



EDITORIAL NOTE

These past few months, it's all been about letters. Everywhere I've looked, at every show, for every installation: letters flying around and dissolving into a chaos of dark space. Seeing them over and over again left me wondering if it's not a metaphor, a stand in for something else.

Are these letters in chaos speaking of a confusion in logic? Are they speaking of the present confusion? Of our inability to communicate because we use the same words and the same letters to mean different things? Is this just us all standing at the tower of Babylon, speaking different languages?

These days, we keep trying to use such long, beautiful words crammed into equally long, unique metaphors – unless we're typing up that 150 character tweet that works better for shouting slogans than speaking at leisure. Same letters, different meanings.

In the contemporary art world, it's not always been about letters specifically, but it's always been about meanings and interpretations of words, concepts, shapes, forms... The one essay that revolutionised my way of thinking about contemporary art is an art theory piece by Rosalind Krauss called 'Sculpture in the expanded field' (*October*, 1979).

To be honest, it took about three takes before I got what it was about at all (followed by a few phone calls about the maths behind the expanded field and a whole lot of research). First then did I – *imagine!* – find myself getting what all these contemporary sculptures and earthworks and installations were about.

Great, of course. Also, sad. Krauss' work was written in 1979. We're in 2021 now. How come we still haven't found any other ways to speak, to write, to say and to make our letters into words that can be translated without the prior theoretical knowledge?

Words that actually connect between people, between artists, between curators, between thinkers, between all of us? I know contemporary art is a bit of a minefield, but surely we can find one way or other to build some bridges that we can all cross together?



So, with a most wonderful team that has brought so much creativity, joy and belief to my life, I decided to start a journal. We spent hours and hours on end trying to figure out what that is, how it can be, what we actually want. What looks good, and what is good. What makes sense to do? How do you create a journal that one day may be able to act as a bridge.

Or a cornerstone to a bridge.

Okay, maybe just a building block.

Just *something* that can let us play around, explore and experiment. That gives us time and space to try to reconnect the letters from all these places – because in the end, we're speaking in more similar terms than we think.

Reconnect art and life, music and visual art, performance and photography, video and textiles. The whole lot of it. Reconnect people, reconnect forms.

It's a lofty ideal, an open-ended project, and an absolutely banging group of people that I've had the privilege to work with on this. To you all, thank you ever so much. To all of you who are reading this, thank you equally for connecting with us.

With these words, I'd like to welcome you to our first issue: Disappearance. Credit where credit is due – the idea was inspired by Ackbar Abbas' incredible work, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Together with our contributors, we've been grappling with disappearance as a cultural phenomena in a lot of different ways.

On the following pages you'll find disappearance in a range of different meanings of the word: the disappearance of self, the disappearance of time, the disappearance of spaces, and the disappearance that happens when change is so fast that 'the new' disappears in front of our eyes, always replaced with 'the newer'.

Welcome, thank you, and enjoy.

Love,

M

x

Time Grit.

by Daniel Matthews. Dan's a curator, writer, comedian and artist & co-founder of the podcast series and website *The Hamburg Design Review* where the news and other current happenings are re-interpreted through a personal, humorous and insightful-enough-to-make-us-uncomfortable lens.

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An essay that is not there.

x

A tale about a bird.

by Maria Kruglyak. Maria's our editor at culturala, artist and cultural journalist.

x

Pass.

by Diana Lizette Rodrigues. Diana's an artist and poet working with spoken word, film, and painting in a practice that explores the deeply feminine and the ritualistic in our daily lives.

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On Jasper Jones by [name to be released]

They are a writer and photographer specialising in contemporary art and working within the field.

x

Photography by Jasper Jones | artist

Jasper works in photography, curation, art direction and film. We're seeing him here as a photographer, but from his home in London and Amsterdam he works for Millennium Images and with exhibitions all over the two cities.

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Psychodrama of a Fragmented Self

by Angeliki Vidou. Angie's a law graduated living in Greece. She's interested in psychoanalysis, film and photo and is studying at the New Lacanian School in Athens (AKSPA) that hosts seminars for psychoanalytic practice and monthly discussions in psychoanalysis and film.

x

Turning tables & turning identity: Thoughts on artistic self in the shifting EDM economy

by Matthias London.

Matthias is a Czech-German writer living in Berlin. He explores stream of consciousness writing and journalism, and is interested in building on the undoubted legacy of Hunter S Thompson.

x

Desert of the Hyperreal: Gulf Futurism's prophetic mirage

by Sarah Scott. Sarah's our assistant editor at culturala, curator and art history writer.

x

An expanded space of disappearance where the disappeared appears by Maria Kruglyak.

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Visual essay

by Daniel Matthews and Anna Cherednikova.

Dan you already know from Time Grit, and Anna's a photographer from Russia living in Sweden and Spain, who explores everything about plants in her portraiture-works.



Time Grit.

Time Grit. *by Daniel Matthews*

An hour spent sorting and arranging a boxful of coins into columns worth one pound. Around forty-five minutes spent wiping the sprouting spores of black mould from an annoyingly intricate window frame. Supposedly, nine hours and twenty minutes devoted to the playing of Sid Meier's Civilisation V.

Fifteen or so minutes spent building a DIY device that allows me to hover an iPad over my body and in front of my face when I'm in the bath. Probably getting on for six hours of drawing and colouring a cartoon of former UK Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott sitting on a giant (and quite possibly toxic) toadstool. Maybe half an hour frittered away thinking of a few noteworthy ways in which I've used time in the last few months.

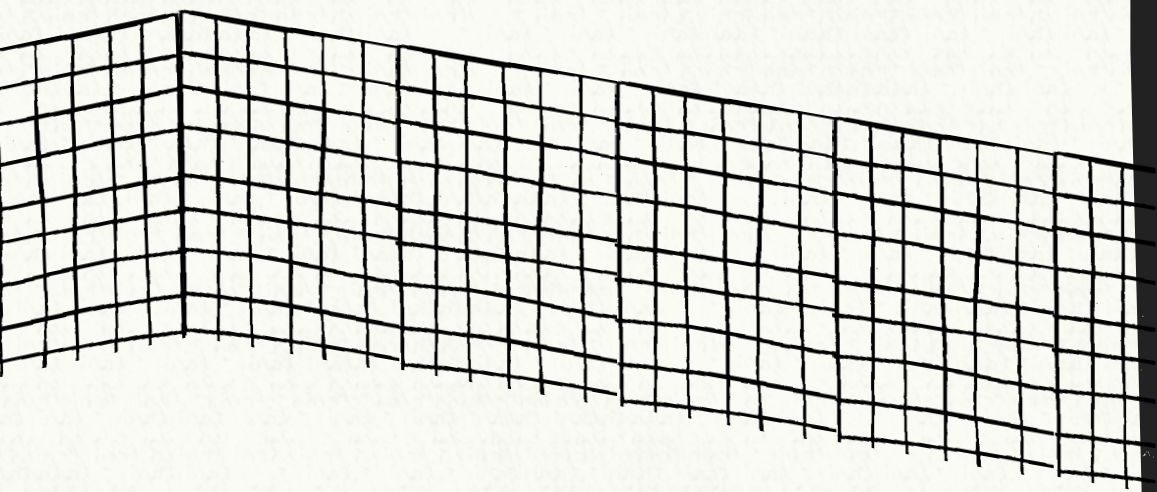
I've said 'used' where others might say 'wasted' purely because I can look at, and in some cases touch, the results of these activities. I can see and breathe a more tolerable level of mould. I can scroll across an unhappy virtual empire. I can look at a cartoon. All these windows of time have had an outcome. They've brought some form of profit to me, a creation that would otherwise not exist, be it the opening part of an essay or a row of stacked coins.

Having thought about this more, I realise that I say 'used' instead of 'wasted' because I've developed an uncompromising attitude towards my productivity.

In reality, the cartoon took a few separate sessions to complete, but I didn't see any of those hours as being time 'used' until the piece was entirely finished. Until it was done, in my own head, I'd 'wasted' almost six hours.

On other creative projects, say, a podcast episode, I can spend a week's worth of hours recording and mixing, but it's only when I export that precious .WAV file for external review that I can say that all that time was well spent.

It's an odd way of looking at time and accomplishment that prioritises the object of a final result over the process of actually making it. The window between start and finish temporarily disappears, robbed of value, until a discernible outcome swings in to retroactively (re-)attach value and presence to the minutes and hours.



While this pushes me to finish things that may otherwise stutter, stop, and spiral out of mind, it also emits an auto-punitive state of mind. A state of mind that I've found to be capable of sanding time down to a smooth and singular slab.

