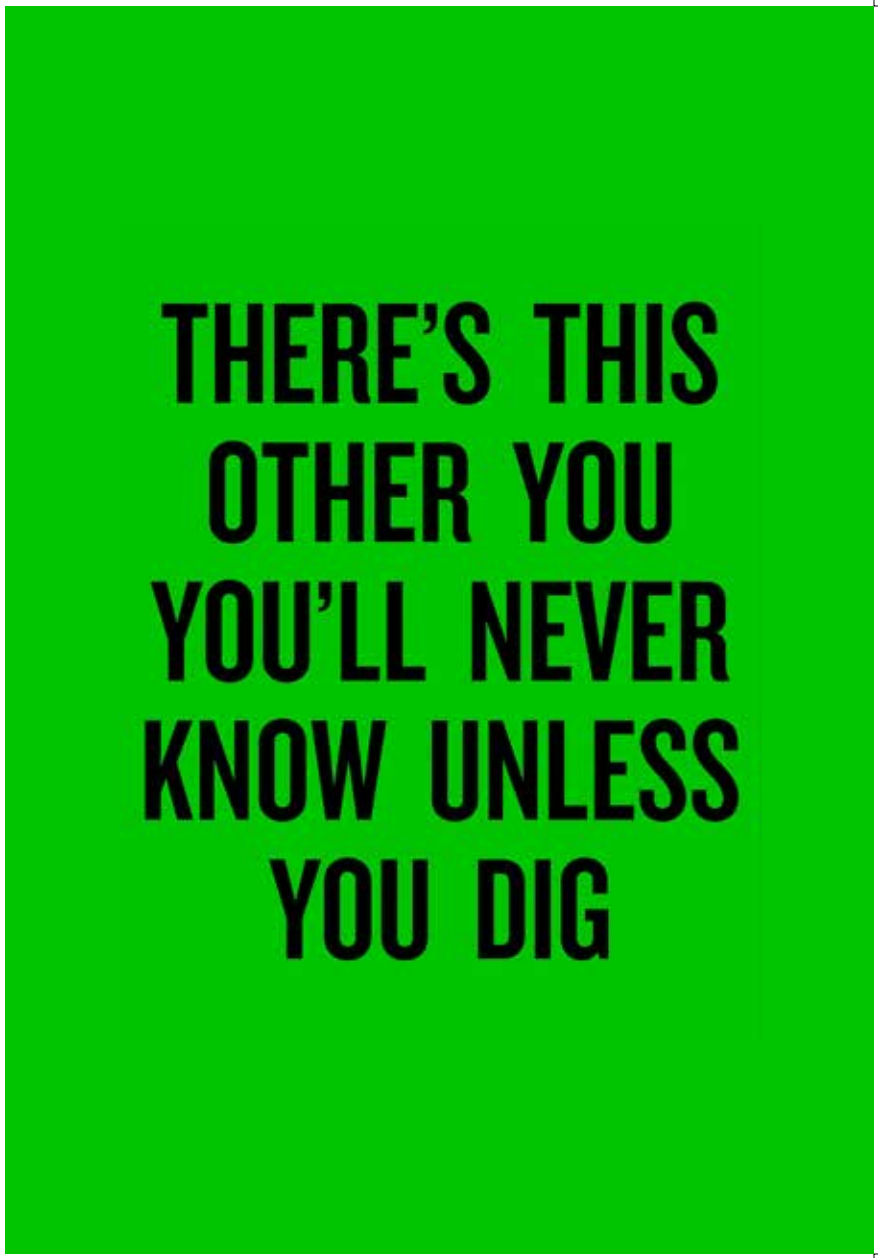

WHAT SEEMS RANDOM USUALLY ISN'T

IF YOU DON'T DO IT, IT WON'T HAPPEN SO JUST DO IT

THERE IS BOTH A FICTION AND A NON-FICTION VERSION OF YOU

ADDING NEW PEOPLE TO YOUR LIFE IS HARD WORK

SOMETIMES NOTHING HAPPENS

SO MANY PEOPLE DON'T DO THINGS AND I JUST DON'T KNOW WHY

FEAR OF
BOREDOM
IS JUST AS
GOOD A
REASON
AS ANY

THE WORLD
SENDS YOU
SIGNALS BUT
IF YOU STOP
LOOKING,
IT STOPS

Four Slogans on the Theme of Work and Creativity
2020

From 'Douglas Coupland' one of five books in a series
titled 'Just an Idea'
Published by Sarah Andelman
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IN A MOMENT OF TENDERNESS, THE FUTURE SEEMS POSSIBLE[1]

SOFIA VICTORINO

Two women dressed in black are on a stage. They walk slowly towards each other. As they come closer, they stop and take a deep breath. Arms extended, they hold hands. Then, they begin to hug in silence, eyes closed. Their hands perform slow movements, touching and caressing each other's backs. The action lasts several minutes. One of the women holds a glass of water. She begins to pour the water onto the floor, as if watering a plant. She utters words in a language I do not speak. Then, she says:

> This is a call to our ancestors, those that have been here before us, those that gave us the strength to be here, today. I call them to be here with us and to join forces. Past and present colliding towards our future. We are a vessel, a channel to things that haven't been heard. This is a call to the women that were here, that were there, that were in different places. To the women that fought for us, that gave birth to us. The waters that broke and that made us come into life.

The two women on stage are artist Otobong Nkanga and curator Koyo Kouoh. Their performative gesture is emotionally intense. Witnessing such manifestation of affection between two people seems to break the protocol of what is expected in a professional situation. How radical is this gesture in the politically charged framework of a biennial? What is it saying about the format itself, its constraints and possibilities? This greeting ritual calls upon our future, present and past; the material and the spiritual; time-in-the-now, time before and time forwards. This is an experiment with time and space and, I would argue, it encapsulates a deep entanglement with our common heritage.

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This text traces back to the panel discussion held during the 2019 Sharjah Biennial with artists Otobong Nkanga and Akram Zaatari, art historian Hannah Feldman and curator Koyo Kouoh. As the moderator of the panel 'Africa is not a country, the Middle East

is not a continent',[22] I was interested in how distinct artistic and curatorial practices overlap, particularly through ideas of collaboration, metaphors of digging through history and memory, and the possibility of thinking through and beyond the lens of geography. How do specific contexts shape different models of art practice? What happens when these practices are translated, mediated and framed by cultural institutions in multiple places? These questions have been part of my ongoing conversations with Omar Kholeif over the years. They developed when we worked together on the symposium 'Beyond the Former Middle East: Opening Dialogues' (2013) and later on research for the eponymous exhibition and conference titled 'Tracing an Imperfect Chronology: The Barjeel Foundation Art Collection' (2016).[3] The world has changed since then, yet the sense of urgency persists.

Reflecting on the work of Nkanga and Zaatari commissioned by Sharjah Biennial 14 led me to think, both literally and metaphorically, about what is at stake in the act of digging, of gathering fragments buried deep, and translating these fragments into a new context. Fact and fiction are intertwined in the construction of history, and they illuminate our understanding of the present and the relations that animate it. The metaphor of archaeology – used by Sigmund Freud when dissecting the layers of the human psyche – seemed a relevant point of departure from which to address shared concerns found in their works, particularly in relation to the critique of representation and the need to interrogate dominant narratives of Western centrality and coloniality.

Installed on the grounds of Bait Al Aboudi, *Aging ruins dreaming only to recall the hard chisel from the past* (2019) is the title of Nkanga's work for SB14[4]. In collaboration with composer Emeka Ogboh, she created a site-responsive piece that blends sculptural and natural elements such as sound, light, words and soil. A series of circular craters were dug and filled with salt water. We heard voices, whispers. We heard children singing. We heard a tree telling a story. We heard birds. We saw reflections on water. We saw shifting colours and shadows all around us. Nkanga's work triggered a heightened sensorial experience, beyond doors of perception. Echoing precolonial cosmologies, the agency of all things living was made visible and, thus, embodied. We intensely experienced the elements that inhabit this garden, including the water that runs through her poems printed onto

lightboxes with tonal shades of the sunset. How do we come to form ourselves in relation to land?

Akram Zaatari's film *The Landing* (2019) begins with an epigraph: 'To Hassan Sharif who stripped action from its narrative possibilities'. By restaging the 1980s performances of Sharif (1951–2016), Zaatari asks what it means to inhabit the work of other artists and imagines how people once lived in a certain place. Shot in the UAE desert, the film shows what is left of a housing project called Shaabiyyat Al Ghurayfah, which was built in the 1980s in Al Madam, Sharjah. Its ruins, fragments and the new sonic landscape enable us to compose an image that blends present and past: objects, tools, games, stones, swings, digs, camels and helicopters become protagonists in the film. The 'reconstitution' suggests a temporary inhabitation of spaces, a way of dwelling that deals not only with material evidence, but also with the body as a living archive. Voice and sound actualise the gesture and draw attention to the temporality of the ruins as something that seems to sit outside of time. Aware of the entangled histories of archaeology and European colonialism, Zaatari talks about exhibitions as excavation sites and archaeology as a practice that has informed his work. He states: 'I am not an archaeologist, and the finds I "excavate" aren't archaeological objects in any strict sense. Yet they share something with archaeological enquiry: they embody the urge or the desire to search for objects from the past that contribute to our understanding of history and present'.[5]

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The three questions that I was interested in exploring on the panel discussion in Sharjah were: firstly, collaboration as a methodology; secondly, institutional practice and what it means to transform the ways in which institutions operate; and thirdly, how new and alternative models might develop by looking at different genealogies, away from fixed notions of identity and representation.

I propose to begin with collaboration. Collaboration is relational and performative. It is about letting go of a certain type of agency in a way that enables processes to unfold organically, beyond rigid rules and prescribed outcomes, accepting vulnerability and plurality. It also entails a process of unlearning that might lead to a new perception of realities that had been taken for granted. Collaboration as a methodology – or, at

least, its most *visible* side – usually evolves in dialogue with people, in response to particular places and histories. However, we often tend to forget a much wider range of possibilities and shared cosmologies. As Nkanga says: 'We are constantly collaborating, but not defining it as such…what becomes important is the way those translations of ideas, of encounters – travelling to another space, smelling the soil, feeling the heat, tasting the water – become collaborations. It is not just the things we do with people, it is also how those elements decide to reveal themselves to you and how you can work with that. And that is what makes the work'. Koyo Kouoh defines collaboration as 'a never-ending conversation' pointing to an extremely important aspect that tends to be undervalued: joy. There has to be joy when doing things together.

Akram Zaatari uses photography and film to question structures of representation. In his view, as artists and historians, 'we allow history – and nature – to speak through us'. According to the artist, 'the more you put ideologies aside, the more you allow history to penetrate you, to use you as a medium to reveal itself'. Hannah Feldman critiques this position and refers to the way in which Zaatari collaborates with objects and uses historical material to expose society's fractures from within, inasmuch as 'history is one of the greatest ideological organising structures'. Perhaps what needs to be discussed further here are the different conceptions of history – or, at least, how history is being told and by whom. The monolithic structure that Western modernity considered the 'canon' needs to be questioned to make space for multiple convergences.

But what happens when histories collide? Could the cracks in those collisions become interstitial spaces from where another kind of history might emerge? I now turn the focus into the experimental ways through which artists and curators have proposed alternative models of what constitutes an 'institution'. Let us consider two very distinct projects and the role they each play in their local ecologies as well as internationally: firstly, RAW Material Company, Center for Art, Knowledge and Society, in Dakar, founded by Koyo Kouoh, and secondly, the Arab Image Foundation, in Beirut, co-founded by Akram Zaatari. In both of these examples, our understanding of what an 'institution' might be takes a more expansive and polymorphous form.

According to Kouoh, RAW Material was 'a response to a desire, a necessity, an urgency for platforms, frameworks, spaces of engagement with the artistic, with the political,

with society'. She stresses the importance of creating structures that might live beyond us by questioning: 'How can we employ our practices, curatorial or artistic, to create structures that rig us within society in a meaningful way?' Kouoh and Otobong Nkanga together have explored the concept of 'germination' in their research and practice, thinking through ideas of care and repair in relation to history, ecology, sustainability and support structures. As Nkanga argues, 'the notion of creating an institution is also to understand the physicality, the bodies, the humans within it that allow for that architecture to keep on being alive. Institutions are just names, brands. But the people behind [them] are the ones that can shift the politics, can shift the energy, can shift the way of transmitting knowledge within a space'. In *Against Photography*, the book accompanying Zaatari's latest exhibition in Sharjah (2019), the artist discusses the development of the Arab Image Foundation and the motivations behind it. Zaatari exposes the creative tensions between the artistic drive and the institution's aims. He advocates for a culture 'free to create institutions that aren't bound to traditional or hegemonic museological models'[65] and sees the idea of creating infrastructures and institutions as part of a wider social practice, noting that 'structures are constraints but they ensure long life'.

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> You're in the Olympic Games, and all of a sudden you're holding the flag of Nigeria, you're singing the anthem, and the next moment, since you live in another country and you have also the nationality of that country, they bring you in again. But you know where your core lies, where it burns, where it's beyond. You have the political identity, the racial, the palate, the food. You have the emotional identity. So it's very difficult to talk about just one, but you're sliding through many spaces where your body's been triggered and where you totally feel connected to.

The notion of excavating narratives, which I mentioned earlier, and the question of negotiating multiple identities are reflected in Nkanga's words above. Her position points to the genealogy of the colonial as a restrictive framework through which to look at art practice. I want to suggest ending this brief account by asking: Can art and culture be rewritten, considering the microhistories that circumvent the conventions of canonical narratives? What if the space of art could be one that speaks of solidarity, of alternatives to the rise of nationalism, fascism, racism and any kind of extremist position? What role can artists play when speaking from the complexities of their localities, fuelled by the

idiosyncrasies of their respective art ecosystems? The writing of histories needs to acknowledge the existence of porous borders, the polyphony and provisional nature of a dialogic process that encompasses multiple temporalities, genealogies and struggles.

1 I borrowed this title from Book One in Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2019), 155.

2 [2] See 'Africa is not a country; the Middle East is not a continent: Panel Discussion', held at the Sharjah Institute of Theatrical Arts, Sharjah Biennial, March Meeting, 11 March 2019, https://vimeo.com/328406334. All of the quotes in this text are from the panel discussion, unless otherwise noted.

3 [3] The symposium was held on 10 May 2013 and the conference was held on 22 October 2016, both at Whitechapel Gallery, London; see https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/events/barjeel-art-foundation-conference/.

4 I first read these words in the form of a poem written by the artist in the book that accompanied her exhibition, *To Dig a Hole that Collapses Again* (2017).

5 [4] *Akram Zaatari, Against Photography*, Museu d'Art Contemporani (Barcelona, Spain), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (Germany), Kungnip Hyondae Misulgwan, Sharjah Art Foundation**,** 2018, page 42.

6 Ibid., p. 42.

HOLDING TIME: ON THE AESTHETICS OF SURVIVAL

TAREK EL-ARISS

Fig. 1. The desert encroaching on modern buildings in Akram Zaatari's *The Landing* (2019)

In *The Landing* (2019), Akram Zaatari shows the desert encroaching on modern structures – skeletal buildings announcing a reversal in modernity's quest for the domination of nature. Modernity, which brought about national and building projects, assemblies and city halls, might finally be admitting defeat. Likewise, the modern time, which has come to the Middle East through pocket watches and town clocks, wars and amorous encounters, might have surrendered to the time of sand

and dunes, announcing the return of something outside of its linear and teleological narrative.

Today, modernity as a constellation of concepts and narratives – such as the nation, the subject, history, and time – is increasingly challenged. Portals to ancient structures and rituals have opened, revealing old as well as modern ruins (*aṭlāl*), as depicted in Zaatari's film. These portals are also reactivating writing codes and poetry on Twitter in addition to horrific forms of violence through encounters with monsters, both material and virtual. Deep-seated anxieties from pre-Islamic Arabia and elsewhere are re-emerging and encroaching on modern subjects and their dwelling spaces, communal narratives, and social orders. Yet perhaps these anxieties and the shape they take have always been there, never overcome, lurking, just waiting for the passing of modernity's projects and secretly wishing they would fail.

Stepping outside of linear time, abandoning the commitment to the future, or admitting the failure of modernity as a historical and building project brings to mind the existentialist model about which Sartre and Camus wrote – the fixed span of time from which there is 'no exit'.[1] In this span, one confronts monsters coming from all sides as in a video game. And in the absence of a clear future, a *telos* or a moment of salvation, all one can do is to hold time not by stopping it, but as one would hold one's breath, terrified at the catastrophic scene flashing on screens and in nightmares. However, another holding is possible: the holding of a child or a lover, and the telling of stories and making of art in order to delay, to trick fate just a little longer.

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Saint Augustine was one of the first to reflect on the question of time by turning to the story of creation. In his *Confessions*, he argues that God, though outside of time and thus eternal, created the world, in the beginning, through an act that inaugurated a temporal dimension.[2] Augustine calls attention to the collision between that which is outside of time and an event that brings time forwards, generating it. Therefore, time is not something that always existed, but was, in fact, created in the Book of Genesis, which ends with a period of rest on the seventh day. Time is the essential component of creation, and with it is created the human understanding of time.

