



RACHAL BRADLEY

Interlocutor

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
THE SCHOOL OF ART, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

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Project details

Output author	Rachal Bradley
Project title	<i>Interlocutor</i>
Output type	M – Exhibition (Original Artistic Works)
Location	London, UK
Dates	June 2017–March 2018
Budget	£27,000
Partners	Gasworks, London
Funders	Freelands Foundation; Arts Council England



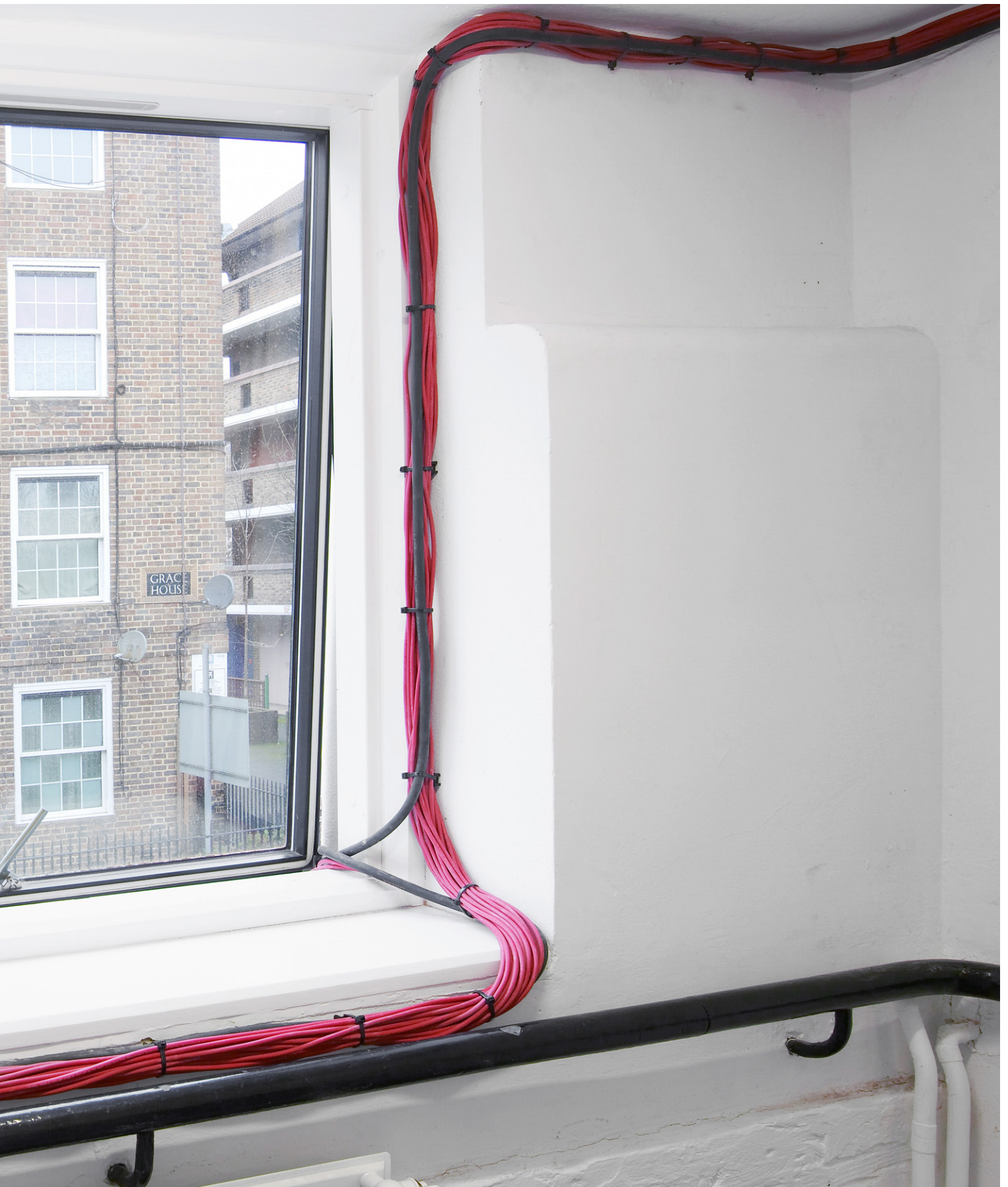


Figure 2. *Interlocutor* (2018). Detail of the internal wiring network.

Research content and significance

DESCRIPTION

A solo exhibition of sculptural work at Gasworks, London from January 25th – March 18th 2018 following a fully funded residency (by the Freelands Foundation) from July – September 2017 at Gasworks studios. Comprising three major architectural scale sculptures. Of these *Interlocutor*, was attached to the facade of the building and wrapped around it both externally and internally via a network of wires and ioniser units.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This work is research into the agency of the ‘body’ within organizational structures. The work proposes the following key questions about an individual’s relationship to the institution.

- What is the effect of different material productions upon the body?
- How is the body defined by different notions of materiality contained in differing epistemological frameworks?