Pulling all value from the hours of process just to pile it high on the point of completion is like saving a chocolate advent calendar until Christmas Eve and then eating all twenty-four chocolates at once. Maybe slightly melted and pressed into a blob. It's pretty nice in the moment, but you've actually defiled an advent calendar so far as to remove its point. What was meant to mark the joyous road to Christmas has been rendered a standard box of mediocre chocolates, which you've eaten all at once.

The reason I want to make my living and my life through a creative outlet is simple: my enjoyment of it. By this I mean my enjoyment of the doing, of the actual sitting (or standing) and acting on a compulsion. I enjoy shaping a captured impulse into something presentable and, ultimately, of mutual benefit to myself and whoever might see/hear/listen/touch/read it. I enjoy the daily chocolate ritual that marks and gives value to the passing time. That's why I buy advent calendars. That's why I involve myself in an often frustrating creative process.

And that's why this phenomenon of time being sanded and smoothened to the point of disappearance worries me. Time should be gritty. Time should have texture. I had to think back and really lean in close to see the examples I gave earlier, despite the fact that they've been legitimised by an outcome. Truth be told, those outcomes are actually part of a much longer and, hopefully, grander process. While the time used for them does hold value, it's been too easy to look past it towards some eventual and hazy super-outcome which threatens – even before it's been reached – to draw all the excitement and enjoyment into itself.

It's like
a fractal.

You could zoom out forever, pushing any new and exciting detail away until it becomes impossible to relocate as an indistinguishable part of something bigger. This means that my hazy distant outcome could come and go, sanded down into disappearance, like all the others before it, in aid of some even more distant target. And then the further justificatory target could come and go in a similar fashion. Repeat.

Desperate to come out of this period of reshaping, of difficulty, and of opportunity with more than I went in with, I've put a certain amount of strain on my relationship with the creative process. I've been overinvesting in the result as a sign of productivity, furiously working towards the endpoint in order to banish the 'wasting' of time, only to facilitate its disappearance.

Perhaps it's ironic then, after all this thought, internal struggle, and weird ideology crafting, that it only took three hours of watching *Married At First Sight: Australia* to convince me that desperation and outcome oriented tunnel vision were destructive forces best left untouched.

How to write an essay that dis

A TALE

about a bird by Maria Kruglyak

It was nothing more than an empty scroll, hanging on the wall of the monastery of Shokoku-ji, a Zen temple in Kyoto. Or was it at Toko-ji in Masuda? When it comes to legends, it's hard to be sure about anything. Hung up, it would seem that it'd be an object of importance. A piece of art, perhaps, but the old scroll has little in common with the object-as-art of our times. Except one thing actually. Just as with contemporary art, this fifteenth-century scroll needs some explaining to be seen for what it is and not just what it seems to be. A language, a story, a reasoning behind the empty scroll. Something to fill the emptiness.

As the monks would tell you, the scroll once held a painting of a bird, drawn in the exquisite ink and ink wash of Sesshu Toyo 雪舟 等楊 (1420-1506). Sesshu was both a Zen monk and a painter, and perhaps the most influential artist from the Muromachi period. Many say that his brushwork held within it the very essence of Zen Buddhism: the unrestrained lines speaking of a spiritual awakening (*satori*) at the moment of drawing. Sesshu's paintings were so much admired, that it was said no one could paint birds and animals looking so alive that they seemed to be about to begin to move of their own accord.

So what about our scroll, the empty one on the wall? It used to be a bird, they say, but as soon as Sesshu finished his last brushstroke, the bird took off from the surface of the scroll and flew away, disappearing into the sky. All left now is this empty space where there used to be a bird. An empty space filled with a bird that disappeared.

Isn't it curious, that in a tradition where paintings of birds and animals were meant to signify the creature rather than represent it as close to life as possible, the painting that represented had to disappear, leaving an empty space that signals to that which is no more? To give the scroll value – and magic – a legend was needed. A legend that turned a naturalistic painting of a bird into an empty scroll that signifies a painting of a naturalistic bird. Believing the legend, using the thoughts and words around the artwork, we see the scroll not as empty, but filled. Filled with magic, filled with that which no longer is, filled with that which has disappeared.

Pass

How there is an interest now
to pull the skin of my palm
back forward

loosen freedom

The word precious
slips out of my mouth

disintegrating fluid
a cloud and then another version
of you across the street

moral laxness
other association
outside brown retinas

I want to read a book
to you at night

political and poetics
intersecting
losing the idea of

“old” and “new”

maybe something we’ve both have felt in a core
to be afraid to lose.

by Diana Lizette Rodrigues

maybe something we’ve both have felt in a core to be afraid to lose.

JASPER



JASPER JONES is a creative working in the fields of photography, curation, art direction and film. Based in London, UK, he started his practice studying photographic art at the University of Westminster. Graduating with a first in 2015, he then went on to work at The Ravestijn Gallery in Amsterdam. His most recent role at Millennium Images included running and managing the highly regarded photography competition *Peaches and Cream*.

Throughout this period, Jones has exhibited and curated exhibitions as well as taking his shows to UNSEEN photo festival. In November 2018 he held first self lead solo exhibition / book launch, displaying his latest work 'Scroll' and a series of abstracted vinyl prints. His practice now surrounds the meeting between fabric and photography, working with vinyl being at the core of his work. Jones also runs and curates an annual exhibition, *Hot Sheet*, where he showcases a selection of emerging artists whose work surrounds the photographic.