Within this experience of time, trickling as in an hourglass, comes the creation of the subject. In Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, the eponymous lead

subject is a tragic figure who faces beasts and monsters in a race with time to save himself and others. After killing a man on his way to Thebes, Oedipus must solve the riddle of the Sphinx upon his arrival in order to save the city's inhabitants. After defeating the ghoul-like antagonist with his wit, he is made king by marrying the recently widowed queen. Unbeknownst to Oedipus, however, is that he is the son of Laius and Jocasta, the King and Queen of Thebes, and that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Thus, his victory against the Sphinx both enabled and delayed that which was predetermined: a plague that would strike Thebes and not spare the city until the truth about Oedipus's birth, patricide, and incest were revealed. Between the defeat of the Sphinx and the advent of the plague, there is a window of time in which Oedipus manages to delay the ultimate verdict. He does not know that he has killed his father and married his mother until the end.[3] Oedipus acts as a trickster up to a point, yet he must ultimately accept retribution, which leads to his tragic downfall.

Sophocles's tale was fundamental to Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex theory[4]; it raises questions about time – how the past affects the present, and whether salvation is possible. Freud thus inaugurates the modern subject haunted by the past, a past that he must confront, just like Oedipus. Psychoanalysis, for Freud, was a form of time travel, which allowed the subject to affect the present or the future by accounting for the past. Freud saw individuals as having a historical narrative with defining events that conditioned their development, very much mirroring that of communities and nations. The past, in order to be accessed, must first be imagined, and then narrated, over and over, in order for its wounds to appear and its trauma to register.

The nation, like the subject, has to imagine its past as it strives for salvation in the future. This salvation, as Benedict Anderson wrote in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, is not a transcendental form of salvation, but a political one, made possible through the building of modern institutions. Anderson discusses the rise of different reading practices starting in the eighteenth century with newspapers and print capitalism as well as an increase in writing in vernacular languages.[5] Through these modern practices, people began to imagine themselves within secular time – no longer members of a dynastic or sacred community, but a national one. These national communities developed particular 'origin' stories, which affected new ideas of the present and developed a sense of a teleological future. Anti-colonial struggles in the Global South have also

formed through this lens, relying on the concept that engendering the nation acts as a moment of salvation that breaks the bonds of colonial rule and liberates people through national projects, such as establishing an official language and schools, along with other modern institutions.

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Modernity's institutions, temporalities,, and imagined communities are increasingly challenged today. Concepts of time that were once necessary for the formation of the modern subject and the modern nation seem to be changing radically in the age of wars and reconstruction projects, especially in the Arab region. For example, when the Lebanese Civil War ended in 1990, the late prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri called on the Lebanese to exit war and to enter into the future.[6] Unlike the Freudian subject who must deal with past trauma in order to potentially move into the future, this new model of time depends on forgetting the past and suppressing its experiences. Given this model, the new subject and nation no longer have to deal with the past as Freud identified and theorised it. This new model informs many reconstruction projects in the region, and it serves as a way to exit the constraints of the 'developmental' model (psychological, political, social, etc.), either by entering directly into the future or never entering it at all.

The 1990s marked the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1990), the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), and announced the advent of neo-liberalism. These events served a blow to a certain Left, which had – up to this point – centred on national liberation, anti-colonial struggle, and secularism. The decade also brought about satellite television and the internet, which led to new experiences of simultaneity that propelled humanity through space-time at warp speeds. Thus, historical, ideological, and technological developments coincided; this altered the subject's experience of time and, in particular, of the secular time of the nation. Compounded by seemingly inevitable climate collapse, these radical changes in the constitution of the subject and its environment require that we turn to premodern models of resistance, in which tricking and hacking are necessary in order to defer what seems like an ultimate verdict.

Though Oedipus managed to delay fate up to a certain point, one other trickster succeeded in doing so indefinitely; her name was Scheherazade. In *The 1,001 Arabian Nights*, King Shahryar, allegedly traumatised by the infidelity of his first wife, gets revenge by marrying

a different virgin every night and having her executed at dawn.[7] By choosing to marry the king, Scheherazade, like Oedipus in Thebes, answers the people's call. In so doing, she saves the virgins of the kingdom from certain death. She does this through trickery and storytelling, confronting the beasts and monsters in fiction as a way of taming the monsters around her, in her bed, awaiting to decapitate her at dawn.

The Arabian Nights divides time into small segments, each marked by a story or a part of a story. Storytelling thus holds time as Scheherazade holds her husband in bed, deferring an inalterable retribution by one night, and then another, and another. Each night offers one increment of time that keeps Scheherazade alive. In the absence of salvation or an absolute victory over fate, *The Arabian Nights* offers a model of deferral and delay akin to what Gilles Deleuze calls 'the virtual'[8] or what Henri Bergson refers to as 'the duration'[9] – spaces of becoming that break with Hegelian dialectics and the denouement and syntheses that have structured modernity's march towards the future. Bergson developed the concept of *la durée* (the duration) by looking at movement and physics, and positing that time is not measurable, but rather something that must be imagined. Just as in physics, speed is measured by dividing the space traversed into small segments and then adding them together. The virtual therefore involves a different understanding of time that cannot be fully captured. There is something that remains outside of time and needs to be imagined. Imagining time must acknowledge the uncertainty of the future and the inability to escape the time span that has set in. Modernity's version of the subject is affected by these different speeds and imagined times, and ultimately requires new conceptualisations.

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Abdallah al-Ghadhdhami's book *Thaqāfat Twitter* (*Twitter Culture*) serves both as a manual for civility in online communication and as a philosophical reflection on the effects of this communication on the public sphere, the subject, and time. His work reflects a fascination with the virtual and expresses terror in the face of its far-reaching transformations. He describes an experience of radical self-exposure: 'Twitter is a formidable cultural tool that performs dual yet complementary functions of unveiled unveiling (*makshūfa al-kāshifa*). It is unveiled because the account holder becomes unveiled (*makshūf*) as if he were bathing in a glass house'.[10] As al-Ghadhdhami expresses his anxiety about cyberspace,

he repeats the concept of unveiling (*kāshif*), presenting a naked, vulnerable, and fragile subject, susceptible to fascination and terror, regression and attack.

The fragile subject emerging in cyberspace must confront trolls and ghouls, both virtual and material. This characterisation announces the collapse of a symbolic order and the Freudian subject with interiority, or the sutured subject of modernity and of Arab modernity (*nahda*) in particular. Going even further, al-Ghadhdhami claims that cyberspace is 'the glass house [and] he who enters is not safe'.[11] Not only is modernity upended in cyberspace, but concepts of safety and security, or *am*ān, in the Islamic context are unsettled. When the Prophet entered Mecca in AD 629 / AH 8, he told the city's inhabitants who had fought him that he would provide them with *amān*, or security, and that he would not seek revenge. This is the Islamic covenant, which marked a shift from the tribal logic of retribution and war to a new model of patience (*ḥilm*) and security (*amān*). Al-Ghadhdhami's subject constitutes a break not only with modernity but also with this Islamic covenant.

The exposed and fragmented subject emerging in cyberspace is forced to confront trolls and ghouls lurking online and arriving through portals from pre-Islamic Arabia and Norse mythology, devouring travellers and browsers alike. These creatures inhabit virtual and real caves and wildernesses, eroding the security of modernity in both its European and Islamic contexts. This state is characterised by fascination, terror and bewilderment. Facing screens, this new subject accepts devices as bodily ports and portals through which it experiences its own corporeality, the other, the world. To be in this state is to confront a new time of monsters, coming from the tales of the 1,001 nights or attacking online. This is a space and time of marvel ('ajab), magic (*siḥr*), and death. This terrifying space of vulnerability is also what Bergson and Deleuze read as the virtual, the space of potentiality and duration, where things could be actualised. It's also the space of tending towards madness, where an extra step closer, further into the territory of the ghoul, could mean the difference between life and death.

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As sand encroaches on modern structures in Akram Zaatari's *The Landing*, and as the awareness of the current collapse intensifies, the need to make new time and to develop strategies of confrontation becomes more urgent. It is said that the only people

who could trick the ghoul were the *ṣaʿālīk*, or brigand poets of pre-Islamic Arabia. Poets such as al-Shanfara and Ta'abat Sharran were also ghoul-like, as they were excluded from the tribe and used to live in the wilderness, relating more to hyenas and vultures than to the horses of Umru' al-Qays. Perhaps because of their marginalisation or queerness, these poets were able to understand the logic of the ghoul – to defeat it, survive, and delay a tragic fate of starvation and death in the wilderness. Other tricksters include Oedipus, who vanquished the Sphinx, and Scheherazade, who tricked King Shahryar and his monsters to keep her alive one more night, and then another, and another. These figures understood the logic of the monster and were able to delay its retribution, holding time, making new time. As poets and storytellers, brigands and heroes, they confronted their tragic fates with art and literature, deploying marvel and bewilderment through personal exploits and aesthetics of survival. It is to them that we must turn as we seek to create new time.

1 See Albert Camus, *L'Étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942) and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). This idea was referenced in curator Omar Kholeif's opening remarks for March Meeting 2019, organized in conjunction with the Sharjah Biennial 14. See "A Poem, a Context, or a Dream," https://vimeo.com/328382670?fbclid=IwAR0HHqKPAFB6siL2z95Qd0_P87_JmdkwxjdvS7nTz-703nQBI9tQ5QBY2pQ

2 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Classics, 1961).

3 Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone; Oedipus the King; Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Classics, 1984).

4 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

6 Rafiq al-Hariri, *Al-Ḥukm wal-Mas'ūliyya: al-Khurūj min-al-Ḥarb wal-Dukhūl fil-Mustaqbal* (*Governance and Responsibility: Exiting the War and Entering the Future*) (Beirut: al-Sharika al-ʿArabiyya al-Muttaḥida lil-Ṣaḥāfa, 1999).

7 *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddawy and Muhsin Mahdi, eds. (New York: Norton 1995), 11.

8 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (London: Duke University Press, 2002).

9 Henri Bergson, *Durée et Simultanéité: À Propos de la Théorie d'Einstein* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1922).

10 Abdallah al-Ghadhdhami, *Thaqāfat Twitter* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2016), 48. The author's translation.

11 Ibid., 2.

IMAGINATION IN THE THOUGHT OF IBN ARABI

FATIMA AL QASIMI

Imagination is one of the most important factors that distinguishes humans from all other creatures. Without it, development could scarcely occur in human life, as creativity has been inextricably tied to the imagination through the great proliferation of fields within the sciences, literature and the arts. Hence, it is important to discuss imagination in relation to an aspect connected to the subject of this research paper, which is art. The study of art properly lies outside of my essential area of specialisation; but here, it is possible to rely solely upon the simplest and most ancient definitions of art that have reached us: that is, Plato's definition of art as imitating nature and Aristotle's doctrine further specifying that the distinctions between various species of poetry are based on differences regarding the nature of their imitations, which vary according to their subject matter, subject and mode.1

Allow me, therefore, to take some distance from these terminological definitions, so that we might see, by means of that distance, another aspect of the subject that we wish to penetrate. In researching the linguistic meaning of the word 'art (*fann*)' in Arabic dictionaries, one finds under the triliteral root of *fāʾ* and doubled *nūn* – or rather, that of *fāʾ*, *nūn*, *nūn* – only the expression *fanan*, which means a limb or a tree branch. A limb, of course, stems from the root of a tree and is distinguished from it by its curvature, its declination away from the root. This suggests that art is an imitation of nature that occurs by way of a declination that imparts it with aesthetic form. In truth, the process of imitation that the artist (or any creator) requires cannot be separated, in one sense, from his imagination or vision of the world, or, in another sense, from his self. Hence, the imagination proves to be of especially great importance in artistic creations. This research paper, titled 'Imagination in the Thought of Ibn Arabi', is my contribution to Sharjah Biennial 14, *Out of Context*.

Ibn Arabi's full name was Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin Ali bin Muhammad Ibn al-Arabi al-Hatim al-Ta'i, but he is better known today as the Great Sheikh Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi, or Ibn Arabi. He was born in the city of Murcia in Andalusia in the year 560 after the Hijra (1165 CE) and died in Damascus in Syria in the year 638 after the Hijra (1240 CE). More than 800 works of differing length and importance are attributed to him, including books and epistles, some of which are now lost. Amongst his best-known books, and those most securely attributed to the author, are *Meccan Illuminations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkīya*) and *Ringstones of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*).

The present discussion of imagination requires us to consider the very process of imagination, which is dependent on the imaginative faculty. Ibn Arabi viewed this process as a mental faculty that is located in the brain's frontal lobe, the region just behind the forehead, the area that is also termed 'the third eye or eye of imagination'. He subdivided mental faculties into three areas: the recollecting faculty, located at the back of the brain; the rational faculty, located at the fontanelle at the top of the brain; and the intellective faculty, which is free floating and draws on both the sensorial and visual faculties. The imagination is thus dependent on the five senses, as it can only imagine what is given over to it by these faculties. It subsequently conveys to the preserving faculty what the senses have given over to it. But the imagination can also construct images that do not correspond to reality, such as when a person pictures a horse with wings, an image that the imaginative faculty has constructed out of images of a horse and a bird. So, we can clearly see the imagination's effects not only in creative acts, but also in the invention of new things. Here, it is perhaps appropriate for us to note that the image-making faculty is a faculty of the soul that has, at times, also been called the illusory faculty; whilst in other instances, Ibn Arabi called it the 'visionary faculty', in that he considered vision to be like a pen that inscribes what it wishes onto the tablet of the imagination.

The foregoing discussion concerns only one aspect of the imagination described by Ibn Arabi; indeed, he further subdivided the imagination into the *absolute* imagination, the *connected* imagination and the *separated* imagination. The *separated* imagination is the 'world-imagination'; it is also the main focus of our discussion here, after we clarify what is meant by these subdivisions of the imagination. As for the *connected* imagination, it is the imagination of the individual, which Ibn Arabi called 'connected' for two reasons: first, due to its connection to the eye of the imagination at the front of the brain, and second, due to its connection to the world-imagination. He distinguished between the *separated* and the *connected* imaginations by delineating that the images left by pictured things vanish from the connected imagination, i.e., the imagination of the individual, once the individual departs into the world of sense, intellection or something else. That is, to say, that the images do not remain present in the connected imagination, except when the individual remains present with them. As for the *separated* imagination, which is the world-imagination, it holds the images – even when

the imagination of the person is no longer connected to them, as with the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his companions) vision of the angel Gabriel (peace be upon him). In this case, they did not report to have seen him with the eye of imagination, since he had become embodied for them in the form of a human individual. Rather, they saw him with their sight and did not realise that he was an embodied angel. As for the prophet of God (peace be upon him and his family), only he knew that it was Gabriel (peace be upon him) because God had granted him the capacity for realisation in addition to knowledge regarding the realities of creation. I cite this example here, which is given by Ibn Arabi, in order to bring the reader closer to seeing what is meant by the *separated* imagination.

The *absolute* imagination, or 'the cloud', is the third aspect of the imagination according to Ibn Arabi. It is the first receptacle to have received the being of 'the Truth Exalted', to employ Ibn Arabi's expression, which refers to the hadith of Abu Razin, who said: 'I said: O prophet of God! Where was our Lord before He created His creation? He said: in the cloud under which there is no air, and above which there is no air, and then He created his throne on the waters'.[2] His statement, peace be upon him, 'below it was no air and above it was no air' indicates that a cloud – rather than merely its image – is, in fact, intended. 'The cloud' in the Arabic language is an abstract noun that denotes in the singular form a dense raincloud. The same is referred to by the expression 'the dust', which is the primary substance of the philosophers. In the view of Ibn Arabi, the cloud is also the *absolute* imagination, since it is this substance of the world that received the formation of the images in it, much like the images of things crafted are formed in the imagination of craftsman before they appear in reality.

This unfamiliar classification indeed requires further clarification, and I attempt to explain it in this paper. The imagination has an extreme importance for Ibn Arabi, who stated in a poem:

> If you truly have both mind and eye, you see only one true entity in them together
> Being's imagination is more vast a presence than reason or sensation in yield and extent
> For it brings about the shaping of shapes, it brings all of being into the grasp of form[3]

Thus, Ibn Arabi viewed the presence of imagination to be a vast being, as he stated in *Meccan*

> *Illuminations*: 'Therefore the presence of the imagination is the widest of presences, for it gathers together the two worlds, the worlds of the unseen and the seen'.

This vastness for Ibn Arabi has a strong connection to the name 'the Merciful' as well as the Merciful's characteristic of mercy that envelops everything, by way of which God the Exalted brought out all beings from the darkness of the void into the light of existence. Indeed, Ibn Arabi considered the cloud to be 'the breath of the Merciful' in that it was the primary receptive material in the formation of images of the world; that is, in the bringing of beings out of the darkness of the void and into the light of existence. This first apparition and the appearance of these beings was, perhaps, quite similar to the picturing of crafted things in the imagination of man. Ibn Arabi considered the cloud to be the absolute imagination and the imagination of man to be a *constricted* imagination. According to Ibn Arabi – who held the view that there must be a partition between every two beings or worlds – there is a certain imagination that is a partition between the constricted imagination and the absolute imagination, and this is the world-imagination. The world, Ibn Arabi believed, is a great person, whilst man is a small world, each entity possessing its own particular sort of imagination.