PROCESS

The sculptural work developed out of research into infrastructure which we use to protect our bodies, including alarm systems, body armour, cable organisation and medical prosthetics alongside ioniser machines used in the well-being industry. The work was formally developed using 3D design programmes and a bespoke fabrication process using vacuum forming and high impact plastics. I worked in collaboration with an electrician to fabricate each ioniser unit and install the network of cables and units around the building.

DISSEMINATION

The output was visited by 1,333 people. A video interview and documentation have been viewed online 99,262 times. The demographic of the audience was wide ranging with both an international and local audience made up of art specialists to school children from the local Lambeth area. During the residency and exhibition at Gasworks, I organised and developed an infrastructure of discourse. An extensive programme of workshops, semi-public and public events, discussions, and readings which further disseminated the work.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this work develops the immaterial processes that govern our bodies have a material impact, producing social relations which further re-inform our material environment.

Introduction

This body of sculptural work posed questions around the body and how this is a fundamental unit of an organisation, both spatially and operationally. This exhibition sought to emphasise the treatment of a body in energetic terms, translating it into different epistemological frameworks, from herbal medicine, to nano-science to legal copyright. By doing this I sought to re-define the body materially through these different frameworks, looking for insights into how far a body can be produced materially in relation to its constitution.



Figure 3. *Interlocutor* (2018) installation on the facade of Gasworks, London.



Figure 4. *Interlocutor* (2018). External installation of the Vacuum formed high-impact polystyrene, electrical components.

INTERLOCUTOR

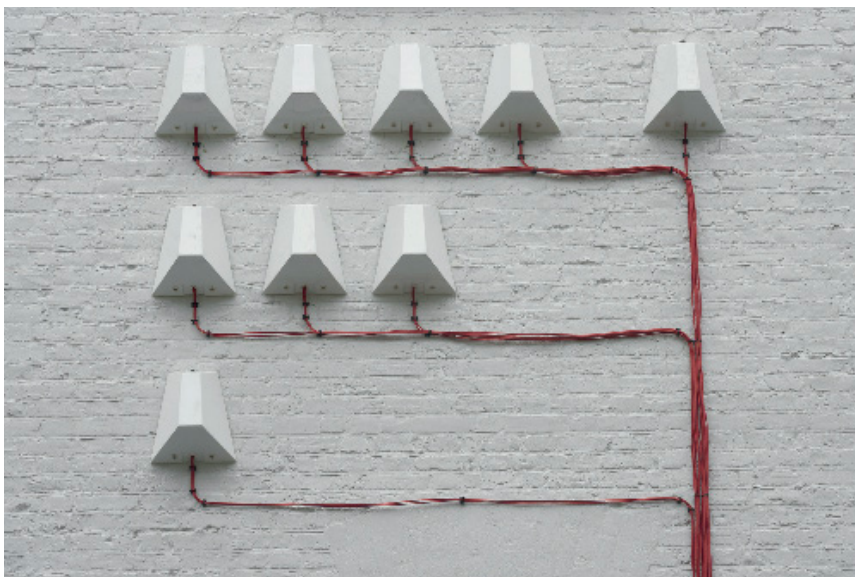


Figure 5. *Interlocutor* (2018). External installation of the Vacuum formed high-impact polystyrene, electrical components.

Research context

The three sculptural works in the exhibition build on the 1960s conceptual movement of 'institutional critique' including Michael Asher and Louise Lawler who were interested in how the operations of art institutions contribute to systems of cultural confinement. The limitation of institutional critique is that it becomes the accepted critical voice of the institution and no longer offers radical or relevant insight. *Interlocutor* develops this position into constitutional critique by asking how do we constitute the security and benevolence of an institution?

Through these works the exhibition develops a new theoretical framework looking at the institution on an 'energetic' level through the bodies which make up the organisation, from the audience to the staff. By re-framing the parameters of the 'body' of the institution the work pushes the discourse from institutional critique to a constitutional critique. A new insight is generated to show how differing bodies of knowledge premise the understanding of the 'body' from 'wellness' to legal process to industrial material.

The sculpture *Interlocutor* was conceived as a work spanning both the public and private sphere. Specific parts of the sculpture were installed at points only visible by people from the neighbouring apartments, such as the stack of units

on the chimney breast. This work is an advance in what can be understood as a 'public' artwork and questions its role as a benevolent force. The use of negative ions in this work brings into question the veracity of scientific knowledge with artistic knowledge situating these both back into the body of the audience. The work of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Romantic poets inspired this notion of miasma and the potential horror of advancing technology in relation to the human body. In all the works I was interested in a move between differing epistemological conceptions of the body, both metaphorically and literally and thinking these through formal sculptural materials.