JONES

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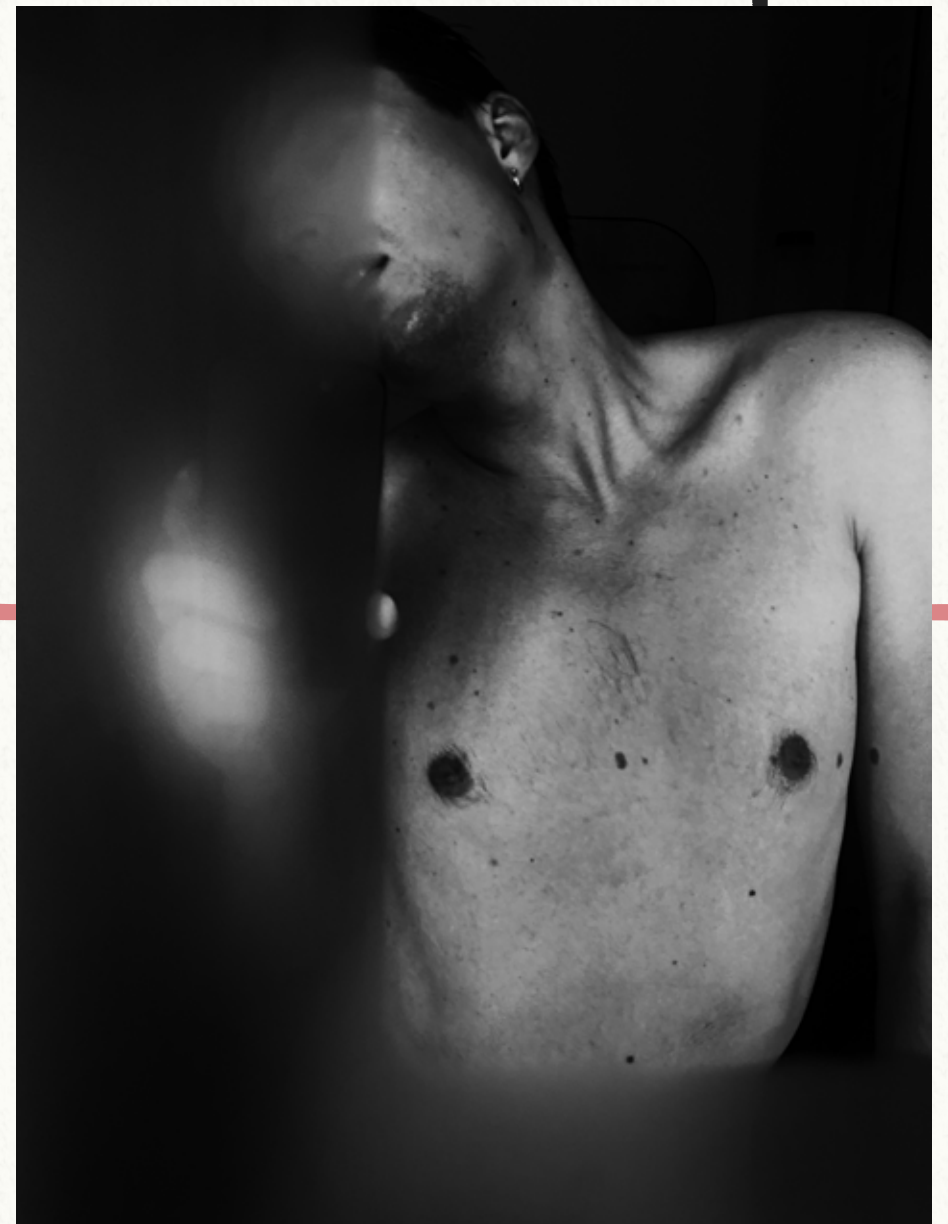
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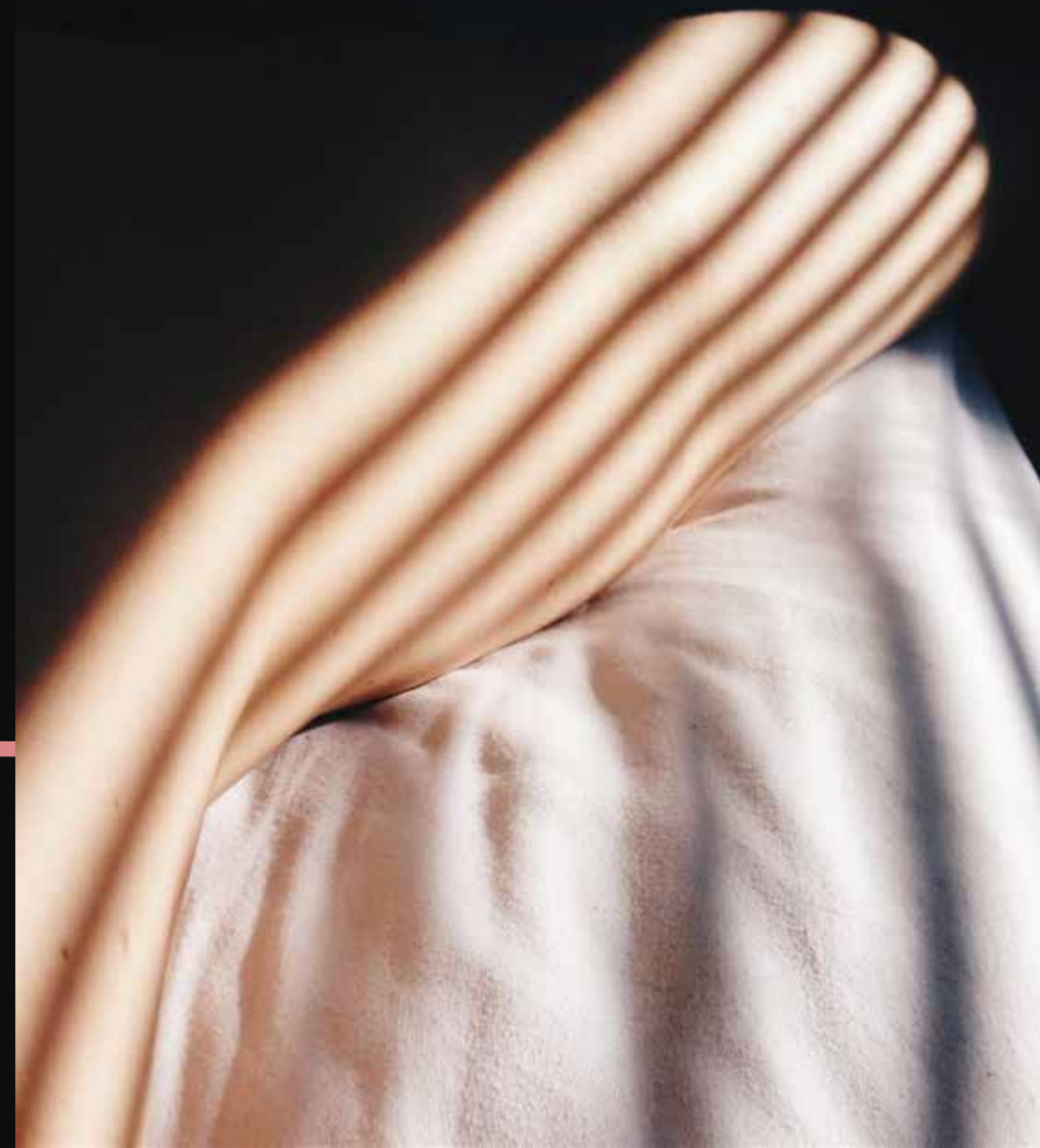
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It finally, reaches its end. Somewhere, around here.

By Name TBA.









Courtesy of the artist.
© Jasper Jones

The photographs on these
previous pages...

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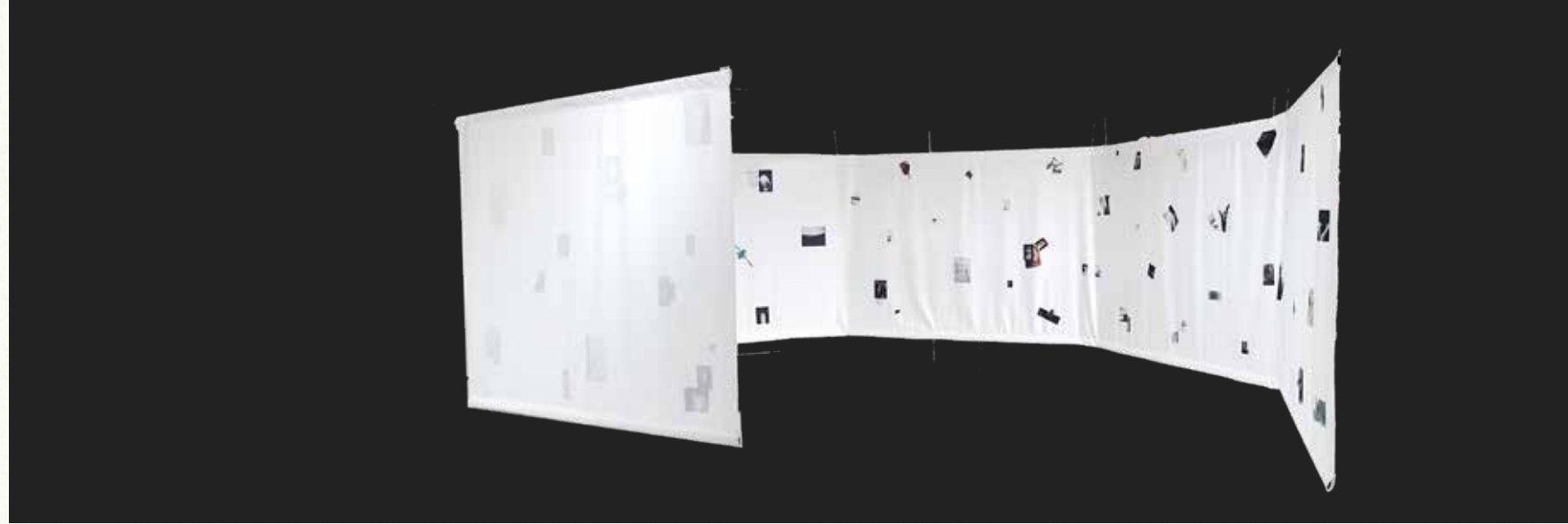
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Psychodrama of a fragmented self

by Angeliki Vidou

A psychoanalytical reading
of Jasper Jones' *Scroll*



In a world that seems to be disappearing into the unknown, in a world that's struck by one traumatic experience after the other, art attempts to preserve what we seem to be losing. Images and artistic experiences have always emerged what's hidden, disguised. In times of chaos, art peaks. One's dismembered image of the self creating the need to return to the body. Regardless if returning to the body means misery or safety, what is yours is familiar. You might loathe, adore, admire or belittle it but it all comes down to this: what you're feeling towards yourself is all you've known.

This alienation from the self creates a fertile ground for the intersubjectivity of the Ego. We can observe this phenomenon according to Freud's psychoanalytic brain model. According to Freud, the *Id* (our primary source of drives and instincts) seeks pleasure, the *Superego* (a reflection of ethics and social norms) seeks perfection and the Ego tries to express itself while satisfying both the *Id* and the *Superego*. The Ego is thereby in a constant process of trying to satisfy the *Id* according to the restrictions enforced by objective reality, social norms and the *Superego*'s demands.

The duality of the Ego as a mediator tries to keep the balance between the *Id* and the *Superego*. A mature defense mechanism used to express the *Id*'s drives, transforming anxiety into a higher cultural aim isolated from a direct expression of the impulse itself, is *sublimation*. Through *sublimation*, the Ego instead of repressing the unwanted, socially unacceptable instinct, channels it – setting it

free through a new, useful source. This is a complicated defense mechanism where the initial object of satisfaction is substituted for a greater social cause, which is even more alienated from the drive itself. The Ego doesn't only repress the instinct or drive, it can also reshape it into something useful and potentially more constructive.