It seems quite difficult to attempt a discussion of imagination in Ibn Arabi's writings without delving into the question of the correspondence between the smaller man and the larger man; that is, the correspondence between man and the world. Ibn Arabi held the view that the world expresses the form of a single individual with a number of organs, and that there is a shared resemblance between man and the world, such that all the realities of the world correspond to a part within man. Thus, Ibn Arabi subdivided the world into twenty-eight ranks, each of which has a corresponding rank within man. I have treated this correspondence in detail in my book, *Educational Contents in the Writings of Ibn Arabi*, but what concerns us now is the notion that the world has an imagination that is similar to the imagination of man. Ibn Arabi stated that the second heaven is the repository of the imagination of the world, just as the frontal lobe of the brain, behind the forehead, is the repository of man's imaginative faculty, which, as has been stated above, extends in two directions: first, into the senses, and second, into the image-making faculty. Ibn Arabi also asserted that the second heaven, which is the orbit

of the planet Mercury, is the repository of the world-imagination, corresponding to the brow of man and confined between two heavens: the heaven of the moon, equating to the senses of man, the first heaven; and the heaven of Venus, which is the third heaven, and which Ibn Arabi considered to be the repository of the image-making faculty. In this sense, Ibn Arabi treated the realities of the world as the nourishment of the human faculties, meaning that the world-imagination for him was the extension of the imagination of man. In fact, it seemed to form a single imagination, the world-imagination, but with numerous aspects. Thus, if images appear pictured within man, it is said that they are pictured in the *connected* imagination; and if they appear outside him, then they are formed, embodied and shaped in the *separated* imagination. Ultimately, there is nothing in the world that does not have a form in the *absolute* imagination; that is, the cloud, or, in the terminology of the philosophers, the world-substance.

In this sense, imaginative exercises gain great importance – not only within creative work, but also in knowledge and discovery – in a very particular way for Ibn Arabi and, more broadly, for Sufism in general. The practice of summoning to presence is amongst the most important exercises deployed in Sufism. In it, the seeker conceives of an image of his sheikh using the eye of his imagination, then draws that image into his heart and contemplates it for a period that permits the eye of his imagination to be trained towards the achievement of insight. It is well known that the human imagination can both summon forth images from the recollection and compound them, just as it can transform meanings into sensory images. It cannot, however, transform sensory images into meanings, since abstraction is of the essence of the intellective faculty. Likewise, there are other exercises that Ibn Arabi symbolises in his writings, such as the imagining of the letters of utterance, which is a practice that readies the individual's faculty for telepathy. There is also the summoning of the image of what is utterance, by which he means the sublime True, with reference to the beneficence mentioned by the prophet of God (peace be upon him) in his statement, 'Beneficence is to worship God as if you can see him, because even if you do not see him, he sees you'. Reference is made, in any event, to words of this effect, even if the texts differ as to the material of the hadith.

Ibn Arabi, along with the other Sufis, held the view that Sufism is an expression of a revolution in the orbit of beneficence, or that, following the legal expression, 'Sufism is the station of beneficence'.

Insofar as beneficence turns in the orbit 'as if you see Him', the imagination has to be accounted amongst the most important instruments of Sufi behaviour and amongst the important instruments of discovery, realisation and creativity. For whilst it is apparent that man distinguishes himself from other creatures by means of his creativity, in truth, he distinguishes himself from them by his imagination. At the same time, differences and contradistinctions amongst individuals of the human species vary according to the particular faculty of imagination. At the highest of the human ranks comes the 'perfect man', and it should be noted that Ibn Arabi's description of 'the perfect' includes the statement that he is the one who possesses 'knowledge of the Semsema'. For Ibn Arabi, this expression indicated knowledge that is too subtle for perception. What, then, is the knowledge possessed by that 'perfect man'? Does it entail that the perfect man possesses knowledge of everything? If so, then from where does the perfect man obtain that knowledge?

In the eighth chapter of *Meccan Illuminations*, Ibn Arabi cites an Islamic narrative whose core is that when God (the Sublime and Exalted) created Adam, the father of man (peace be upon him), the first of the human species, some amount of his clay was left over, from which the Exalted created the date palm. After creating the date palm, an amount of *semsem* remained. By his power, the Exalted and Most High then made from the *semsem* a land so vast that if the throne, the seat, the heavens and the earth, and all that encompassed them, were flung into this, then these were like a small ring cast into a vast desert wasteland. Ibn Arabi mentions, too, that in this land, there were wonders and strange things that confounded reason, and that, in fact, many matters that defy reason by their impossibility, or the impossibility of their existing, did, indeed, exist there. He also asserts that the land of Semsema was the scene in which the knowing raised high their sight, and that amongst the worlds in that land was a world that accorded with human forms, so that if a knower entered that land, he would witness himself within it. Ibn Arabi narrates that one of the knowing, when he entered this world, saw in it a land that was all of musk, whose scent would destroy anyone of this world who tried to smell it…and he also entered the land of soft red gold, whose trees were gold and whose fruits were gold. If he took from this land a piece of fruit, such as an apple, he would find it delicious to taste and smell beyond all description. Amongst its fruits were such examples that if you put one fruit between the

sky and the earth, it would cover the vision of the sky for those on the ground. And amongst the fruits of the land's trees were some that, if they were plucked, would grow back again in the same moment. Amongst the inhabitants of this world were those described by the knower as having the best souls he'd ever seen, more friendly in welcoming guests than any in our world. The seas of that world did not mix, and amongst them was the sea of gold, bordered by the sea of iron, and neither of these seas flowed into the other, no matter how their waves met, whilst the water of those seas was finer than any air of this world…in this land, too, were cities with gates adorned with the most precious jewels of all colours. The knowers travelled amongst the cities by land, sea and air, in comfort and with speed, and they did not die if they sank into the sea, but instead walked under the water until they reached the shore. Ibn Arabi mentions that in this land, there was a Kaaba covered with a kiswa encircled by circumambulators, who were spoken to by the Kaaba, from which they drew knowledge. Amongst the wonders related to this world was that it contained a sea of dust that ran like water, on the banks of which were stones, and these stones ran towards each other like magnets, so that they joined together to form a ship. When the ship became complete, the inhabitants of the land then gathered and cast it off into the river of dust, and they rode it and travelled wherever they wished. Ibn Arabi asserts that the running of this ship was amongst the most wondrous things he had seen, since it had no equal amongst all the ships of this world. On the two sides of the ship were two hollow cylinders as long as its hull, raised at the front and falling to sea level behind, so that the air flowed through from front to back and pushed the ship forwards.

This text, some of whose significations I have just outlined, is, in fact, amongst the most pleasing writings of Ibn Arabi. The land of Semsema that is discussed in this chapter appears to be one of the names of the world of the imagination. From the beginning, Ibn Arabi's description of it seems to correspond to this, but the divine power has opened vast worlds within it, vaster than the heavens and the earth, and this is the mark of the imagination. For in the imagination, the camel can pass through the eye of a needle, just as the ship that closes our description of Semsema could be compared to a present-day steamship, with air entering from the front and leaving out the back, pushing the vessel along its course. Hence, the role of the imagination in creativity and invention becomes clear, except that the truth that appears by way of this description, as has been outlined above, adheres to

how the world-imagination is a deposit of what has come before and what now is. It's as if the creative man should activate his connected imagination in the expansion of the world-imagination, insofar as the possessor of imagination arrives at what can be given form by way of the active faculties, and this is called 'creativity and invention'.

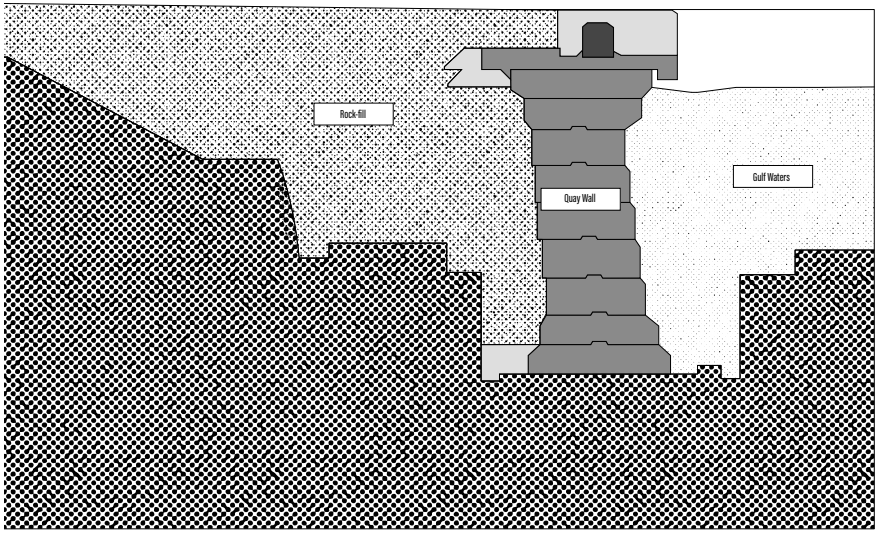
I have attempted here to briefly approximate the concept of the imagination in the thought of Ibn Arabi by indicating the importance of the exercises that seek to develop and enliven the creative imagination. If we were to trace in detail the writings of the Great Sheikh, we would encounter the meanings and exercises by which the practitioner ascends to real knowledge of the world, marked by the breadth that characterises the imagination, by which worlds of creativity for the individual and the society are opened.

This should only be considered a brief summary, as the concept of the imagination in Ibn Arabi requires profound study, one that will greatly benefit the areas of edification and of creativity.

1 Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. Ibrahim Hamada (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library), 66.
2 As cited by Al-Tirmidhi in his collection as hadith 3109; he calls it a 'fine hadith'.
3 *Meccan Illuminations*, 36.

TIME MANAGEMENT, WHILE BIDING MY TIME

TODD REISZ



An estimated section of construction of a quay wall, Port Jebel Ali, Dubai.

As an architect, I have been trained to give you advice. My counsel today is offered for free, in the hope that you'll pay me for more in the future – say, through offering me the commission for that new cultural building. For now, I'll bide my time by writing to you about managing time; about making it, breaking it and, maybe, getting away with it.

At the start, I want to assure you about my expertise in regard to time. You see, it is largely grounded in the fact that architectural practice never gave up on progressive ideals. Other professions shy away from insisting that history is an account of undeterred progress. But not architecture. Like engineering and urban planning, it is still very much a positive practice, wherein time is linear and redeeming. To become an architect is to sign the pact that the world is your problem, and you are the solution: the distance between Problem X and its Resolution is simply a matter of time. In architecture, there is no echo chamber of doubts and mistranslations; rather, there lies before you an acoustically acclimatised concourse for steady traversal over a moving walkway. Embracing architecture is allowing the future to appear before you, illustrated, drip-fed and catalogued.

To practice architecture and acknowledge its temporal framework can bring all sorts of comfort. You can leave things behind, and you can look forward to more ahead.

The great chronicler of science, James Gleick, reminds us that time can only occur if change occurs. And change, he observes, can only be perceived spatially.[1] If change is necessarily spatial, then time only happens

if space says it can. Since time can only be read through space, and since the architect shapes space, one can conclude that the architect is engaged in moving time along.

Creating space for the sake of time might have been a way for architecture to set signposts for the ages, to connote milestones in human-built history and to present them as our own contributions to the rest of the planet. As the philosopher Steven Vogel asserts, since we human beings are *of* the earth, then our creations, whether reproductive or productive, are also of the earth.[2] But architecture does not work that way. Architecture is at variance with nature. It abides by its own time, the tick-tock-tick-tock kind of time: linear, synchronisable and deferential to the turning of steel cogs. Actions are repeated for the sake of unwavering advancement.

If you are familiar with cities in the UAE, then you've heard eye roll–inducing platitudes that go something like the following: Dubai (or whichever city) has achieved in 10 years what other cities have achieved in 30, or 50, years. This song has been sung since the 1970s. You've probably heard it in a CNN commercial or an Emirates in-flight video. Maybe even an architect said something like that to you at a reception.

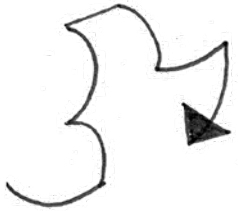
If this oft-repeated assertion is true, then what happens with all that extra time gained? Could it be that time has *been made*? Is the extra cache of decades squandered, just as those earned minutes that the microwave or the faster CPU was supposed to gain you? Does it get bartered in exchange for Twitter-induced endorphins, online shopping and choppy Zoom chats?

Let's investigate these questions in terms of infrastructure – and by *infrastructure*, I mean just about any hardening of extracted raw materials into stiff, impervious forms to stimulate urbanisation. So, the list might include residential towers, roadways, ports, hospitals, airports, desalination plants and that cultural building whose commission I'm angling for. And in these pursuits, architects are joined by other kinds of worldmakers, including engineers, urban planners, politicians and those recently identified place-making consultants.

Infrastructural development is often described as *forward looking*. Forward looking, in the sense that calculations today bring improvements tomorrow. Architects and other worldmakers approach these projects with layers of drawing sets and step-by-step schedules – imagined concepts to reinforce a straight-arrow sort of time.

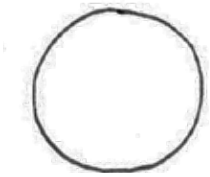
Linear time.

An infrastructural project requires leveraged funding and, therefore, other kinds of time. I'll explain. 'Leveraged funding' means that future money is withdrawn today, its repayment ostensibly mapped out according to a designated loan period. Investors and creditors, however, don't pursue infrastructure because they see a *future* in it. They see a *profit* in it. No argument is made for why the project is necessary or how it fits into the human saga of progress (though the PR squad might produce such a yarn). Feasibility, rather, is determined upon the assurance that a loan will be paid back, with interest. The project is subsequently defined more by a medley of ravenous terms & conditions, mostly having to do with scheduling, evading and then rescheduling debt payments. A project is not measured in stages of design, but in adjustable rates and payment options. Time's straight arrow slackens. Anthropologist Akhil Gupta calls this kind of time *lumpy*.[3]



Lumpy time.

After the loan period is set, another kind of time also sets in, once again frustrating straight-arrow time. Design is translated into deadlines; deadlines lead to what Gupta calls *dead time*.[4] There's an induced race towards the finish – pushed on by legions of workers, the constantly relubricated pistons of machines and the incessant hammering of planetary surfaces into submission. Time is to be completed, and matter to be rendered motionless. Monumental. Infrastructure is an insistence against the ephemeral and flighty. Time gets killed. Infrastructure is being without time.

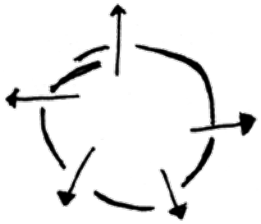


Dead time.

The hardening of time occurs as a sedimentary crust over a fragment of the earth. Labour-intensive acts bring into final motion ingredients like these: pulverized rock, salvaged sand, silicon, aluminium, iron and sweet water. They take their last breath for the next epoch as they are hardened into indestructible blocks. Their stacking, in addition to the pouring of impermeable rock fill, composes a garrison. Girded by steel, the construction accommodates its own choreographies of time, lived out in various forms of inhabitation.

Infrastructure might appear hardened, dead to time, according to the engineered imagination; but, of course, things don't work out that way. An infrastructural project can offer a promise of permanence, but really it delivers new kinds of time – schedules of maintenance, proclamations of expansion and threats of decay. The word *decay* may induce images of cracked surfaces and leaky conduits, but it's actually a temporal matter:

timelessness oozes out from the concrete. You could also read it as time*fulness* slipping back in. The architects and engineers will have to be recalled; the workers again recruited to keep time out.



Leaky time.

Whether during the first contract or one of the countless and subsequent maintenance contracts, the creditors announce that projects are 'ahead of schedule'. It makes for good press, but it also comes with a financial bonus, or at least a pat on the back, for everyone involved. 'Ahead of schedule' is public-relations speak for 'beating time'. Beating it is another way of keeping time out.

By now, it should be clear that the shaping of a space is also a shaping of time. But you may have your doubts. For example, can the architect's progressive,

confident notion of time survive the contortions and misshapes inflicted upon it during the realisation of her design? Might the architect's expressive steadiness, her reliance on history's 'best practices', be just a matter of theatrics, a purchased smoke screen for keeping people calm in the face of so much commotion and metamorphosis? Yes, the architect's careful, systematic plodding forward might just be a deployed ruse, a dramaturgical curtain across the other kinds of manufactured time. You, the observer, are asked to be focussed and addled at the same time.

If the making of space were not whipped into a wizardry of transformation and complex time geometries, would space then be seen for what it is? Does anyone want to see what it is actually *made of*, bare of all the somersaults that go into selling its tale? Do you really want to know about all those dungeonlike stores of rock-fill below your kitchen floor, those whopping quay walls that might protect you from a gall, but that will one day fail and still never go away?

Architecture is a way to shape the earth, if you fully give over to its ideology. Or it's at least a pleasurable mindset, maybe like a mindfulness practice, in the face of more cruel forces. The architect's projected steadiness and assertive calculations seem to be necessarily co-opted by investors and creditors to make their points. While concrete hardens into dead time, the investors and creditors stop time in their own way, splintering it into countless distractions. And, when a financial bust comes around, bankers may seem to embrace *slowdown*: they proclaim that making a city *takes time*. But that is just a necessary interval for whetting the blades.

More often than not, architects are paid to use rationality, as a means not to reveal time's movement, but to stop it. As if just a little more concrete will guarantee things won't drift away. You could argue that the profession is drowning in concrete, via a world encased in it. Architects and their professional kin are paid to reshape the planet, now a vast site of in-situ formwork. They promise to make things 'future proof', so that time doesn't enter their designs; that the universe beyond stays away from the interior within. If you pay us enough, we might figure out a way to make the planet stop, to make the earth stop in time.

Stopping the earth would make it uninhabitable, but also more fathomable for the human brain. If we were no longer bound to the earth's time, then we would no longer be beholden to all of those measurable cycles –

like days, lunar phases, years and shipping cycles. Time could also not be warped by finance. If we couldn't count the cycles and adjustment rates, then time would become count-less. Since progress is right now hostage to manipulated time, how could we reconceive it without time? If we could do just that, we wouldn't need to make, or beat, time anymore, because we would be holding so much of something so much better.

1 James Gleick, 'Time Regained!', *New York Review of Books*, 6 June 2013.
2 See Steven Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).
3 See Akhil Gupta, 'The Future in Ruins: Thoughts on the Temporality of Infrastructure', in *The Promise of Infrastructure*, eds. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta and Hannah Appel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 62.
4 Ibid., 73.

IN MEMORY OF MY FEELINGS: PART 1

OMAR KHOLEIF

PRECURSOR

This text was authored in early 2018. It was originally intended to form part of an homage to the late Professor Jean Fisher as part of Sharjah Biennial 14. Fisher, whose influence could be felt throughout the Biennial, as well as its attendant themes, is now represented here.

I have always been an immigrant, wherever I have lived in the world. I left Egypt, where I was born, at three months of age. Life began modestly in Glasgow, Scotland, where my parents existed in self-imposed exile. When I returned 'home' throughout my youth, I was a stranger to my own extended family who scoffed and giggled at my polyglot Arabic accent. Now that I am living in the United States again, I realise that I have been code-switching my whole life: not only speaking, but also writing in a foreign language, a tongue and a vernacular that is not my own, constantly attempting to conform. Being a diasporic 'Arab', I have watched the world devour the image of *these* (my) people and their collective identities on many a stage. I've been privy to everyone from presidents to school kids spewing bigoted rhetoric, seeing the Arabic-speaking world fused with the violence of religious extremism, a condition created and spoon-fed to multiple publics by political commentators who have perhaps withdrawn themselves from their own complicity in making history. I've always longed to find a native polyglot like me, someone who could discuss the mutilation of the Arab image in the Western consciousness, with whom I could talk about Putin and Paris, Netanyahu and Nagasaki, Tehran and Tel Aviv. But *the freedom* of expression *to tell your own story* is a sanctioned act. Being Arab in the US today is a condition that has become hollowed of any poetry: an apocalypse engulfing image and text.

'Submitting the self to itself', to invoke Etel Adnan – to acknowledge one's own polyphony as a conditioned code-switcher within the world – has become part of a resolve. Negotiating a portentous topography, constantly attempting to be 'seen', cannot be life's only pursuit. Individualism, that exceptional American ideology, does not account for the right of the human to be her- or him- or themselves. The constant rallying cry of 'assimilation' still exists. But to assimilate with what, with whom? With those who carry guns in open-carry states that destroy the border that is the body?

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Female authors have served a great purpose in this life. In efforts to dig into our interiority – to understand phenomenology and agency – lyric and prose have

acted as balms. Maya Angelou, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Susan Sontag, Toni Morrison, Mary Shelley, Doris Lessing and Harper Lee, to name but a few examples of the figures who have affected me, somehow managed to use words as a means to expound upon human nature. My favourite line from *To Kill a Mockingbird* is 'the rust on the razor that threatens the throat'. This line is so precise and potent in its sense of danger. I constantly search between the lines of their prose, wishing I could express the wanton longing that sits within each page, crying to be liberated from a world dominated by 'the giants'. I have aspired to transcend to such a space, to speak with a tongue like she or she or they. I have been told by the anchoring women in my life, the mentors who taught me at school, that writing is a graft, a daily practice that for a woman embodies the lived oppression of the female body in society. I can attest from simple musings that I am a feminist, but I am no expert in feminist theory; simply, an affected subject. Why I associate with such figures is clearly triggered by a greater emotional simulation than the influence of prose.

It could most certainly be the search for a maternal figure, a being that will nurture and protect. But it is also a desire to be understood as being the subject of multiple forms of oppression – of many things at once. I remember a saying by Virginia Woolf, As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world'. Did I have a world of my own?

These words usher in my time in Palestine. I recall a trip to West Jerusalem to visit a 'liberal' filmmaker friend. I entered a 'night-time café' and waited; she never showed. I drank an aniseed beverage off of a grotty countertop. Peering eyes everywhere – of an Arab body in space? Did I elicit fear amongst the patrons? This was not a home. Later that evening, I wandered by foot back to the East, a petrified tourist.

Almost fifteen years ago to this day, or was it a decade?

I made it to Ramallah in the West Bank two days later. A congregation of stray dogs sat barking in front of the residence I was about to take up. I was still laden with anxiety, unable to breathe. The job that I did, 'research student' at the time, opened more doors for me than I had first assumed. I found myself amidst a group of artists. I was taken to a venue that might have been called 'Bar Anissa', where some danced; everyone seemed to smoke and laugh without fear of adjudication. Here, I was in 'the heart of the heart of another country'.

After my trip to Palestine, I ventured to visit my family in Egypt for the rest of the summer. My maternal grandmother still maintained a tight grip on me during these visits to my so-called 'home'; she played my mother and me off of each other. On the second morning, she argued that it was time to excoriate me of my sins and that we had to venture out on an excursion. She took me to an Egyptian village. As the car stormed in, red dust rose, and crowds of children sat on the streets, covered in flies. She asked me to go 'look' at what 'suffering' was really like; I could tell she was frustrated with me complaining of what she perceived as 'First World' problems.

She got out of the car and opened the trunk, and began handing out toys and candy, which she dangled, wanting the kids to jump into her arms; to love and be loved in return? She saw herself as a UN aid worker crossed with an Angelina Jolie–type figure. My asthma was already in full force. I sat in the back of the car, as bugs of all form and distinction began to latch onto me. I had always been afraid of insects, but the fear grew like a tumour in my chest that was about to suffocate me. Whether I fell asleep or fainted is unclear. When I opened my eyes, we were on an empty desert stretch anchored by nothingness, endless emptiness, except for the spectre of landmines on either side of the road, remnants of a colonial rule.

In the car, I dreamt of Palestine and the endless bugs that had surrounded me in the little stone house that I called home in Ramallah. A poem started to form in my head about a house centipede that I had seen one evening out of the corner of my eye whilst I lay in bed:

I watch your body decay into a million pieces as I scoop you into my hands
You attempt to scurry, but you have nowhere else to go
Like the bodies, wounded, hopping across burnt soil and ash
Yours becomes a euphemism
A dozen, a hundred – a thousand legs

Scurrying together
Under barbed wire
Bleeding as they are tossed through revolving doors
Rifles pointed at their heads
I tower over you
And watch you turn to dust
I am left wondering: Will you ever return?

I had wanted to return somewhere, but at the time, I had no official citizenship beyond my green Egyptian passport; the doors were only narrowly open. I returned to Britain, where I had received a scholarship to continue studying. A visiting professor by the name of Jean Fisher was to come in that day and teach us of the ills of colonialism. I could see the eyes of my peers glaze over; I stared at this woman, somehow a little cracked at the seams, a cancer survivor, somewhat ashen. Her hair thin and grey, her clothing oversized, tiny blemishes on her face, but for a pair of radiant eyes that were filled with light for art. But not any kind of art: not art for art's sake, but art for activism's sake. Her physicality echoed the stark and harrowing experience of the artists that she discussed – of the Irish, the Native Americans and the Palestinians.

As she spoke, I sat transfixed not on her PowerPoint presentation but on her, the way she spoke: quietly, choosing each word meticulously, as if she were writing a novel as each breath was exhaled. I could not stomach the courage that late afternoon to speak to her, but I did inquire with the departmental secretary for her email address. I wrote her a letter that I authored with painstaking precision. I asked her why she 'cared' for these artists? 'Isn't that what you curators do, care?' Jean responded immediately, almost ignoring the lengthy padding in my correspondence to her. She followed this with a rant about how the 'art world' had stopped caring for anything or anyone, and that it had instead become about status and the market value of objects. At the end of the email, she asked a single question that opened a door, 'Where are you from?'

Jean took a curious interest in me. I often wondered if it was the unusual sense of 'in-betweenness' that I occupied, first as an Arab, as an African, but also as someone who was 'disabled' and had come from little means. I am uncertain if it was out of empathy, but she increasingly became a part of my life, taking charge, helping me to make decisions. She insisted that she become my thesis advisor. She began to shift my thoughts, in every piece of writing, and to turn them back to the question of political identity. When I would respond that I did not understand anything of my own identity, she would implore that I dig deeper. I was steered away from the artists of the canon of art history that we were commonly schooled to study, and I was encouraged to consider those artistic figures who sat at the margins, who represented an 'in-betweenness', just like mine. She explained the work of Jimmie Durham to

me, an artist who used humour to interrogate aspects of the Native American experience, even though he was of no official tribe or no longer bore any formal affiliation to that community. She spoke of Willie Doherty, the Northern Irish artist who documented the country's tumultuous political history. Judith Barry, who she once joked was a sort of Mary Shelley of the art world – a figure who created mammoth installations that interrogated the vampiric qualities of how women were portrayed in popular media – was another influence. There was Emily Jacir, who used performance to 'speak back to' the concept of statelessness; there was Steve McQueen, who negotiated the space of the Black male body; Jack Goldstein, the filmmaker who transposed trauma through Technicolor; and Hamad Butt, the conceptual British-Pakistani sculptor who had died young, whose archive she had lobbied to get into the Tate's collection.

It transpired that the spectre of trauma bore heavy on Jean; many of her good friends had passed in tumultuous circumstances, including Jack Goldstein, who had taken his own life, and her friend the art critic Stuart Morgan, who had died suddenly in his early fifties. She would regale me of many a story of an artist or a critic who had passed too early, who she professed would sit around in her living room debating art's potential to create a form of political agency. Jean was, herself, an outsider of art's customary confines. She had studied zoology and received a PhD in medical sciences, to appease her father, whilst she simultaneously worked towards a degree in fine arts at Newcastle University. She was forever modest in her description of herself. When I would invite her to give a lecture, or when I would commission or republish a piece of her writing, she would always send me the following short biography: 'Jean Fisher is a writer on art and postcoloniality based in London'. She never alluded to the fact that she had, at one point, been asked to form part of the curatorial team of documenta11, the world's largest art exhibition, but had fallen ill and had to reduce her contribution. She never discussed her many years of teaching at Goldsmiths, Middlesex and the Royal College of Art, where she schooled the artists who would all go on to become some of the most renowned figures that we know today, not to mention the many others whom she championed: Francis Alÿs, Black Audio Film Collective, Sonia Boyce, James Coleman, Willie Doherty, Jimmie Durham, Edgar Heap of Birds, Susan Hiller, Gabriel Orozco, Alfredo Jaar and Barbara Kruger.

There was an air of glamour in the tales that she would narrate, and they reminded me of the 'Old World' reading clubs of the British literary scene, where authors,

including Woolf, would gather, theatrically enunciating their carefully crafted words. I became one of these characters for Jean, in time. She had this way of probing you, so that you would spill everything without her giving much of her own self away. Jean was older, and it was physically troublesome for her near the end to make it down the stairs. So, we sat in her bedroom, where she would chain-smoke, as she asked questions and listened. The room was in a three-storey house on Chapter Road in South London, a short walk from Kennington Underground Station. Her room was piled with books and papers, congealed with dust. When I asked if I could help clear some more space for her to work and move around, she professed that she required every shred of material that ensconced her within this hermetic sphere.

In the corner sat a terrifyingly grumpy cat that scowled at me whenever I entered the room. I was allergic to him. She called him Tutti Frutti; he sat on the corner of her bed as if he owned the place. When she got her own website, Tutti got his own blog. Jean journaled sixty-seven entries for him before she died.

Joining Jean in her chain-smoking habit felt a compulsory part of our camaraderie; even when I was suffering from bronchitis, I didn't put the cigarette down. On these afternoons and evenings, she would ask me to bring whatever piece of writing I had recently authored. She would take out a blue, not a red, pen and start reading aloud, correcting sentences, sometimes critically, on other occasions furtively. She was exceptionally caring and had become attuned to my sensitivity.

For years this continued, even after I had graduated. Momentarily, she stopped with the personal questions. She cared more about making me the best writer that I could be. I am forever curious what 'cause' I fulfilled. I didn't tell my friends. I was worried that they would chastise me for wasting the time of a great mind. It became evident that Jean was fighting for me to be seen within and by my own community. There were weekly email introductions to figures from Okwui Enwezor to Kamal Boullata. I couldn't understand why she fought for causes as opposed to caring for her own health. She was physically wounded by this point, so much so that she resembled that trite metaphor of an endangered little bird.

When the so-called 'Arab Spring' took over the news media in 2011 – and I, at the time, was in Cairo – Jean started to write me long emails, prodding, wanting to

know every detail. But she also seemed terrified for me. She insisted that I return to London and discuss the situation with her. I explained that I could not leave just yet; for one, I had no home. Then my grandfather died after a protest, and it turned a page for us.

In Jean's bedroom, I spoke of my grandfather before moving onto my mother and father. She professed them to be [*insert scandalous four-letter word here*], a word she asserted sat easily on her tongue because she had spent much time in Ireland, where the term was used more flagrantly, endearingly. We would occasionally manage to venture outside the house, to her favourite Indian restaurant in the neighbourhood, where she would recite passages of Edward Said's writings to me.

She complained of constant stomach problems, of carpal tunnel, of every bone hurting so much so that she could barely find the strength to send a text message. She fell down the stairs one day not paying attention, and that was the beginning of the end as I knew it. She spent the last remaining year and a half in and out of hospital. I could rarely, if ever, see her. I had moved to America, which she thought 'a fatal mistake', but one that she eventually conceded was worth the

adventure for a 'person of my age'. She, herself, had lived in New York in the 1980s, eventually feeling so isolated, bar her friendship with the artist Judith Barry, that she returned to London.

In the final days of her life, she spoke of living by the seaside, of Hastings, of the great Arab poets that I had first heard of from my mother – Etel Adnan, Andrée Chedid, Joyce Mansour and many others: Gibran and Darwish, always Darwish, for he represented the sea to her. He was invariably waiting to cross the sea to return to Palestine, and she, herself, was always postponing a self-imposed exile that she believed would lead to her ultimate freedom.

When Jean passed, I was on my way to meet the filmmaker and artist David Lynch. We didn't talk about his films or art. I told him, holding back tears, that I was in mourning. He respected that and asked of Jean's biography, even though I am not sure he was entirely interested. We spoke of birds, trees and the countryside, whilst we smoked in a cavernous concrete room built specifically for that purpose. We gazed out the window, the California sun shimmering off Mulholland Drive.

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Jean was not keen on me working in anything that resembled a 'museum' in Britain. She professed that they ≈x speak in 'BBC English'. She wasn't all too wrong.

Jean had, in the final years of her life, exiled herself from much of the world of art that I was attempting to break into. She would have preferred that I had gone 'freelance', something that in her lifetime might have seemed feasible for some. I had never let show to her that I was always barely scraping by, waiting for checks and transfers from newspaper and magazine jobs and curatorial projects. The world was different now: 'changing the world' had become a slogan appropriated by large corporate marketing firms, as opposed to our small niche that truly cared about art. I explained to her as much, but she turned away from me each time.

In America, my dreams at night were often consumed with her haunting figure, perched in a corner of my bedroom, in my apartment on the edge of the city, shrouded in smoke. It was as if she sat there musing over whether I had been obedient or whether I had maintained the flare of 'dissidence' that she expected of me. Would I get in there and upturn the system? Give them the finger and do things my way? Would I be the 'coyote' that she wanted me to be, her beloved 'trickster' who would shift machinations and, with them, people's imaginations?

Soon, my own illness set in. It gnawed away like a dog on a chicken bone. I would return to the authors who had held me in their brace throughout my youth. I reread Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and dwelled on the line, 'There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of the mind'. What would it mean for my mind to be set free? Would it be set forth into a chamber of silence, unperturbed from the ills of my 'disorder', where cavernous caves of intriguing thoughts could be filled with wondrous critical insights, waiting to be stitched together?

I am still searching for an answer.

A SELF-REFLECTION

ZOE BUTT

I have been tasked here to self-reflect, to map my work, to contemplate my milestones, to reason my decisions as a biography – a task I undertake with wee embarrassment, for it does feel overly indulgent. But I respect that I have been invited to do so, because I referred briefly to a previous experience, in response to a question publicly asked of me, at the closing of my March Meeting during Sharjah Biennial 14, in 2019. Omar Kholeif was drawn to my recollections of a particular conversation that had made an imprint on my life. I have come to adopt such conversational anecdotes as a curatorial mode in the elucidation of experience when tasked to contextualise my decisions (as opposed to the evidential-image display of exhibitions, whose dominance in my profession I have long struggled to reconcile). For 'curatorial' is a verb of talking, thinking, writing, that has defined my in-between life. For me, this verb of bridging, enabling and expanding the understanding of what culture can be is an ethical and political relation between vulnerability and understanding, and my experiences with certain people and places have shaped it as such. But I must explain this *in-between* self…

Thus far, my journey has been steadfastly guided by gut instinct, by a tenaciously visceral guilt-laden conscience (thanks to my rather strict Catholic upbringing, no doubt), which thus pays respect to a near-debilitating, ongoing set of ethical principles. 'Near-debilitating', for these principles have impressed the need for repeated transnational relocations and irrevocably disturbed collegiality; caused great financial and romantic quandary; and resulted in anguished distance from loved ones. However, I am forever grateful to this inner compass, an instrument that I mentally picture as a kind of lacquer box, maintained by the regular addition of layers of sap. These layers have been rubbed back and buffed by the gurus in my life, those who have sat as patient guardians to my foraging for purpose in this very tricky landscape we call 'Art'.