Coincidentally, it's the Ego's work which reaches the surface in art. The artist expresses buried and suppressed emotions, however the authentic drives, stemming from the *Id*, never fully reach the surface. The Ego censors, it sculpts anything that might disrupt the sense of self. At times, the Ego beautifies, and occasionally it uses symbolism but it all comes down to a conflicted situation: a desire that is expressed by both pleasure and pain. Art itself disappears behind the Ego. It transcends as far as the Ego allows, without collapsing.

Jasper Jones, a talented artist based in London, portrays this theme of disappearance of the self in his inspiring project *Scroll*. His work consists (among other beautiful pieces) of self portraits, with a distorted face, covered or hidden behind a shadow or intense light. His photographic work is simultaneously literal and allegorical. His choice of photography as a means of expression is interesting, too, photography being a medium that at the same time disappears and remains for eternity. The moment you capture in a photograph is gone at the blink of an eye, but the photo itself preserves this very moment rendering it eternal, changing the parameters of reality. The variety of self portraits

Jasper uses in *Scroll* allow him to maintain control. He displays what he chooses, he hides what is fragile. The multiple images of dismembered body parts and isolated arms reaching out, establish a sense of the fractured body. The fragmented body. A body attempting to return to the initial feeling of the real, unified self.

Scroll and the perception of reality it creates, directly brings to mind Jacques Lacan's work. Lacan is a psychoanalyst who continued Freud's work, giving it new dimensions. In relation to the *mirror* stage as established by Lacan, Jasper's work of self portraits could be interpreted as the illusion of an identity constructed for the real to reside behind. According to Lacan's theory, the first time an infant sees themselves in the mirror is the moment when the child develops an image of self. Before this incident, the child exists as a unified subject. They do not separate themselves from the 'whole', the outer reality. When the infant understands themselves as having an identity, that significant moment is when the Id and Ego are split. The Ego separates itself from the authentic, the whole, and forms a new idea of the self. This new idea of self is initially expressed through language (according to Lacan) but isn't art a form of expression too? Would it be too bold to say that the Ego expresses itself through the artist attempting to help the individual make sense of themselves and protect them from the untamed Id? In theory, art is allowed to disobey social order and constructs but the individual themselves isn't. Art strives for acceptance. Even more so do artists, who portray a narcissistic need to demonstrate their personality traits through their work.

Scroll reveals an almost ethereal beauty that allows Jasper – as an artist and as a representation of the viewer – to disappear behind a ray of light or a shadow. Many of the photographs featured on *Scroll*, are portraits where Jasper hides his face. He hides behind fruit, his shirt or extreme brightness. Perhaps by hiding his face, he thereby hides the self or the Ego. It is a visual language through which the artist himself fades into an illusion. He draws the distance he needs from other individuals which, somehow, makes both the artist and his audience feel safe. Safe to express themselves and safe

to disappear. By controlling what he unveils and disguises, Jasper creates a balance between what his audience seeks to experience through his art and what parts of himself he feels comfortable enough to expose as an artist.

We can also see Jasper's *Scroll* through the lens of Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny'. The experience of the uncanny is to perceive something as mysterious but strangely familiar. It may describe incidents where something familiar is enigmatically confronted as frightening or distressing. That's where Jasper's work collides with the theme. He uses multiple self portraits to create this feeling of the uncanny for both himself and the audience. He exposes himself in his work, inviting the subject – the viewer – to do the same thing. Nothing seems more horrifying than being confronted with yourself. So do we actually feel comfortable to confront ourselves when seeing Jasper's work?

Freud describes the idea of 'being robbed of one's eyes', as the more striking instance of uncanniness. Jasper has produced a map that walks us through his images that make up *Scroll*, offering a path through this visual journey. One specific photograph paints a very beautiful picture of uncanniness. 'Cover her face as you hide in her memories'. It's a black and white photograph of a woman gracefully hidden behind her blonde hair. Her face is covered, someone wishes to hide in her memories. Jasper creates this feeling of the uncanny by hiding her face. The subject's face is open to interpretation. It could be anyone, anyone who someone might desire to remain forever in their memories. Jasper simultaneously manages to construct the *heimlich* ('the canny') and the *unheimlich* ('the uncanny'). For Freud, to call something 'uncanny' (in German, 'unheimlich') is to describe a relationship where one is both familiar and unfamiliar with an object. The woman in the picture is at once someone no one and everybody knows.

Another interesting piece is a black and white image of an individual disguised behind a shadow. The subject in the photograph resembles a shadow itself. By being in the shadows, one is given the freedom of self-revelation. When no one sees you, when you're merely a double, this feeling of



detachment from the self, allows you to return to the authentic self. *Unheimlich*, the uncanny, becomes a kind of unwilling, mistaken self-exposure. It provides a surprising and unexpected self-revelation. The uncanny exposes a buried self-revelation, which may frighten us by coming to light.

Naturally, when it comes to the uncanny, the Ego expresses itself through transforming anxiety. *Sublimation* makes these anxieties disappear into something different. Altered. It could be the use of a shadow, a distortion or simply creating a safe environment of expression through this alienation. We may find ourselves disappearing behind art that comforts and eases this pain and anxiety that confronts us. In the 21st century, screens and social media establish the ideal environment to disappear behind. The Internet has formed an almost natural desertion of the physical world. Everyone exposes isolated parts of themselves, of their lives. Jasper's work combats this norm by showing a fragmented body, a distorted face, isolated arms, an altered reality. He purposefully presents a disintegrated body, a concealing part of the self, much like the social media naturally display.

Through this fascinating exhibition, Jasper manages to allure the eye and the human psyche. He emerges as an artist who expresses himself in his own terms, while respectively reaching into the depth of human experiences and identities. His photographs create a divine aesthetic which allows every individual to feel familiar yet detached from the pieces. He constructs an ideal feeling of the uncanny.

Turning Tables, Turning Identity, Shifting EDM

by Matthias London

*Thoughts on artistic self in
the shifting EDM economy.*

You're in my dream now. Where beat dictates my personal rhythm and production is my daily loaf. Where the solitude of night becomes my funnel of creativity. Where I venture into the depths of myself and translate them into sound. Where I disappear for weeks into my studio and find shelter in my music. Where I heal myself instead of selling myself. Laren pouches her journal, turns, and trips over her packed luggage in the studio apartment of Paris' outskirts she can no longer afford. Beaten, she continues making her way to the door for her ultimate nightly trip to the Seine.

With her hood hanging deep in her face, Laren dwells in her memories. As an established DJ in Istanbul, she was tired of corporate club owners dictating the music she was supposed to play. She was tired of the patriarchal structures interwoven into DJing. She was tired of authoritarian police presence in Istanbul's nightlife culture. Scenes are embedded into the socio-political context of the nation-state in which they are located, after all. Then, as an aspiring producer of soaring BPM techno music, she gazed toward the *banlieues* of Paris, where she knew a node of industrial, high-energetic techno was breeding. And France seemed more promising than Turkey, more likely to embrace her extraordinary music (read: extension of her personalities); or at least not to oppress it to the same extent. So: *Channel the demons inside of you. Press them into beats.*



Liberate yourself in the creative process. Let the music speak for you. Prepare for the reincarnation. Well, the reality in Paris looked somewhat different than what Laren had pictured. Although her tracks were well-received in the scene and featured on streaming channels of multiple labels, revenue flows from her production were virtually non-existent. Using music production as an artistic tool to make sense of herself did not seem to provide her with the financial basis for making a living. How is this possible when everyone seems to be listening to more music now than ever before, and the EDM market is steadily growing?

Like a plethora of independent electronic dance music (EDM) producers, Laren is troubled by the various dilemmas associated with the 'platformisation' of the music industry. As if it wasn't enough to keep pace with the abnormal velocity in which our global society speeds past us. Finer, faster, further, fresher, more efficient, less wasteful: Everything is expected to be at our fingertips within an eye blink, including our music. These societal dynamics and its recent technological innovations undoubtedly also impacted the logic of the entire music industry. Since the ascent of streaming platforms, economic capital is concentrated in the hands of a few tech giants, such as Spotify or Apple Music. As an additional intermediary between musician and audience, these platforms maintain a dual disappearance of artistic ownership: first of all, one-size-fits-all subscription models are now depriving producers of revenues from vinyl, CD, or download. Second, they heighten the age-old imperialist practice of Western artists taking material from people of colour as an 'inspiration' with no remuneration or in some cases no credit to the materials' originators.

Before streaming, the EDM field was driven by somewhat 'friendly' competition, where labels and artists cooperated and collaborated, if only sometimes. In contrast to conventional musicians, DJs like Laren do not exclusively play their own music on live gigs. So: DJs can be producers and vice versa, but you can also play at an event without having ever produced a song. Before, when witnessing a moving melody at a performance, audiences would storm the next record store for the purchase the day after a live show. Say, even if Laren did not play her own music at gigs, some other DJ eventually would do, and the gig audience would then buy her music. The dialectic relationship between producing and touring made the EDM field of cultural production more economically self-sufficient while moving the sharing of state-of-the-art electronic music into focus.

The advent of streaming services disrupted this cycle by monopolizing revenues, increasing competition, and therefore pushing the industry toward a gig-economy. Algorithm-driven playlisting of streaming services remains quite a conundrum to the public. Actually, the only tangible certainty is that they disproportionately disadvantage those who create the electronic music we so love and desire: producers. You might say that Spotify playlists like 'Discover Weekly' expose audiences to a wider spectrum of artists. You might also argue that they facilitate the transformation from previously friendly competition into unhealthy competition. See, uploading music to Spotify and other streaming

platforms is relatively affordable for producers (resulting in more suppliers), compensation per stream is low (resulting in less revenue). Meanwhile, playlists significantly boost streams but the playlisting selection process is something of a black box. That means: more competitors quarreling over less money while personal bonds that used to characterise the EDM field are fading.

This disappearance of artistic ownership logically precedes the disappearance of artist identity. Due to the technological infrastructures that provide information to everyone at lightspeed, artists from every discipline have been experiencing a shift in their everyday conduct. In the EDM milieu, streaming platforms force independent EDM producers to engage in more non-creative labour, such as the employment of marketing mix strategies, branding, or public relations. Labels used to take on the task of manufacturing, distributing, and marketing records for artists that were signed by them. Regardless of the power dynamics at play between artists and labels, most of the non-creative tasks were outsourced to the labels. See, now Laren and others must focus on social media management, merchandising and promotion, applying for grant money, or working under precarious conditions in the service industry to stay afloat – instead of developing their creative abilities. This transformation of labour undoubtedly affects their livelihood in requiring them to somewhat self-conceptualise as cultural entrepreneurs, whether they like it or not. The consequence: Laren's self-identification as an artist disintegrates, as the possibilities to translate cultural capital into economic resources fade.

If we take this thought even further, it becomes clear that EDM producers are globally interconnected through a shared lifeworld that sprouts from similar experiences of artistic alienation. Postmodern identity is forged reflexively amid an increasingly complex interplay of local and global influences viz-à-viz structural factors of class, ethnicity, race, and gender. Nevertheless, the developments in the EDM field can, to some extent, be generalised. Since the universal model of Spotify and Co. spans over the entire globe, it is secondary whether Laren originated from Turkey, Thailand, Mexico, Nigeria, Georgia, or Germany. Reduced revenues and increased competition push artists toward non-creative tasks everywhere. Consequently, Laren is not isolated in the alienation from her artistic self but globally connected to other artists who share her struggle of identity loss.

In such a globalised capitalist system, we can no longer distinguish between the production of a market commodity and the practice of an art, although for many producers the profit motive conflicts with their artistic aims. Laren can find jungle tunes at the Caribbean coast of Colombia and hear psytrance whiplashing through the silence of the Himalayas. She follows gabber sounds to an abandoned train station of the Siberian railway, and house tunes provide refuge in a decrepit house of God overlooking Johannesburg. Warehouses remain the prime venue for queer techno raves in London, while Australia's Byron Bay keeps spawning hippies bouncing to Goa. Regardless of Laren's origin, size, shape, or colour, if she wiggles her path to any such underground event mushrooming in any of the corners of the earth, she is slurped into their

participatory nature. When you are part of a scene, you understand that the scene is the value, not the economy. And it is precisely this value that nourishes electronic music: a celebration of music that resonates beyond language, beyond borders, heals us, and connects us through rhythm and beat – that's the aim of Laren's electronic music.

Yes, the gig-economy has been rendered gig-less due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and left a myriad of destinies depending on live shows in the EDM industry in ruins. However, the pandemic also forced upon us the necessary stillness to reflect on our foundations, which accelerated the process of unearthing what we have in common and the cosmic potentials for egalitarian change concealed in them.

If we want to do justice to the requirements of the looming cultural renaissance, we need to shift our self-identification as hollow isolated individuals toward understanding ourselves as part of a colourful and interdependent whole. For the EDM scene, this means emphasizing collective identity as a global community that is connected in the most unexpected of ways – let it be a dream, or a normative value system, or a shared experience. Only then can centralised power hierarchies be resisted and a truly democratic environment be achieved. Only then can Laren engulf herself in creative labour, secure fair remuneration for her music production, and reclaim her lost artistic identity.

Laren is hurled out of her thoughts and sucked back into her material self that leans against a weeping willow by the Seine. She digs for her pen in the fanny pack to give her journal entry its finish, rips out the page, and buries it under the majestic tree. It's a new moon, and she seeks to plant it as an intention.

The final words read
selflessness, safety, & strength.

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Desert of the Hyperreal: Gulf Futurism's Prophetic Image

by Sarah Scott

Writing *The Futurist Manifesto* in 1909, the Italian poet, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti declared, “the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire.” He eschews history, determining to deliver Italy from “its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries.” In 2012, the artist and writer Sophia Al Maria and artist, composer Fatima Al Quadiri were featured in an article for *Dazed Magazine*, in which they coined the phrase ‘Gulf Futurism’ to describe the tendency of Arab states of the Persian Gulf towards a high-tech sci-fi landscape and the futurist tropes of a rejection of the past and a celebration of speed, violence, machinery, youth and industry.

It is easy to imagine that Marinetti would enjoy a tour of modern Dubai, a place famous for newness, a seeming dismissal of the antiquities in favour of cathedral-like malls and skyscrapers. It is a city that delights in confounding nature, shipping in sand to manifest islands and archipelagos and summoning a ski resort in the middle of the desert. Al Maria argues that Gulf Futurism is evident in ‘a dominant class concerned with master-planning and world-building, whilst the youth culture is preoccupied with fast cars, fast tech and viddying a bit of ultra-violence.’ According to this description it seems to embody Marinetti’s ideal.

However, when one compares the original futurism which allied itself with Fascism and was burnt out in the brutal reality of violence in the First World War, the darker side of Gulf Futurism is suggested, an accelerationist society built by migrant labour from oil-wealth, the substance that has contributed the most to global climate crisis. The region has undergone what might be experienced as a ‘quantum leap’ due to the development that has occurred in cities since the discovery of oil in the 1960s. Al Maria, who grew up travelling between Seattle and UAE explains that her grandmother grew up living a Bedouin lifestyle that had little evolved for centuries, “one of the most ancient ways of living came head-on against extreme wealth and capitalism – glass and steel against wool and camels.” This imagery of an aggressive clash in which hard metals come against soft wool and animal matter reflects the potential for disappearance of a past way of being in a rush of uncompromising futurist drive.

The sense of dislocation from the context of the past due to rapid development is explored in Kuwait-born artist, Monira Al Qadiri’s work *Diver* (2018), an artwork that seeks to bridge the disconnect between pre- and post-oil worlds in the Arabian Gulf. The piece connects the historical industry of pearl fishing that dominated the coastal Gulf for hundreds of years to the massive transformation that took place after the discovery of oil in the region. The artist’s Grandfather was employed as a singer on pearl-diving boats, but

she describes her alienation from that history, 'I felt that that whole world had disappeared to the point that it became somehow fictional. I couldn't see a cultural connection between me and my Grandfather at all. The way pearl diving is marketed and advertised to the local populace as heritage and history is deformed and sanitized, is like a Disney movie of sorts.' The mention of Disney suggests a fiction that has no relation to the original reality of the poverty and hardship involved in pearl diving. In *Diver*, Al Qadari links pearl and oil through colour and form, focusing on the fact that they share the same iridescent/dichroic colour spectrum.



Still from *Diver*, by Monira Al Qadari, 2018.
Courtesy of the artist.

In the video, synchronised swimmers wearing dichroic body suits that match the sheen of both pearls and oil move to a dance choreographed to rare archival footage of a traditional pearl-diving song. Al Qadari describes how the rough and guttural song is seldom performed as such today, the 'scream-like' noise replaced with a sanitised version suitable for tourists. By re-integrating the original song into the highly performative dance, she attempts to reconcile the pre- and post-oils worlds. She equates the use of the dancers' bodies as ornamentation with the way in which these histories have been presented as pretty embellishments in contemporary Gulf society despite their gruelling reality. However, the exhausting physical movement of the dancers replicates the intensity of the pearl-diving work as well as the strenuous effort required by the artist to move this history into a solid component of her regional identity. In their iridescent suits and goggles, with movements cutting through the black water, the dancers resemble aliens, alluding to the otherworldly futurism of the current Gulf landscape as well as the alien submarine landscape where both pearls and oil are found.