I'm a woman born with too much fire, a Leo Dragon, the chop-suey daughter of a Hong Kong immigrant scientist and an Australian-British language buff. Born in Australia the year that the White Australia policy ended, my early coastal (predominantly white) childhood was dotted with frankincense and purple robes, as both of my parents were also supernumeraries of the Opus Dei mission in Australia. Thus, my childhood was mapped by the rituals of faith and its indoctrination of gender; of the division of time

between respect for what we can see, and that which we cannot. It was my adolescent questioning of what I refer to as a 'Roman Catholic cult' that triggered my first historical hunt for facts within the past and the present worlds, spurring my realisation of the relationship between religion and politics. My middle name is Magdalen, after Mary Magdalen, the prostitute redeemed by Jesus, posthumously also his lover, who is, perhaps, a trigger for the imprint of women in my life. For, you see, my gurus are predominantly of that kind; not that there are no men, but it is really the bombast bravery of the female warrior in the arts that has inspired my ongoing battle with hegemony. I recall one lunchtime inside a freezing, glass-walled museum office in Australia, where my boss, Suhanya Raffel (a dear guru still), declared, 'Zoe, we are going shopping'; 'Oh! What for?'; 'We need to buy you a suit'; [*shock*] 'What for?!'; 'Because [*she chuckles*] you need to understand the power of a woman's visual presence in this uneven world'. And so, off we went, though my 'suit' turned out to be a most crafted, unconventional version – but yes, with a jacket and heels. Thus unravelled the hindrances (and power) of my gender, social obstacles that would (and still) haunt me. But more crucially, I am thankful for the nurturing of instincts labelled 'female' that have had a significant impact on the way I operate as a manager and as a builder of community, a believer in teamwork as a way of knowing the personal and the professional face of one's crew. These instincts have also guided me as I undertook the critical and sympathetic role of counsel and mentor, as one who confronts the emotional triggers found within our daily work. And I have this first, dear lady guru to thank, so much, for encouraging this relation to resource and knowledge-building.

My anchor in the world of Asian art and its 'contemporaneity' was fostered by the luck of working at the Queensland Art Gallery, where I focussed on assisting in the curatorial development and collection aims of its flagship event, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Leading up to the realisation of its 2006 edition, I had been given the portfolio of China, Vietnam and Thailand to coordinate the research, implementation, facilitation and delivery of existing artwork, commissions and loans. It was a joy to fill in library gaps with real experience, and I gleefully cherished the year-end prize of research travel. Emails and phone calls aplenty, departmental brainstorming and fine-tuning of proposals – my travel itinerary and schedule of appointments grew, only to result in my being hauled up to senior management two weeks

before departure, where I was informed that I would not be going. That I was to hand over my portfolio, because *he* was going instead. Flabbergasted and appalled, I exited what felt like a glass-museum prison at that point. I was a deflated, humiliated woman, feeling so disappointed and incredulous that all of these wonderful artists, with whom I had been speaking for more than a year, would be meeting a man who had no clue about their lives. As I hugged my colleagues, who hung their heads in sympathetic shame, I realised that my love of working with artists was not going to occur within these museum walls, and vowed to find a way out. This intense disappointment, however, was laced with gratitude, for it was here that I had to admit, in this most peripheral city called Brisbane, that the kernels of my own cultural ancestry *had* been given seed to grow. I was thankful for the shared expertise of colleagues (who had become the dearest of friends), for their critical encouragement of my thirst for comparative knowledge, a process of excavating context that has gone on to determine much of my curatorial work in the realm of linking history to human experience.

My most memorable conversation concerning what shapes the learning and definition of comparative knowledge, however – an enquiry spurred by myriad artists and their artistic methodologies – came a little later. I was working in Beijing by then, employed by an underestimated artist intellect, sipping oolong laced with the unfiltered haze of cigarette smoke. I remember naively asking a friend, Lu Jie, 'What was it like as a student enduring the Cultural Revolution, when China was so closed off to the world, where the ability to "compare" was so limited?' He replied with a typical smirk, 'What makes you think that my education was *limited*?! It was wonderful! My world pondered the meeting point between countryside and urban life; the encounter of tradition – or, rather, think "folk" – with the allure of the West; the zeal behind ideological fanaticism and the practical repercussions of its (capitalist) fancy. This is real, comparative knowledge, observation and experience'. And thus, my journey of the 'local' took a view through a different lens,[1] listening for the hidden oversights of written cultural assumptions of cause and effect, asking questions of how one context historically intertwines with another, seeking the nuances of urbanity, regionalism, marginalisation and political disenfranchisement. I questioned, as we travelled along the Yangtze, visiting artists working in communities still living in *yaodong* (cave houses) and

working with the families of artists, miners toiling in dangerous and extremely unhealthy environments.

The preoccupations and contexts of these artists further impressed on me the selectivity of a presumed 'final' artwork. I became aware that its poetic language possesses but a fraction of the history that the artist has examined, that the art often engages subjects that broader societies prefer to ignore. Could or *should* the 'truth' of such investigation be appropriately, *curatorially* addressed within the textualities of an exhibition? How could depth-of-site and its integrity be honoured? I thus became even more wary of cultural transference in my work, worried by the impact of dominant aesthetic theory and history (i.e., the mislabelling of a 'socially engaged' practice or the misunderstanding of popular surrealist tendencies in a lot of South East Asian art), in addition to the glossing over of context via a lack of facilitation, translation, understanding and emotional sensitivity. What exactly *was* my responsibility as a curator, when working with artists whose subjects were realities hidden to most?

Such wariness was strongly pronounced when a project that I had been tasked to gear from China became ethically untenable for me to be involved with. Initially compelled by the Ming dynasty exodus of the Chinese and their populating of the region now called South East Asia, I became quite interested in the connected histories between China and Vietnam, conversations further prompted by the pioneering work of the artist collective Long March Project. Thus, the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project was engineered, linking communities between Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Laos, the United States and Korea in a physical retracing of this historical route and the challenging of ideology, historical memory, cultural conflict and so much more. The network of partnerships had been finalised and the launch planned. Warning bells should have rung loud when, after a night out with a bunch of Chinese artists (all drunk as skunks), a certain artist guffawed at the idea of 'marching with the rear of the vanguard' (in reference to my desire for China to better understand its South East Asian neighbours). I was soon informed that the content of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project must be directed by 'us' as initiators; that the platform of mutuality, which I had hoped for, was considered too much of a risk to the overall final quality of the criticality desired for the project's international artistic showcase. To me, this smacked of the historical arrogance typical of cultural relations between China and its southern neighbours, a sinister superiority still felt today. I could

not fathom informing my collaborators of such news, many of whom had only agreed to participate with the proviso that the discussion would be mutually led. I laugh now, recalling the moment I told him – my then-boss (and still, a dear friend and guru to me) – that I was resigning, that I had been invited to Saigon to help Sàn Art, an artist collective, where I volunteered, with relief. He replied with consternation, 'But this is curatorial suicide!' and went on to exclaim that Vietnam would not be able to nurture me in the way that he thought I needed to be nurtured.

Working under the direction of artists in the building of place and community has been my biggest learning curve as a curator, prompted by their minds and methodologies, which have challenged my institutionalised brain. For their context (remember, I have chosen to work in mostly Communist landscapes, anchored in a region with a very uneven arts infrastructure, possessing educational systems predominantly lacking comparative historical perspective) reiterated to me my need to dehabitualise the words of default in talking 'Art'.

In relocating my life to Asia, my language initially failed me in earning understanding from the people I now sought as family. For in Vietnam particularly, culture is ideologically controlled, wrapped in a post-conflict, post-revolutionary mindset of fear, languishing in colonial educational rubric, mired in a nascent art market in glee with profit. My *language* was not only a matter of linguistics, but also a mindset of approach and investigation, of care and friendship. My 'professionalism' was to be remoulded as an earning of trust and empathy, giving time and acknowledgment to the intangible support structures for 'Art' in this highly surveilled society. For me, physical architecture has not been a priority in building institutions. Rather, it has involved the necessity for those of like mind to gather, to talk, to be honest with one another (even when it has been painful) in the sharing of success, failure, doubt and curiosity. In my experience, what occurs off-line has been paramount to sustaining artistic production – off-line meaning the 'events' that cannot be publicised, publicly attended or reviewed. For in Vietnam, what is 'public' is, therefore, licensed, and thus likely to be monitored. As a result, the honest nurturing of young minds must include the sharing of ideas and critical enquiry, which are incredibly important and must take place within the invisible realm.

In this decolonising world, who has the right to speak, and for whom? This is a question I regularly ask myself.

How do we participate in the system of art and its reliance on images, its dependency on capital? I like to think it's about altering a cogwheel here and there, via a work of art or a piece of text or a ruthless conversation, enough for the pathway of information (perspective) to be presented with the possibility of a new course. I like to think it comes from the basic reminder that I am a guest in the societies where I have chosen to live and work. That I am not *from* this place, that I am invited to be here, to participate, lead, contribute. Such positionality continues to meter my role and voice within my work, as I remain critically aware that I do believe we cannot ignore the dominant 'exhibitionary' mode of the circulation of 'Art' (with a history validated by a Capitalist West). But that what I can try to do is demonstrate how anchoring perspective in this 'Other' local and speaking *from* that place of experience *can* counter the learning of history assumed with specific terminology, archive, shape and meaning – this is to carefully leverage the exotification of an artist's 'Otherness', to curatorially facilitate an artist's desire to be internationally acclaimed (whilst remaining locally relevant and respected). This is a dance not easily achieved, especially when the buck is what is most desired. Thus, there remains little critical space for social-feedback loops that examine why thinking of *who* you are talking to actually matters in the making of Art. I've come to enter landscapes, such as mine, where culture is entertainment and its legacies are only 'official'; where thinking about the 'contemporaneity' in Art is about embracing new words for my labour as a curator. I recall a local journalist asking me in my first few years of working in Vietnam, 'Excuse me, what do you do?'; 'I am a curator'. She looked at me quizzically, and then flashed a loud smile, 'Oh! You mean you are a stylist!' I sat there, momentarily confused, but then quickly surmised that she was not entirely wrong. 'So, did you enjoy the show?'; 'Yes, I did, I learnt a lot'. 'So then, why didn't *you* write about it?' I asked, knowing full well that she had cut-and-pasted my press release words onto the newspaper page above her by-line. To which she unabashedly quipped, 'Oh, but your words are so much better than mine'. I had to laugh, for hadn't the West done exactly that – taken its resources, techniques and myriad cultural methodology and disguised them as its own? I found myself unable to fault the woman thus mimicking such plagiarism in return.

This 'in-between' self is still on the road. Though now, when I am asked, 'Where are you based?' I reply, 'I *live* in Saigon'. For this is my physical and emotional

'lived' world; it is home – not just a *base*, but a place full of experiences, full of the people and memories I care about. As an invited guest to such a clime, I possess a permanent, privileged temporality that has, at times, been full of stomach-racked anxiety in knowing I could be, one day, asked to leave. But, if there is any mentoring offered in countenance, it rests with the tales of individual artists, of their first-hand experiences in fighting for mobility, fighting for their art to represent the tensions inherent in the masking of human greed. And I'm reminded, yet again, that the only constant is change, the only constant is movement.

Saigon, July 2019

1 My previous understanding of 'local' was rather narrow-minded up until that point. It was a mode of thinking that had failed to engage the role of nationalism, of cultural synergies across country borders that gave a picture of a different space of exchange. Think: the concept of Nusantara in South East Asia or the fact that the Khmer Empire once included Saigon.

CREDITS

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PP. XX - XX
Huguette Caland
Robert Covington

PP. XX - XX
Otobong Nkanga. Installation view. Image courtesy SAF, Photography by Shavanas Jamuldin.

PP. XX - XX
Douglas Coupland
Four Slogans on the Theme of Work and Creativity, 2020
From 'Douglas Coupland' one of five books in a series titled 'Just an Idea'
Published by Sarah Andelman
https://justanidea.com/collections/books
@sarahandelman @justanidea

PP. XX - XX
From the Making of 'The Landing' ….

PP. XX - XX
Todd Reisz, courtesy of the author

MAKING NEW TIME: AN INVENTORY

COMPILED BY: OMAR KHOLEIF

BEACH BOOKS, TEXTS AND DOCUMENTS WITH BLAKE MITCHELL

We've been accumulating life for what feels like
too long—
We were informed that the successive qualities of
cumulative culture would repair us.

Raises yellow emoji hand.

I'd like a *processor* to *process* what we have lived
through together.

Who, you?
Was that a request, or a demand?

I am still waiting at the barricades,
socially-distanced
But you have not shown up.
I see pictures of you topless and trim on Instagram,
perhaps nearby?

We made a Spice Girls inflected decision to 'become one'.
But you appear to have disregarded
that promise.

Memory lapses are but mere excuses.
We shall not reserve them for the young or the elderly,
or anyone for that matter—

•

Remember that bitter chill on the 40th floor?
Watching Alicia Florrick in the last season of
The Good Wife—
Debating between us who was who in this relationship?
Who were we going to become?

The solar ice-caps were melting right outside our
window.
In the pit of the frozen Lake as it came
alive in December.
An apocalypse intending to devour all that
was inside of us.
But we resisted, somehow, in some very minor fashion.

The ice dissipated into smooth blue.
Sharjah Creek it was now.
Ships, tender, inching forward
at the pace of ants.
Ships dipped in oil and water.
Ships cooked in direct sunlight.

1968
1975
2011
2015
2019

March.
Paris Match.
Born, but not yet alive,
still together.
We lived it.

Fingertips rake across stained linen—
sheets equal metaphors for wounds.
The seams unbuckling,
modifications were in order.

Bastille Day
May Day
Arab Spring
The Lebanese Civil Wars
The never-ending war of wanton longing.

Happy Birthday, General!
It is all yours.
These hills, these borders, this nation,

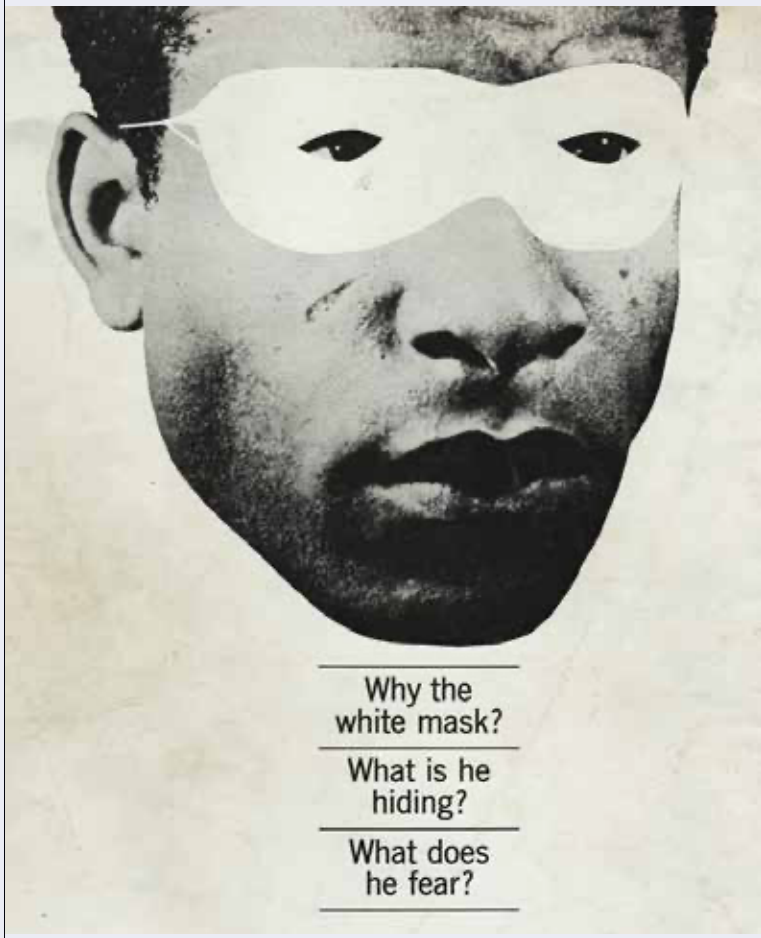
this body, this figure perennially
standing in the fire.

I leave these words—these pages
of memory, as a living archive of what was and what
could have been.
A testimony of illness—
in its myriad forms.
But also, as a document of recovery, of care.

In these pages:
You shall find an absence.
One that we have grown to radically receive.

Two obsolete forms:
Binary genders, hollowed fantasies, un-sutured
pieces of coil.
Together' they of 'brown skin' and they
of 'fair eyes' are permitted to consolidate.
Two fragments, unabridged, working together,
scouring for the ink to author yet another page.

IMAGE ARCHIVE

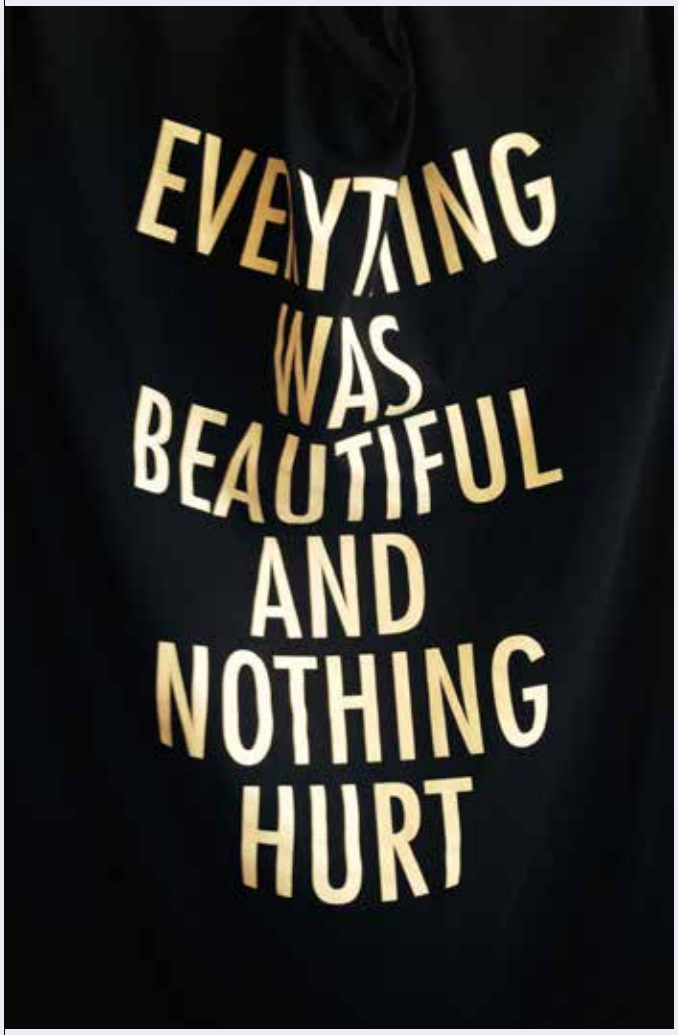

Why the
white mask?
What is he
hiding?
What does
he fear?

2

3


good2grow
Fruit & Veggie Burst

5



6

7

8


FOR
RENT
323-793-1225

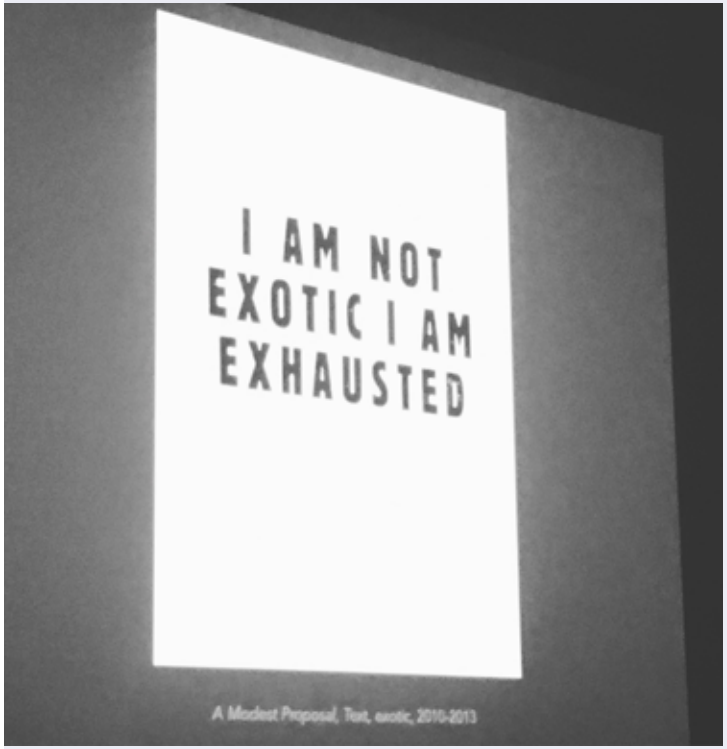

Verlaine : Poems
THRIFTBOOKS


REXULTI
Advil

12

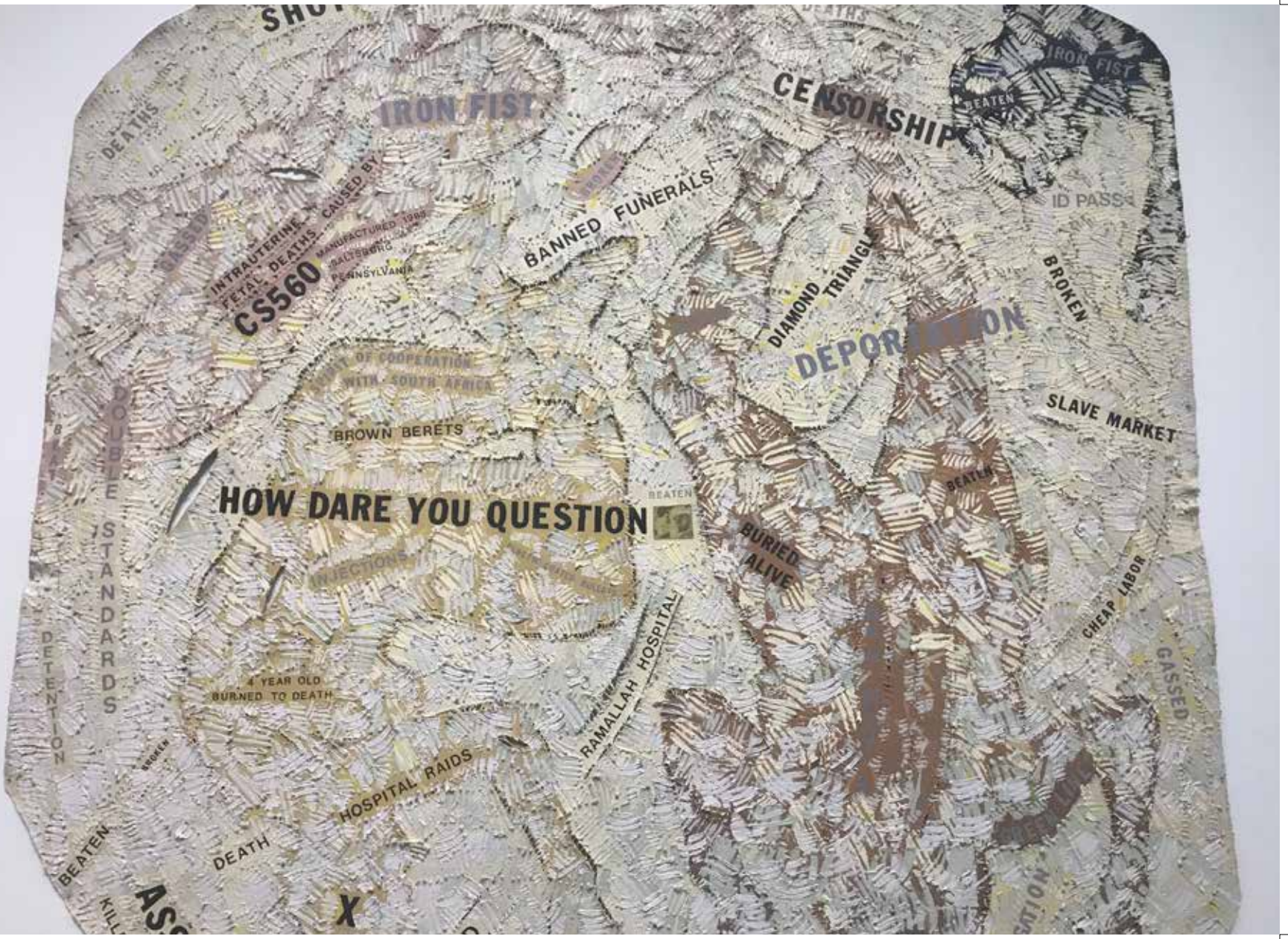
13

14



A Modest Proposal, Text, exotic, 2010-2013

15

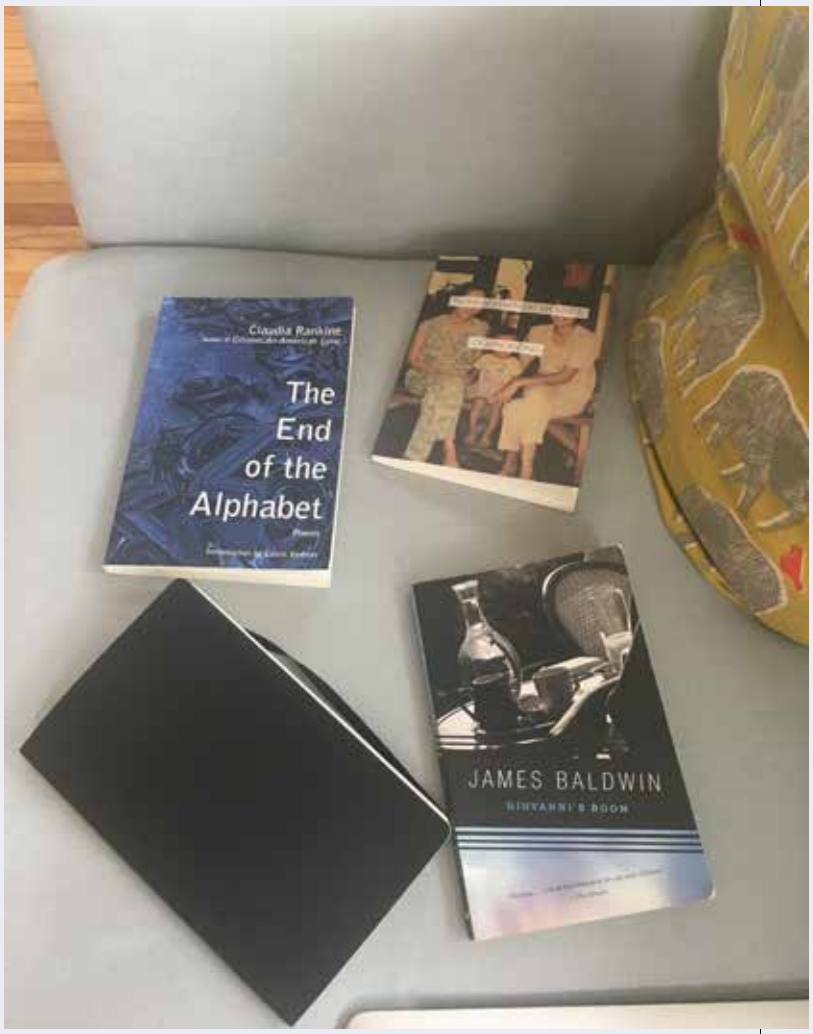

IRON FIST
CENSORSHIP
BANNED FUNERALS
ID PASS
DEPORTATION
SLAVE MARKET
BROKEN
DIAMOND TRIANGLE
INTRAUTERINE FETAL DEATHS CAUSED BY
CS560
MANUFACTURED 1968
SALISBURG
PENNSYLVANIA
BROWN BERETS
HOW DARE YOU QUESTION
BURIED ALIVE
CHEAP LABOR
GASSED
DOUBLE STANDARDS
DETENTION
4 YEAR OLD BURNED TO DEATH
RAMALLAH HOSPITAL
HOSPITAL RAIDS
DEATH
BEATEN