At the beginning of 2021, a raft of British influencers were dragged across the tabloids for breaking lockdown regulations, fleeing to

Dubai's infinity pools and roof terraces as the only place they can continue to deliver aspirational content™ during a pandemic. Writing in 2007, Shumon Basar spoke of the way the city is viewed as a 'fake' Disneyland playground by Westerners, a futuristic theme-park for the vapid, cultureless and rich. This is especially interesting in relation to Jean Baudrillard's discussion of Disneyland almost 30 years prior as an exemplar of 'hyperreality.' He writes that "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance... it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real." In other words, it is no longer possible to distinguish the real from fiction, and the fiction has replaced reality and taken on a meaning of its own. In the showdown of Instagram versus reality the ever more subtle and imperceptible changes of filters, deep-fakes and body-mods have made this binary more slippery and hard to define. In the twilight zone of an ongoing pandemic the futuristic Gulf (a place where cities exist like mirages, at odds with their desert location) initially seems a fitting location for those who trade in such terms.

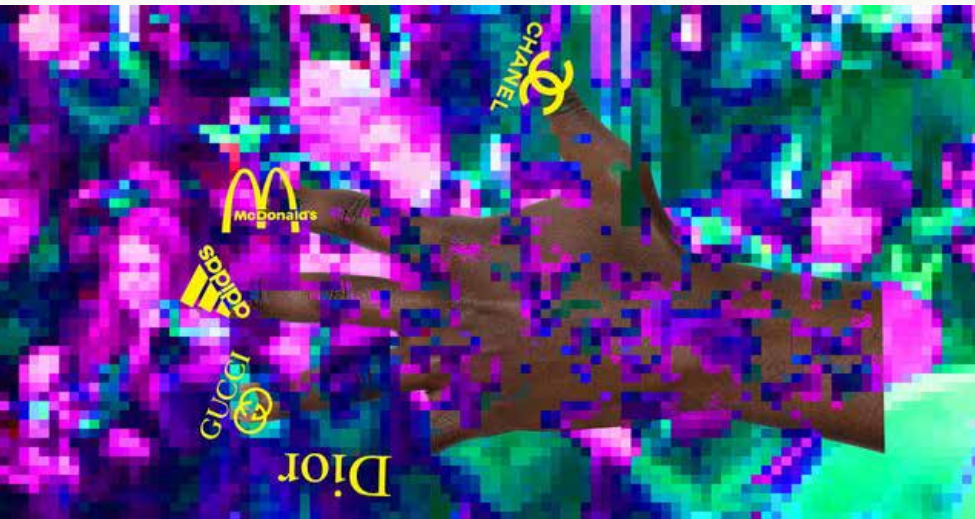
However, subsequent critiques of Baudrillard's incendiary assertions of hyperreality, such as "The Gulf War did not take place", have stated that, for example, while the experience of that war for those in America was a televised simulation, it did happen in a real, tangible and devastating way 'over there.' Similarly, Basar counters assertions of Dubai's fakeness, arguing that 'copies and imitations are not abstract ciphers but productions of reality in their own right. A fake Gucci handbag is still a real handbag. And with each imitation and recreation, the status of the so-called "original" alters.' Whether the proliferation of imitations increases or decreases the status of the original is left up to interpretation. Perhaps, as with Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, the fake takes on a life and value of its own, independent of the original signified.

Still from *Black Friday*, by Sophia Al Maria, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.



Speaking about the video in an interview Al Maria mentions the 'Gruen transfer.' The concept, named after Austrian architect Victor Gruen, is used in shopping mall design to refer to the moment when a consumer enters a mall or store and, surrounded by an intentionally confusing layout, loses track of their original intentions and is more vulnerable to suggestion and impulse buys. This clammy sense of dizziness caused by controlled temperatures, simultaneously cold and uncomfortably warm in fitting rooms, and vast glittering interiors results in a dissociation from the self, which is effectively induced by the overstimulating visuals and sound of *Black Friday*.

The film reaches **a crescendo as the woman collapses on the ground**, tiny in the context of the vast marble-clad lobby. The nausea caused by confusion in these spaces and the dissociation brought on by the assault of advertisements and images are shown as unbearable and destructive. As with the fake Gucci handbag, the artificial environment of the mall has a tangible existence, but is separate from its surrounding context (or the original in the handbag's case), existing as a floating hyperreality in which our original or known ideas of self and identity cannot survive. This reflects Al Qadari's experience, the disjuncture from her personal context and history leaving her untethered and isolated. In the Mall environment we are faced with a choice to perish, like the woman in Al Maria's film, or buy our way out. Bartering for an idea of self through items that promise to make us whole again.



Detail from *The Litany*, by Sofia Al Maria, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.

At the foot of the screen lies the accompanying work, *The Litany* (2016), which comprises of small devices, partially buried in sand, displaying glitchy pixelated loops of image and text. The litter of discarded, outmoded technologies in a pile of dust and sand beneath the shimmering mirage of the mall video represents the cost of the accelerationism of technology.

The rapid cycle of highly desirable new tech into non-biodegradable perma-pollutant, as well as alluding to the rapid rise of Gulf cities, sand transformed into glass under pressure and extreme heat.

As Monica Al Qadari commented on Gulf Futurism's prophetic warning, "Kuwait already has a highly toxic air pollution due to the burning of petroleum, so in a way already feels like the state of the world after huge ecological disaster." If this is the darker projection into the future presented by Gulf Futurism, the ecological wasteland resulting from oil extraction and its subsequent use, then expiry of the protagonist of *Black Friday* proposes its end-game, extinction.

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An expanded space of disappearance: Where the disappeared appears

by Maria Kruglyak

*Looking at the speed of urban change
and contemporary art.*

In Japanese 15th century art, *showing* that something isn't there is a way to show that it's important – say Mt Fuji or the Emperor would always be disguised by mist. In contemporary art and culture, the absence or disappearance of things is more complex. It takes on a range of meanings and forms.

Since the 1980s/1990s, theorists of postmodernity, cosmopolitanism and globalism have found disappearance everywhere. Cosmopolitanism became a *thing*, everyone was writing about it, working with it. Defined as a unity or combination of cultures, it was a concept used as the contrast to nationalism, patriotism and rural life: the uprootedness of city life and migration, the embodiment of globalism. A cosmopolitan is at once at home everywhere and nowhere. Invisible and visible at the same time, the cosmopolitan is a shapeshifter just as the buildings, cars and data that fly by and change form before their eyes.

Disappearance found its place in discourse in connection to the cosmopolitan, mostly in close dialogue with identity, roots and grounding. Then came the scholar who made disappearance into a state of culture, a cultural phenomena so to say, Ackbar Abbas.

Abbas saw disappearance in the culture of post-1997 Hong Kong, when China and the UK had shaken hands over the future of this cosmopolitan city of all cities. Apart from being a defining event in world history, something unusual happened here that made Abbas say that disappearance is a state of HK culture. Something unprecedented. The thing is, this agreement came with a 'timer': 'one country, two systems' for 50 years, and then Hong Kong officially becomes Chinese.

Today, that timer seems to have gone off prematurely, as mass arrests and persecution haunt the city with horror story after horror story. But even in the late 1990s, the 50-year-timeline aspect of the agreement created anger and confusion. In culture and art, it took the form of a fast-paced frenzy eroding traditional, modern and contemporary culture all in one go. What happens to a place that has to

change fast enough to stay as a financial and cultural centre for x number of years? What happens when a city needs to reach its sky limit in a set period of time? What would you act like if you were given a space to rearrange and create in as you wish but only for two years before it's brutally taken away from you and remodelled after someone else's ideas? Would you scramble to make the most of it, abandoning one half-finished project for the new shiny idea, again and again?

Imagine, it's a city. A city placed in this precarious position after a complex history of colonialism, capitalism and revolt. A city having their status quo on an official timer, a *status quo about to disappear*. The 'about to' is the clue, the password, to understanding disappearance, and this is where Abbas comes in. Abbas saw Hong Kong as being in a continuous state of disappearance where change itself is accelerated, sped up until everything becomes almost invisible. In the way that a motorcycle speeding on the road in front of your eyes seems to be blurred, disappearing in your vision. This rushing around characteristic of any city increased by the common knowledge of a 50-year-timer has a curious effect. It creates mirages, ghosts, and a fertile ground for artistic explorations of time and change.

Naturally, it also fosters art that speaks of these very mirages and erosions of the present and this lack: lack of stability, lack of knowing, lack of a set future, lack of a foundation, lack of a continuation.