54
lost

19

20

21


Claudia Rankine
The End of the Alphabet
JAMES BALDWIN
GIOVANNI'S ROOM

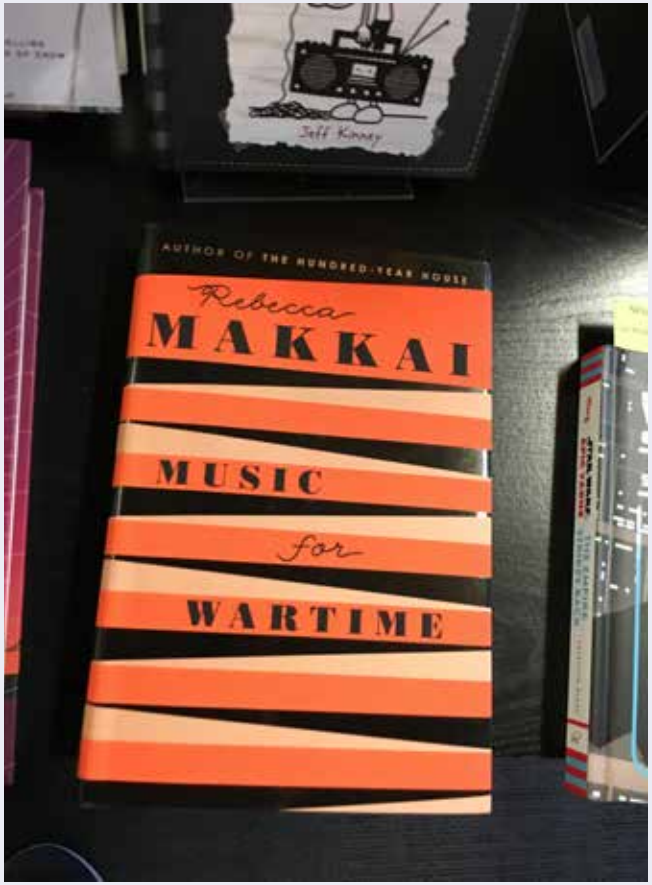

Shani

22

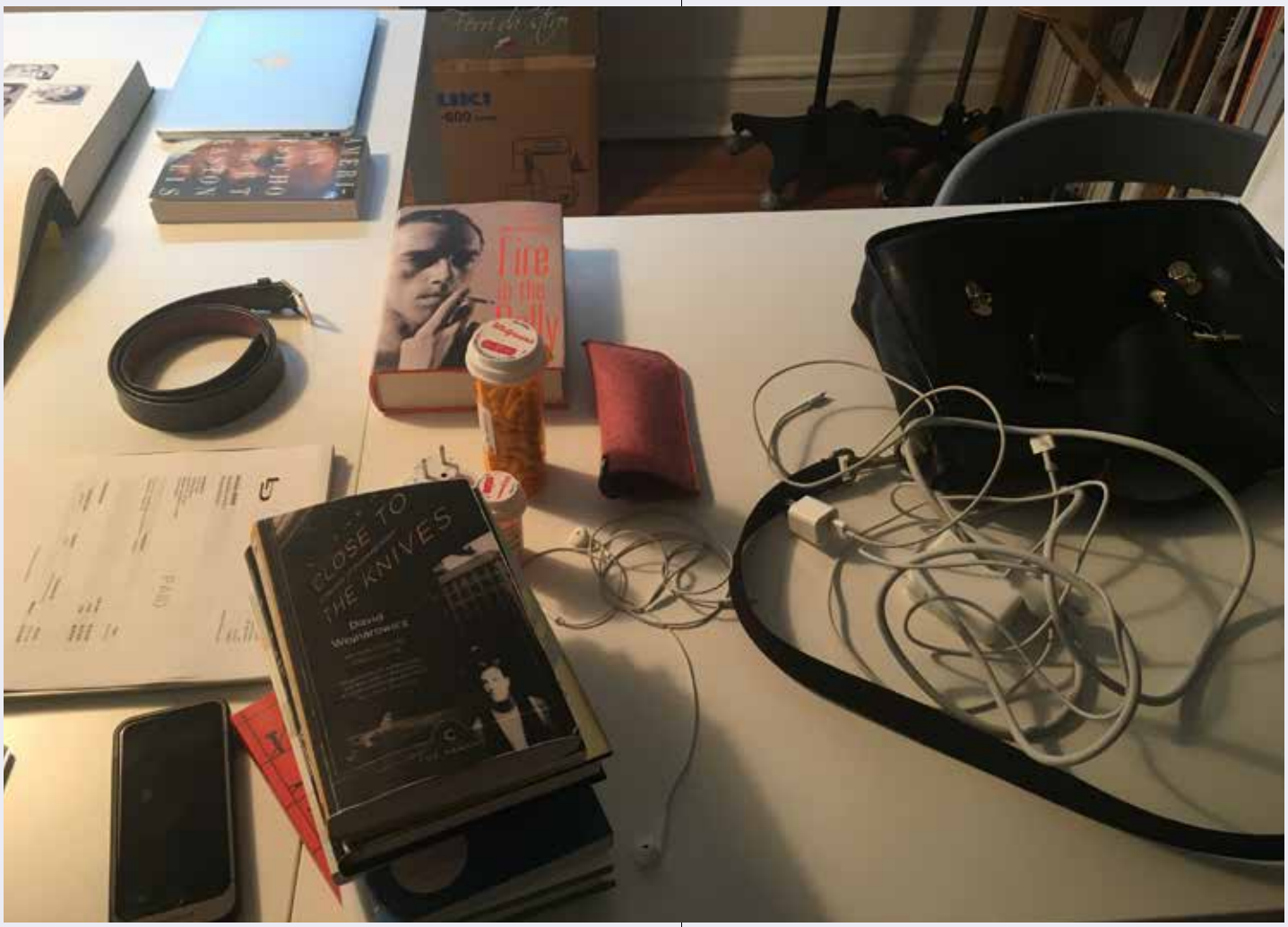
24

25

29

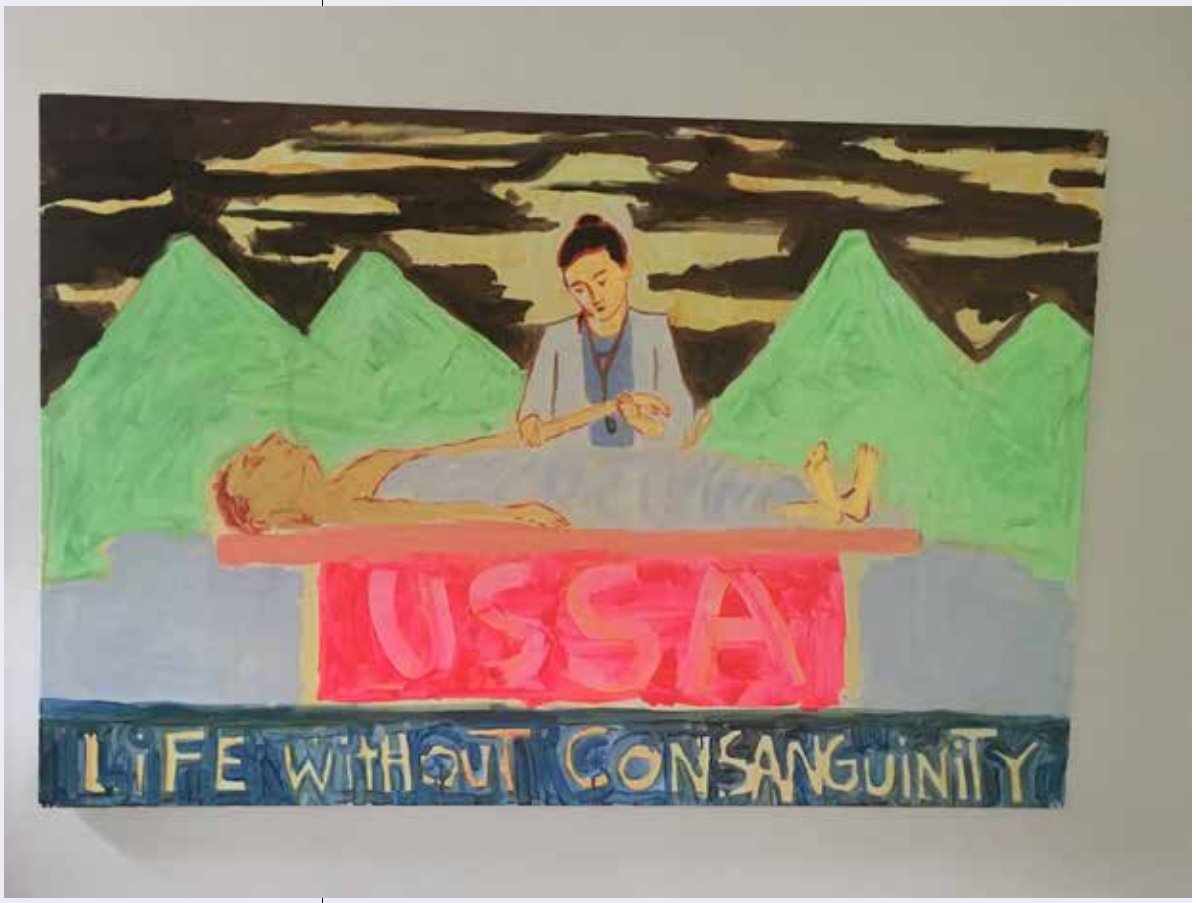

Jeff Kinney
AUTHOR OF THE HUNDRED-YEAR HOUSE
Rebecca
MAKKAI
MUSIC
for
WARTIME

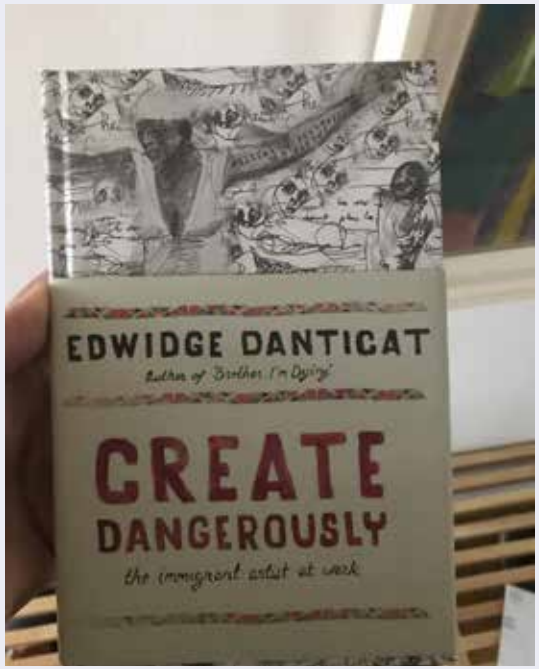
30


CLOSE TO
THE KNIVES
David
Wojnarowicz


'I AM MADE
AND REMADE
CONTINUALLY.'


2018
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
CHN
TANKS
THEAFGHANISTANSMAP
AND
MADEIN AFGHANISTAN


USSA
LIFE WITHOUT CONSANGUINITY


EDWIDGE DANTICAT
Author of 'Brother, I'm Dying'
CREATE
DANGEROUSLY
the immigrant artist at work

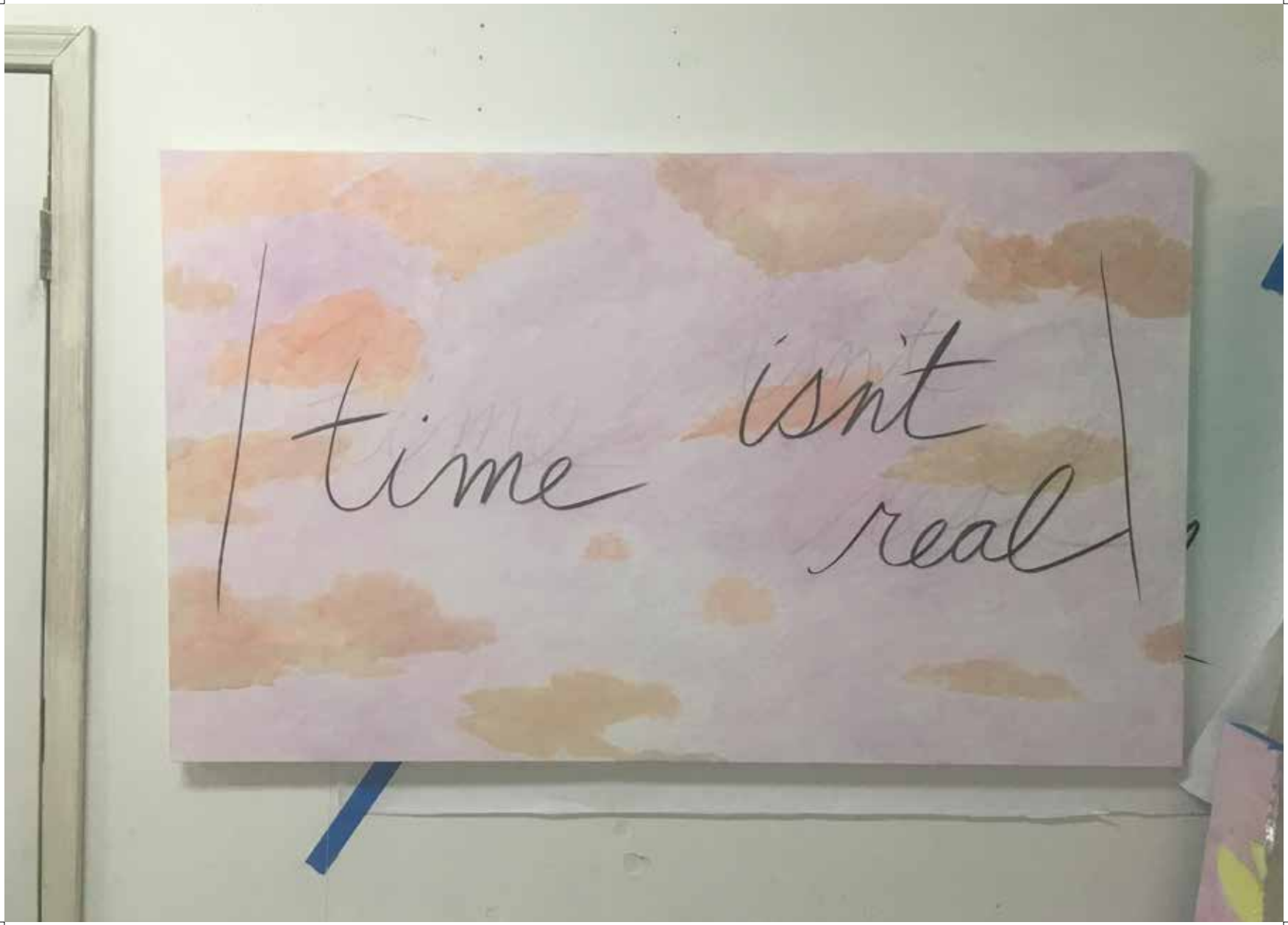
40

41

42

43


"Designing is not a profession but an attitude."
–László Moholy-Nagy, Schatz Building tenant - 1939


time isn't real

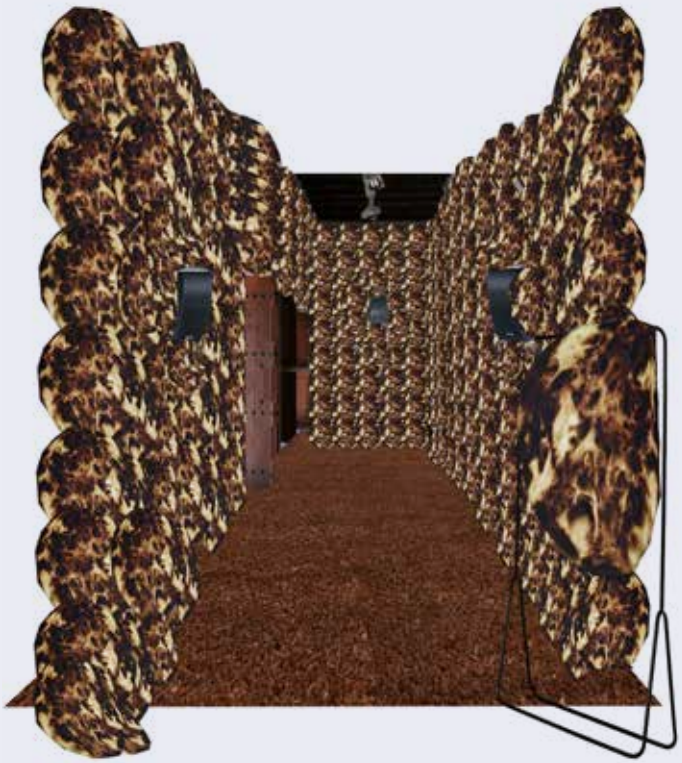

DAMA
Abeta

47

48


A BOX OF SMILE Y.O.'71


BIC



53

54

FLOOD ZONE


black polythene (bin bags?) cover all entrances - windows & doors
single large black umbrella, skewered into toads
mound of sprayed black rubber toads
speakers submerged in dirt
mound of earth
sound of torrential rainfall


IS YOUR
CENTER
INSIDE
AN EMAIL
CHAIN?


BALCONY

61

62


NAVY
NAVY
NAVY


Pahen
RAINCOAT
KHALEEJ
SMALL


OASIMI
RENEWAL
REBIRTH
IMMORTALITY

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Images 2 and 63: courtesy Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck.

Image 18: Still from Unsettled Objects (168-9) by Lothar Baumgarten. Courtesy Sharjah Art Foundation Collection and Marian Goodman Gallery, London.

Image 47: Huguette Caland, from Bribes de Corps (1973). Courtesy the Estate of Huguette Caland, Los Angeles.

Image 48: Marwan, Untitled (2006). Courtesy Sharjah Art Foundation Collection.

Image 52: Production still. Courtesy Akram Zaatari and Sharjah Art Foundation Collection.

Images 53-55: Research drawings. Courtesy of Heather Phillipson.

Image 57: From the series, Churches (circa. 2009) by Hrair Sarkissian. Collection of Blake Mitchell.

Image 66: Production still. Courtesy of Akram Zaatari and Sharjah Art Foundation Collection.

HOOR AL QASIMI
Hoor Al Qasimi established Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) in 2009 as a catalyst and advocate for the arts in Sharjah, UAE, as well as the greater region and abroad. As President and Director, she has expanded the Foundation's scope to include major international travelling exhibitions, artist and curator residencies, commissions and production grants for emerging artists and a wide range of educational programming. She has also served as Sharjah Biennial Director since 2003.

Beyond her role at SAF, Al Qasimi is currently President of the International Biennial Association, President of The Africa Institute and Chair of the Board for the Sharjah Architecture Triennial. Likewise, she serves on the Board of Directors for MoMA PS1 in New York, Kunst-Werke Berlin e. V. and Ashkal Alwan in Beirut. In addition, she is Chair of the Advisory Board for the College of Fine Arts and Design at the University of Sharjah and is a member of the advisory boards for Khoj International Artists' Association in New Delhi and Darat al Funun in Amman. She is also a member of the Prince Claus Award Committee.

Al Qasimi has curated major exhibitions and pivotal solo shows in Sharjah and abroad, including the UAE Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale, amongst many others. She holds an MA in curating contemporary art from the Royal College of Art, London; a diploma in painting from the Royal Academy of Arts, London; and a BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London.

OMAR KHOLEIF
Omar Kholeif, PhD, CF FRSA, an Egypt-born, British-American writer, curator and cultural historian, is Director of Collections and Senior Curator at Sharjah Art Foundation. Trained as a political scientist, he began his career as a journalist and documentary filmmaker before entering into the picture palace of museums. Concerned with the intersections of nonnormative, postcolonial and critical race theory, Kholeif's writings have explored histories of performance art, the language of mental illness, the interstices of social justice and the aesthetics of digital and technological consciousness. The curator of more than 100 exhibitions of art, architecture and digital culture, Kholeif has authored, co-authored or edited thirty-one books, which have been translated into twelve languages. Recent volumes include: *Goodbye, World: Looking at Art in the Digital Age* (Sternberg Press, 2018) and *Art in the Age of Anxiety* (Sharjah Art Foundation/Mörel Books, 2021). Forthcoming titles include the monograph *Internet Art: The First Thirty Years* (Phaidon, 2022) and *Code-Switchers: The Art of Being Invisible* (forthcoming, 2022).

ARAM MOSHAYEDI
Aram Moshayedi is a writer and Robert Soros Curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, where he most recently co-organised (with Connie Butler) the exhibition and eponymous publication, *Paul McCarthy: Head Space, Drawings 1963–2019*. Other exhibitions include *Stories of Almost Everyone*, *Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only* (with Hamza Walker) and *All the Instruments Agree: An Exhibition or a Concert*. Since joining the Hammer in 2013, he has curated projects by artists Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Marwa Arsanios, Andrea Bowers, Andrea Büttner, Simon Denny, Mario García Torres, Shadi Habib Allah, Maria Hassabi, Jasmina Metwaly, Oliver Payne and Keiichi Tanaami, and Avery Singer. He was formerly Associate Curator at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT), where he organised exhibitions and oversaw the production of new works by Tony Cokes, Geoffrey Farmer, Erlea Maneros Zabala, The Otolith Group, Slavs and Tatars, Jordan Wolfson and Ming Wong. He has contributed to numerous exhibition catalogues as well as *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *BOMB Magazine*, *Frieze*, *Metropolis M*, *Parkett*, *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly* and *Bidoun*, for which he is a contributing editor.

DOUGLAS COUPLAND
Since 1991, Douglas Coupland has written thirteen novels, which have been published in most languages, and has written and performed for

England's Royal Shakespeare Company. He is also a columnist for *The Financial Times of London*, as well as a frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, *e-flux*, *DIS Magazine* and *Vice*. Coupland recently mounted two separate museum retrospectives: *everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Royal Ontario Museum and Toronto's Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and *Bit Rot* at Rotterdam's Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art and Munich's Villa Stuck. In 2015 and 2016, he was artist in residence at the Google Cultural Institute in Paris. His exhibition on ecology, *Vortex*, opened in May 2018 at the Vancouver Aquarium and is travelling globally through 2021. In 2016, Penguin published *The Age of Earthquakes: A Guide to the Extreme Present*, a book co-authored by Coupland, Shumon Basar and Hans Ulrich Obrist; its sequel, *The Extreme Self*, is scheduled to be published in the summer of 2021.

FATIMA AL QASIMI
Fatima Al Qasimi is a PhD candidate at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Her research focuses on Ibn Al Arabi, a thirteenth-century Arab-Andalusian Muslim scholar, mystic, poet and philosopher, whose works have been influential beyond the Muslim world. Following a decade of her work on Ibn Al Arabi, Al Qasimi published her findings on the philosopher in a book titled *The Educational Implications of Ibn Arabi's Writings*.

Al Qasimi received her undergraduate degree in education and psychology from UAE University, Al Ain, and holds a diploma in Islamic studies from the Institute of Islamic Studies, Cairo, as well as a special diploma in the basics of education from Al-Azhar University.