It sounds quite familiar, don't you think? Everyone scrambling for the next kick, every street having a new shop opening up and an old one closing down, a new development here and some refurbishment works there... Things changing, shifting, faster as faster as we consume information at an ever-increasing speed. From the late 1990s and into 2021, each year has brought about faster and faster changes, accelerating into the state of... disappearance.

It seems to be a logical end point of human nature and of cities – especially megacities. As we move into the 2020s, this state of a continuous disappearance and uncertainty for the future seems to have travelled across the globe to various places and taking various forms.

I started following this idea by taking Abbas' framework of disappearance to the arts elsewhere, because it just seemed so *familiar* to me: isn't the skyline of New York in a constant state of disappearance, while New Yorkers are forced to move further and further away from the city centre? Isn't

the financial centre of São Paulo experiencing the same as the gap between the city and its inhabitants grows wider and wider? The pandemic may have temporarily frozen this phenomena, but if I'm right, then this freeze would be of an overexposed image, half-*there*, half-*not*. Is that not just a snapshot of London, I thought, half-invisible, almost nonexistent and definitely surreal, frozen amidst changes?

Turns out, this wasn't quite the case. I gathered data, searched biennales, exhibitions, private collections and digital works, looking for the disappeared...and found something else: the disappeared being framed, outlined, appearing.

state of disappearance is very much real and felt elsewhere too, in Johannesburg, in São Paulo, in Santiago de Chile and in Bangkok, to varying degrees and with varying effects. However, its reflection in art shows not so much, I'd argue, a sense of being unable to connect with that which was (as, for example, HK films portraying a ghost of a lover from a past that cannot be returned and has nowhere to come back to – I'm talking about *Rouge*, 1988, dir. Stanley Kwan) but a making appear that which has disappeared. That which has been made invisible by history, by society, by inequality.



From the series *Until You Change* by Paola Paredes, 2017.
Courtesy of the artist.

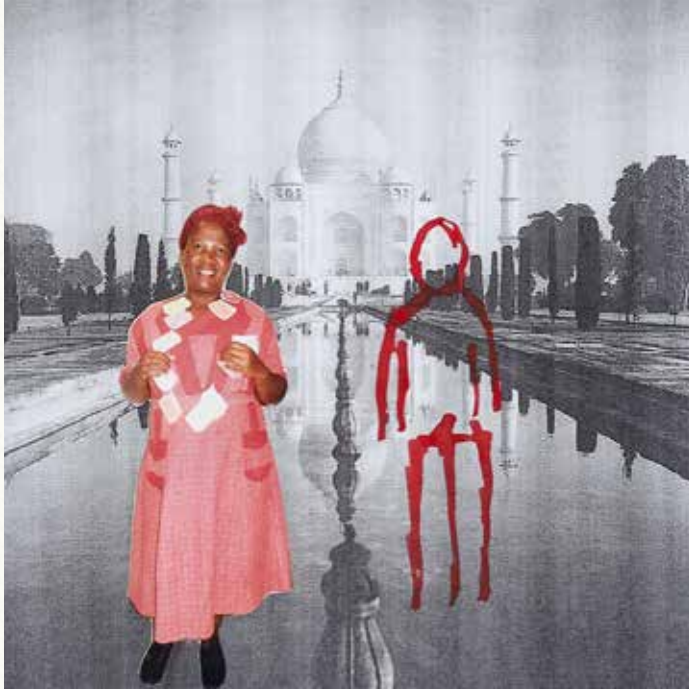
Let's take a step back here. Abbas *found* the disappearance, *felt* the disappearance, of Hong Kong and saw it reflected, duplicated through various schisms: in the architecture, urban development, films and art of HK culture. Since then, he's taken his – revolutionary – theory into the paradigm of other arts and (sometimes) exported a variant of it such as at a talk at Moscow biennale. I've heard others say about Hong Kong that it has this quality of not quite being present, so there's no doubt he struck gold here. This

A ghost from a past that comes back is also a way to make disappearance appear, but it's an appearance that is intangible, unreal. What we see now instead goes one step further: forgotten or hidden histories and realities that have been lost in time appearing as something real and tangible that artists can shine a light on. It's Paola Paredes' (Ecuador) *Until You Change* – a 2017 photo series that sheds light on hidden and censored correctional facilities for LGBTQ+ Ecuadorians. These are places where no cameras are allowed.

So the artist instead replicates scenarios from first-hand accounts of them, portraying the victim by playing them herself. Paredes makes the otherwise anonymous victims reappear in full view and with all rights to their life. Instead of disappearing, which these facilities make people do, the art brings them back into appearance.

Turning to the two young photographers featured in this issue, we have Jasper Jones (UK) framing the invisible, covered face of the artist himself and Anna Cherednikova (Sweden/Russia) whose photographs shed a light on the unseen, unwanted, 'wanted to disappear' weeds.

From *Waiting for Gebane* by Senzeni Marasela, 2017-19.
Courtesy of the artist.



Here we also find Senzeni Marasela's exhibition at Zeitz MOCAA, *Waiting for Gebane* (2017-2019; exhibited 2020-2021). This exhibition has a row of hangers of pink-red dresses that the artist wore over six years, re-enacting the lives of married women in South Africa. There's also another row of empty hangers showing the dresses that never got to be worn – dresses that in their framed absence are made to appear. Then, amongst it all, mixed media collages of photographs of women with outlines of other women drawn onto the photo in the deep red of womanhood: the only visibility of these other women are their red outline. Just as in HK cinema, these 'others' are ghosts, but they're not brought in by the artist to serve as a substitute for a distance to that which we cannot see, but to bring these others to life, to reality, to action. They don't go through walls as ghosts, their contours are clearly defined. They fill the space actively taking part in their new-found life of appearing.

In more conceptual works, we find a continuing booming trend of the 'found object' and the use of recycled materials: art created out of that which previously had been made to disappear into the vast waste of our global lives. That which is lost is, through art, made to take space. To take action. To become visible.

Yes, the world of megacities does inhabit a space of disappearance. Perhaps artists are responding to this state of disappearance, this acceleration, by slowing down the process. Perhaps artists are asking their audience to stop and reconsider. Artists begging us to visualise that which cannot be seen. Inviting us to partake in making appear that which has or is about to disappear.

If you think about it, it would seem that this is a natural progression from the 1990s: from discovering and reflecting on the disappearance, to taking action to make that which is not appear.



From *Waiting for Gebane* by Senzeni Marasela, 2017-19.
Courtesy of the artist.

Sometimes things

disappear

A VISUAL ESSAY
by Anna Cherednikova
& Daniel Matthews

Photography by Anna Cherednikova.
Courtesy of the artists & all rights reserved.
Words by Daniel Matthews.

That glove you left on the bus. Or a sock eaten by the machine. Most recently, it's Mr. Color, the unsuitably grey plastic figurine mascot of a Japanese hobby paint company. He's gone from his position on top of a speaker.

I want Mr. Color back, and searching high and low for him, I've come across various other 'things' that have disappeared. These are all 'things' that I never cared enough about to go looking for. There's intentional disappearances and entirely accidental ones, joined by virtue of the fact that I apparently don't want them enough to have retrieved them.

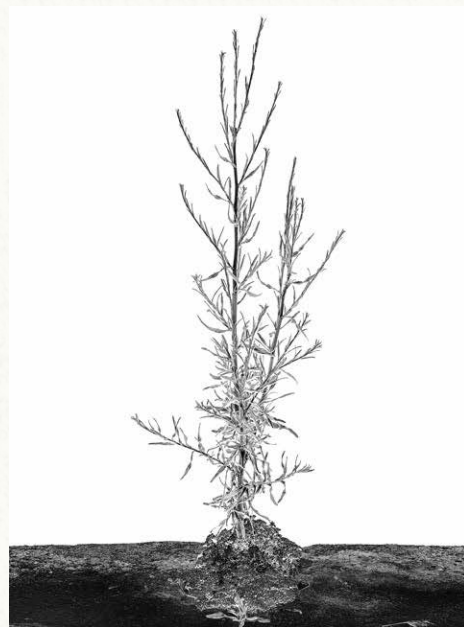
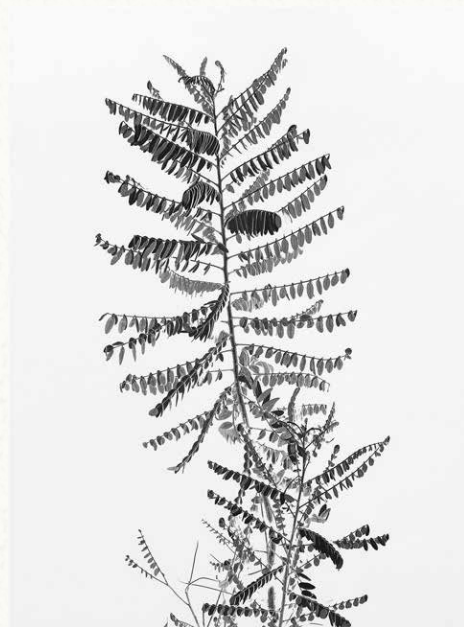
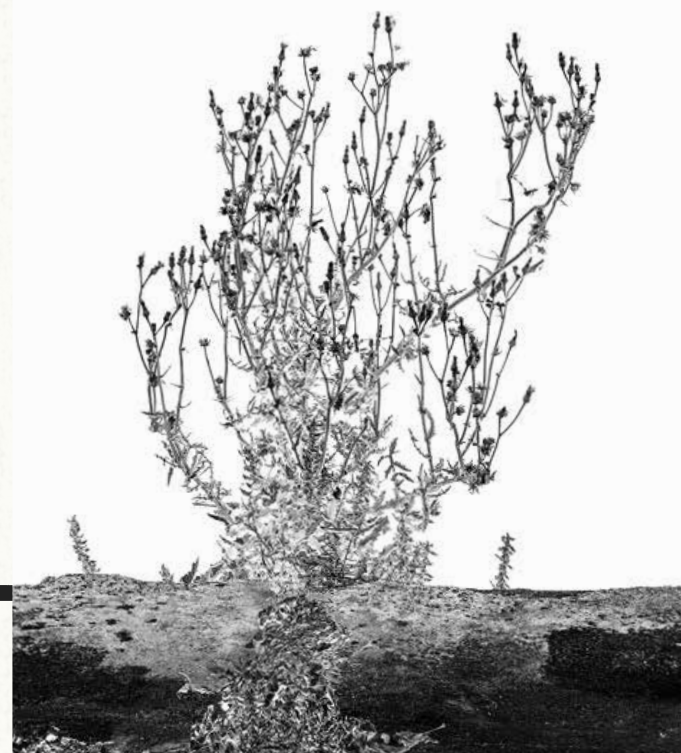
Anna Cherednikova's *Unwanted* photo series does the opposite, searching for and then retrieving those 'things'; the plants – or 'weeds' – that we banish from gardens and other controlled spaces. Looking over road and riverside scrublands and cracked walls, discarded zones in themselves, Cherednikova – who I was lucky enough to bump into on Zoom – highlights the fact that 'unwantedness' very rarely results in a complete disappearance.



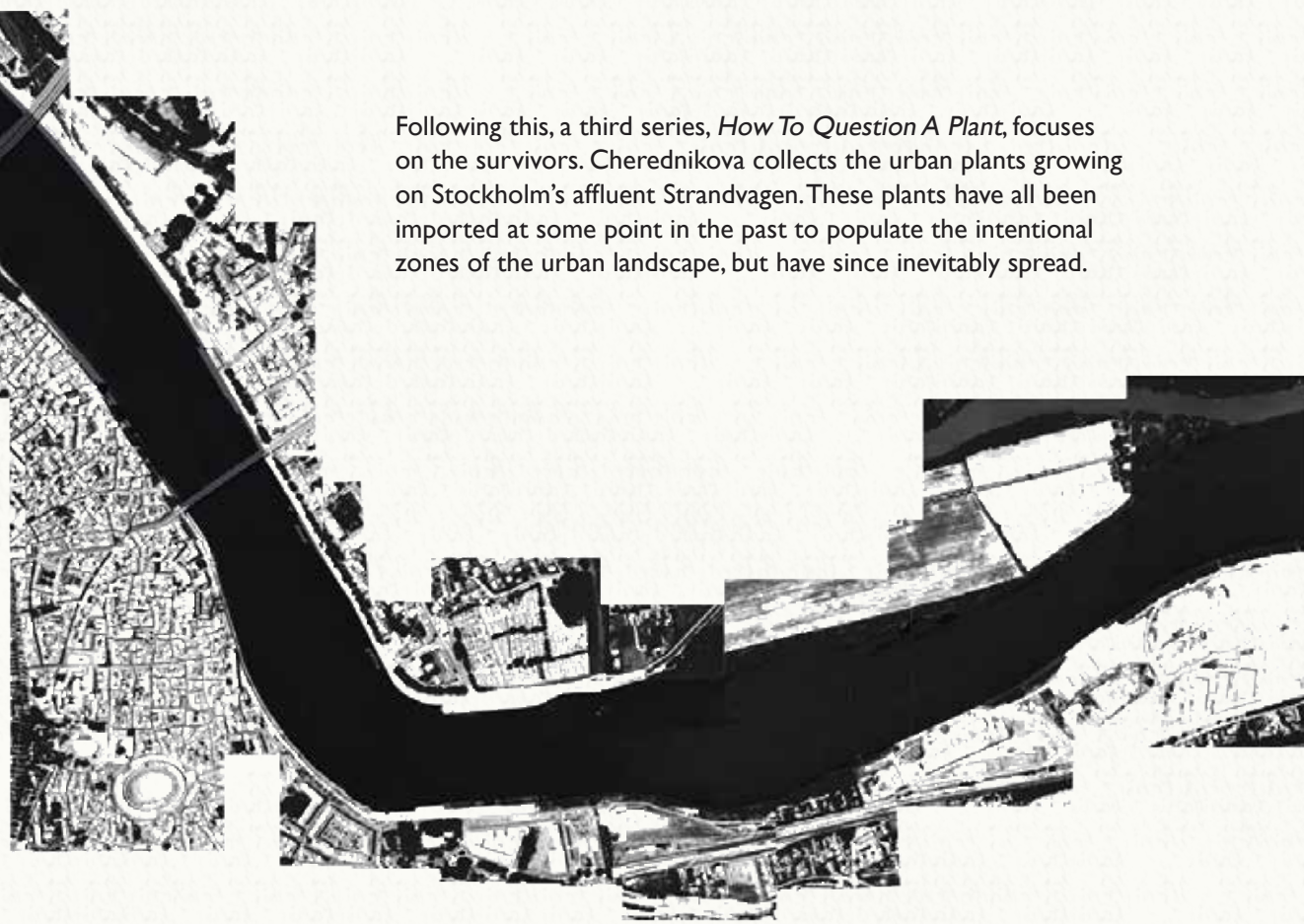
During our conversation, Cherednikova explained how these images are collected exclusively at night, along a one kilometre stretch of disused riverbank, when and where the plants would go unseen were it not for the camera's flash. Further, the dark background turns each plant into a unique and thereby valuable presence. Not only can they now be seen, but each individual 'weed' is *all* we can see.



Further exploring this theme, Cherednikova created *The Garden of Migrations* photo series. This turns the other way and looks at the state of 'wantedness' that has brought plants into the frame as objects of desire, rather than ejecting them. Through usefulness and trade, migration is enforced, and with this wave of new appearance there is also one of disappearance, as the less adaptable variants die off.



Following this, a third series, *How To Question A Plant*, focuses on the survivors. Cherednikova collects the urban plants growing on Stockholm's affluent Strandvagen. These plants have all been imported at some point in the past to populate the intentional zones of the urban landscape, but have since inevitably spread.



These are voluntary weeds, seeping out of their allotted space and moving from the intensely visible world of the intentional garden to the unseen margins of the pavement crack environment. Like their unwanted comrades, their disappearance is incomplete.

In compiling this series, the artist picked plants from the street and recorded their exact address, assigning each one a degree of permanence, before digitally scanning and printing them on plant fibre paper. As Cherednikova sees it, even after the individual plants have dried up, withered away and materially disappeared, this process retains some form of organic physicality.

Having spoken for a good while, it became apparent that Cherednikova's own thoughts on disappearance gather around the fact of nature's constant movement, strength and resistance of control. Without frames or borders, seeds spread and plants move as stone and concrete are broken and give way. The states of 'wantedness' and 'unwantedness' are reduced in their bearing and disappearance becomes the process through which space is created for something new.

From plants to 'things', it's pretty clear that 'wantedness', 'unwantedness' and disappearance aren't absolutes. I own several pairs of shoes that are so tattered, so materially derelict, that any ounce of their original usefulness has vanished, and while this is a potentially undermining instance of complete disappearance, I can get around it by saying: the shoes are still wanted.

I keep them out of a strange respect for their years of service, out of a reluctance to betray their loyalty, and out of the fear of them cursing my name as they're carted off to landfill. This is a fear which comes from an understanding that, like Cherednikova's urban plants, these shoes won't cease to exist the moment I discard them. Like the glove, sock and Mr. Color, their disappearance will be more of a relocation. They'll still be out there.