SOFIA VICTORINO
Sofia Victorino is the Daskalopoulos Director of Education and Public Programmes at London's Whitechapel Gallery, where she leads a programme of artist residencies and commissions, community projects and public programmes, including performance and film. Previously head of Education and Public Programmes at the Serralves Museum in Porto, Portugal

(2002–11), she focuses her research on art, performativity and social practice. Select curatorial projects and commissions include those of artists Mikhail Karikis (2018), Emanuel Almborg (2017), Samson Kambalu (2016), Rivane Neuenschwander (2015), Luke Fowler and Mark Fell (2015), Peter Liversidge (2015), Bart Lodewijks (2014–15), Francis Upritchard (2014), Fraser Muggeridge (2014), Heather and Ivan Morison (2013), Theaster Gates (2013), Claire Pentecost (2013) and the collective Assemble (2017). Victorino serves on the Advisory Committee for the William Townsend Memorial Lecture Series at the Slade School of Fine Art and on the advisory board for the *Documents of Contemporary Art* series, co-published by Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press. She has lectured on the MA in Curating the Contemporary (London Metropolitan University) and the MA in Contemporary Art and Education (Goldsmiths, University of London).

TAREK EL-ARISS
Tarek El-Ariss is Professor and Chair of Middle Eastern Studies at Dartmouth College in the United States. Working across disciplines and languages, his research interests include contemporary Arabic culture, literature and art; new media and cyber culture; digital humanities; Nahda literature, language, press and literary theory; travel writing and the war novel; film and television studies; sci-fi and utopia studies; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French philosophy and literature; gender and sexuality studies; and psychoanalysis, deconstruction and affect theory. El-Ariss is the author of *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (2013) and *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals: Arab Culture in the Digital Age* (2018), and editor of *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda* (2018).

TODD REISZ
Todd Reisz is an architect and writer whose work often examines cities of the Arabian Peninsula from historical and contemporary perspectives. He served for

five years as the Daniel Rose Visiting Assistant Professor in Urban Studies at the Yale School of Architecture, where he is currently the Kahn Visiting Assistant Professor of Architectural Design. Reisz has also taught in the Aga Khan Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He edited the *Al Manakh* series (2007, 2010), two essential publications on the urbanisation of the Arabian Peninsula, and was the editor and contributing writer for Beirut-based *Portal 9*. For six years, he was a leading designer and researcher at OMA in Rotterdam. In 2020, his decadelong project on Dubai's early modernisation and the architectural career of John Harris, *Showpiece City: How Architecture Made Dubai*, was published by Stanford University Press. His next book, *Building Sharjah*, which he co-edited with Sultan Al Qassemi about Sharjah's modern architecture and the cultural landscape in which it is rooted, will be released in 2021 by Birkhaüser. Reisz's work has been featured in several editions of the Venice Architecture Biennale, in addition to the Sharjah Biennial, *The Guardian*, *Perspecta*, *Log*, *Jadaliyya*, the *Journal of Urban History*, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Architectural Design*, *Artforum*, *Volume* and *ARCH+*.

ZOE BUTT

Zoe Butt is a curator and writer based in Vietnam. Her curatorial practice centres on building critically thinking and historically conscious artistic communities, thus fostering dialogue amongst countries of the Global South. She is currently Artistic Director of the Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City. She previously served as Executive Director and Curator at Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City (2009–16); Director, International Programs, Long March Project, Beijing (2007–09); and Assistant Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (2001–07). Her work has been widely published internationally. She is also a member of the Asian Art Council for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and in 2015, was named a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum.

Butt has undertaken wide-ranging curatorial projects, which include interdisciplinary dialogue platforms such as Conscious Realities (2013–16), group exhibitions of Vietnamese and international artists and recent exhibitions in Ho Chi Minh City, such as *Spirit of Friendship and Poetic Amnesia: Phan Thao Nguyen* (2017) and *Dislocate: Bui Cong Khanh* (2016) at The Factory and *Conjuring Capital* (2015) at Sàn Art. In 2019, she co-curated *Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber* in collaboration with Omar Kholeif and Claire Tancons.

First of all, I would like to pay tribute to some of the figures who have given close attention to my development and who have mentored me in some shape or form. **Professor Christine Geraghty**, you may never read these words, but it was you that made me fall in love with the essay form. **Karen Alexander** and **Mark Nash**, thank you for the golden opportunity. **Michaela Crimmin**, you have taught me that modesty and humility are essential in this world. **Anna Harding**, you gave me the chance to experiment in ways that I never thought I could. I am glad that I can now offer some form of support in return. **Iwona Blazwick**, I am grateful for the all the teachable moments. I had never dreamt that someone who came from *where I come from* could hold such space. **Michael Darling**, you were and ever are a brilliant person to bounce ideas off of. You helped to build a dream team, which included **Naomi Beckwith**, **José Esparza Chong Cuy**, **Susan Chun** and **Heidi Reitmaier**, all of whom I take inspiration from to this day. **Professor W.J.T. Mitchell**, you are one of *the* most distinguished of scholars, but you never made me feel that I was any less intelligent when I shared space and time with you. You have emboldened me to carry on dreaming. And of all my mentors, **Professor Jean Fisher**, your picture sits in front of me as I write, now framed; the memory of your loss is still piercing.

It is with heartfelt sincerity that I express my gratitude to the artists who helped to make the dream of SB14 a reality. Of everyone, **Otobong Nkanga**, you sutured historical wounds and offered not just me, but the citizens of Sharjah, a permanent site of solace. I am so honoured that your award-winning installation was one of the first works to be accessioned into the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection during my tenure. **Lawrence Abu Hamdan**, from the moment that I experienced *The Freedom of Speech Itself*, since our initial meeting in Dalston, your brain has seeded and sown constellations of ideas that I am working through to this day. **Cory Arcangel**, my admiration for you began in 2002. Thank you for taking the step towards this collaboration and for being vulnerable to new challenges. **Marwa Arsanios**, you handed me a DVD in 2010 (or was it 2011?) at 98 Weeks in Beirut; your unique approach to unfurling historical ruptures has stayed with me, and always will.

Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck, you went over, above and beyond. Your ambition and your attention to detail are inspiring. **Semiha Berksoy** may have passed well before SB14, but her polymath spirit has been a long-standing stimulus. I, too, hope to light up the silver screen; moonlight as an opera singer, a painter; and become somewhere near as prolific and energetic as

she was. **Candice Breitz**, your gravestone to history was an apt if tragic foreshadowing. Thank you for bringing a new language to this exhibition. **Huguette Caland**, I am so happy that I got to know you; it breaks my heart, each and every day, that it has taken so long for people to finally *see* and appreciate your work for what it is: *something revolutionary*! I am committed to your legacy for the rest of my living days.

Ian Cheng, your brilliance knows no bounds. **Shezad Dawood**, here you gave something back to a community that was in desperate need of being seen. **Stan Douglas**, you have been an idol-figure. I hope that this is but the first collaboration of many. **Lubaina Himid**, nary have I met an artist whose work is as precise, as spirited and as evocative as yours. You have done so much for all of us. I do not think that you can even comprehend the magnitude of your influence. Thank you for entrusting me with telling a part of your artistic journey. **Alfredo Jaar**, I am often confounded by how such a gentle soul can tackle such harrowing subjects; I have learnt from you through this process, and I will continue to do so.

Ann Veronica Janssens, your phenomenological renderings of our imaginary captivate and illuminate our senses. Working with you has been a privilege that

I hope to repeat. **Barbara Kasten**, thank you for your caring spirit, for your friendship in Chicago and beyond and, above all, for sharing the stories that underpin your magisterial works from the 1970s. **Astrid Klein**, you are an emblem of how one can bounce back from tragedy and into a field of ebullience. Your art activated Bait Al Serkal with memories for me that cease to disappear. **Marwan**, I was heartbroken that by the time this exhibition had arrived you were no longer with us. I thank Angelika von Schwedes and Andrée Sfeir-Semler for continuing your legacy. As I promised you at your studio in Berlin, I will not stop; I shall not stop.

Bruno Pacheco, you have been my painting teacher since the day of our first studio visit. I would not be able to 'read' Guston or Morandi the same way without your careful eye. Please never change. **Heather Phillipson**, I am thrilled that you were able to dissolve Bait Al Makrani into the realm of the immaterial; to separate mind from body. Our 'voice notes' and your poetry have been a nourishing part of this process, Karen Carpenter.

Michael Rakowitz, my brother, my family. You, Lori, Jude and Renee gave me a home in Chicago, and that time has forever shaped who I am. I am proud that we were able to bring Cody to a place where he belongs. **Pamela**

Rosenkranz, your imagination knows no bounds. We went on an adventure together; sometimes, it seemed like it would fail, but as ever, your diligence has the potential to bring the most impossible to life. **Hrair Sarkissian**, you show us 'the other side of silence'; you bring out the humanity in the inhumane. I hope that Anouk and Ayk will do the same.

Anwar Jalal Shemza, your daughter and granddaughter are keeping your legacy alive. If anything, I have one thing to thank you for, and that is for revealing to me the myopic nature of E.H. Gombrich's teachings and writings, what the late Okwui Enwezor once dubbed, the epistemic 'violence of European modernism'. **Kemang Wa Lehulere**, every object that you make, every drawing that you draft, elicits a million stories. These are tales drawn from an interiority and a subconscious that I know is painful, but we are all the better for having these histories articulated for us here in this life. **Munem Wasif**, dispossessed lives come back to this Earth through your astute brilliance. Thank you for believing in this project and for the memento; I cherish it with all my heart. **Akram Zaatari**, we have worked together for many years, in both piecemeal and fulsome fashion. It was a privilege to be the one to invite you to make your first commission for the Sharjah Biennial; the result, a *situated* historical

opera of sorts – of sound and silence; of embodied absence – will remain forever.

Beyond this, it is imperative to thank the interlocutors who took part in and shaped my portion of the March Meeting, Create Dangerously*:*

Koyo Kouoh, thank you for always reminding me that I am, indeed, legitimately African. **Hannah Feldman**, thank you for always telling it like it is! **Sofia Victorino**, thank you for reminding me that friendship is a lifelong commitment of care. **Tarek El-Ariss**, thank you for introducing me to stories that I would otherwise never know. **Aram Moshayedi**, thank you for being my family in Los Angeles and supporting the case against 'invisibility'. **Zoe Butt**, thank you for being the best co-curator a human could ask for; thank you for your critical mind, thank you for your honesty; you are a cherished part of my life. **Koray Duman**, thank you for showing me 'the other side' of New York City – the one that exists in-between the cracks. **Todd Reisz**, thank you for helping me to understand what 'urbanism' really is. **Reem Fadda**, thank you for long being a quiet and shielding guide, always there for advice and support when they are needed most. **Sarah Perks**, thank you for your belief in me; I am all the better for it. **Douglas Coupland**, thank

you for your mind; but above all, for your friendship. **Yasmine El Rashidi**, you are one of the few chroniclers of my home that I trust. You do not even know your own brilliance. You are a daily inspiration. **Fatima Al Qasimi**, thank you for illuminating the world of Ibn Arabi for me, and with that, for opening up an entirely new field of imagination.

Since SB14, a few very important people have offered me shelter, solace and regular guidance. These include **Adrian Lahoud**, **Khalid Abdalla** and **Boutros**. I am indebted to you for offering me not only a roof over my head so that I could write and work during the pandemic, but also the reassurance of a friendly voice, one that is always there at the other end of the phone.

To my doctors, I cannot thank you enough for helping me to get back onto my feet, as wobbly as they sometimes might still seem. I shall simply call you by your first names here: David, J-P, Yasser, Mark, Andrew and Debbie. I owe you the world.

The organising team of the Sharjah Biennial cannot be underestimated. I am forever grateful to **Hoor Al Qasimi** for inviting me on this journey and for continuing the conversation afterwards about what it means to create a *situated* art history that will benefit the region for generations to come. **Reem Shadid**, **Noora Al Mualla**, **Nawar Al Qasimi**, **Judith Greer**, **Hassan Ali Masood** and **Ryan Inouye** made every part of this process enriching. I am proud to call you my colleagues.

I cannot forget the numerous curatorial assistants who aided every step of the way: May, Raneem, Momen, Zeina, Amal and Ayman. Thank you. I owe you one. This book could never have come together without Wasan Yousif, its Managing Editor, who is always able to bring publications together, and the skilful design and management of Hani Charaf of Kemistry Design.

Of all the loved ones who passed during the course of what has been a very difficult year of loss for everyone, there is one in particular that I must honour, and that is Adam Baxter, my first-ever college 'roommate'.

This book is dedicated to Francis Vincent. You are most certainly far from perfect, but I hope that we can be caretakers for one another, as we continue to inch forward, one day at a time.

PROGRAMME

Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber
7 March - 10 June 2019
Organised by:
Sharjah Art Foundation
Curated by: Zoe Butt (*Journey Beyond the Arrow*), Omar Kholeif (*Making New Time*) and Claire Tancons (*Look for Me All Around You*)

March Meeting 2019: Create Dangerously
9 March 2019
Organised by: Sharjah Art Foundation
Convened by Omar Kholeif

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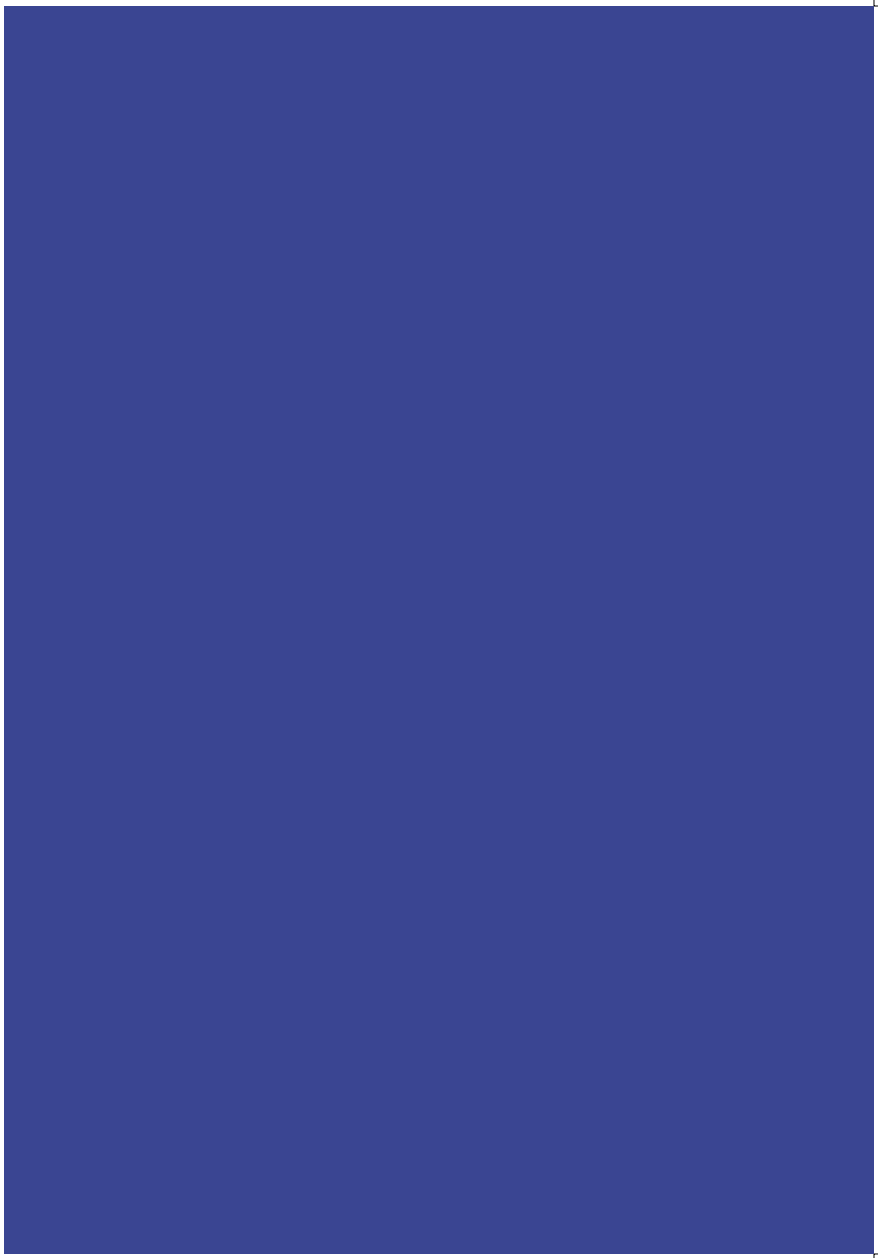

CREATING DANGEROUSLY

A POSTSCRIPT TO SHARJAH BIENNIAL 14 EDITED BY OMAR KHOLEIF

This publication provides a reflective summary of the conversations that took place at the 14th Sharjah Biennial and the attendant conference, Create Dangerously. Through illustrated and reflective texts, this book reveals the power of a collective consciousness: what does it mean for artists and practitioners to gather as a collective force against hegemony? Together, these texts illuminate what it means to think of and through history.

Creating Dangerously is a unique book coming together as one part theoretical reader and intimate archival compilation by Omar Kholeif, on his process of curating the SB14 platform, Making New Time ….

Contributions from Tarek El Arris, Zoe Butt, Douglas Coupland, Chris McCormack, Blake Mitchell, Aram Moshayedi, Fatima Al Qasimi, Todd Reisz, and Sofia Victorino.

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