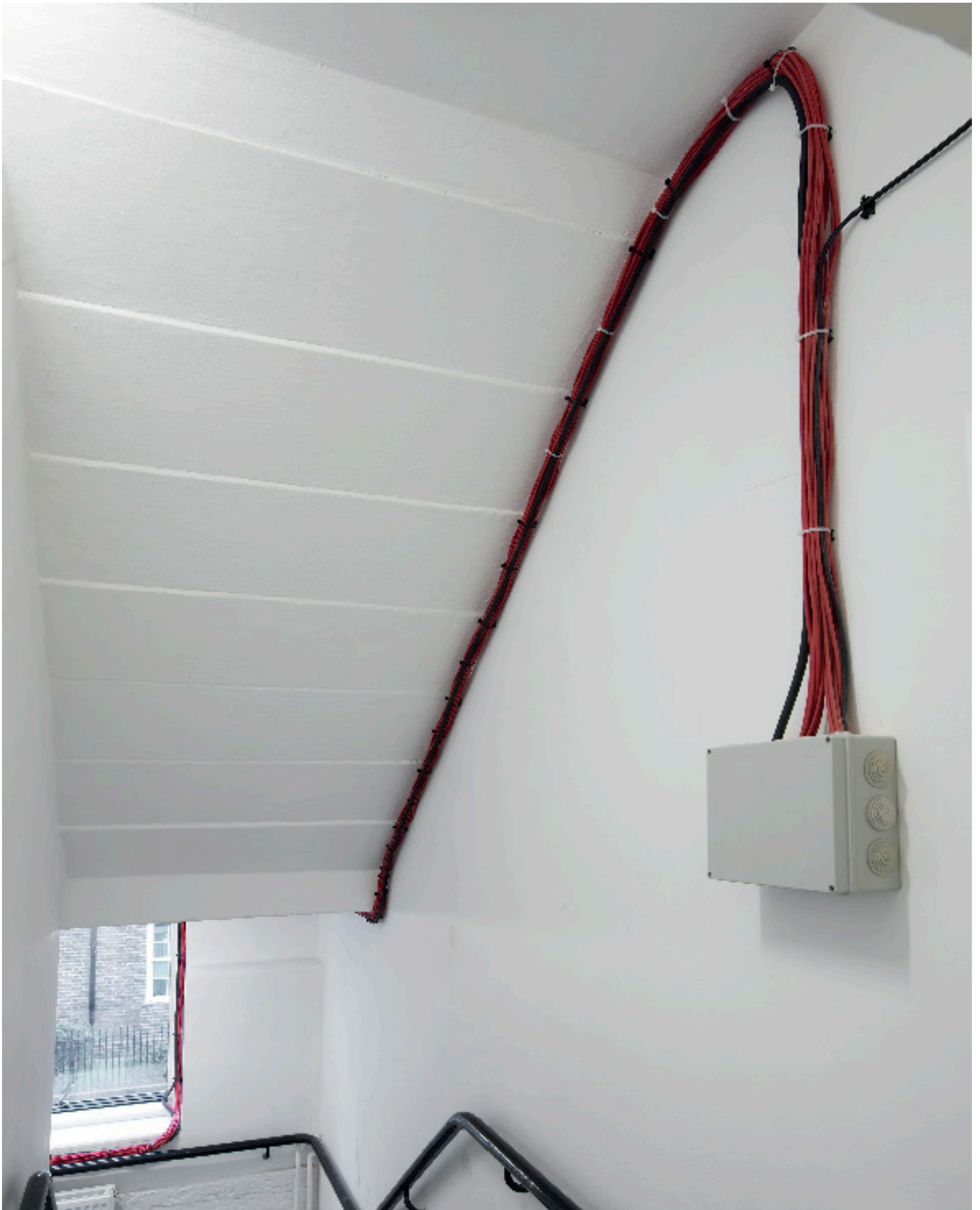


Figure 6. *Interlocutor* (2018). Installation of the internal wiring network within the building.

Research process

During the residency at Gasworks, thoughts developed on how the body navigates private and public space within an organisation and how this could be framed as a sculptural problem. This informed both the form and installation of the sculpture through analysis of alarm systems, body armour, cable organisation and medical prosthetics. In *Interlocutor* I designed a series of purpose-engineered, vacuum-formed units for the gallery's exterior walls. I developed the vacuum form shape of each unit and networked electrical design in the encasing of the gallery building with the gallery's mains electrical supply powering the artwork. The form is based on material research into armour and alarm systems, and contain hacked Negative Ion generator electrical circuits. These units transform the organisation into a giant negative ion generator, emitting negative ions throughout the building and surrounding areas. An ion is a charged atom or molecule, charged because of an imbalance between the number of protons and electrons it contains. In nature, waterfalls and thunderstorms produce negative ions, and they are said to be good for your health, meaning that negative is actually positive. The units are networked through power cables which formally encircle and penetrate the institution's hidden entrails, including offices, corridors, and a private

terrace. Significant research went into the electrical design of the network as it was key to the sculpture that it was powered by the gallery's mains electrical supply. In order to realise this sculpture, several points of different epistemological models were brought together formally. It is this original approach which marks this work as significant. In the work *Infinite Resistance*TM, legal research into the patenting and trademark process was brought into material proximity with the 'body' of the institution's employees by means of the resin. The work created a process whereby the actual bodies of the organisation were placed into a further legal relationship as a trademark working as a body of resistance in both spheres. Extensive testing was undertaken to ensure the milky consistency of the resin during the free pouring stage. The herbal remedy was another method by which to account for the workers of the institution and 'diagnose' the space in energetic terms which reflected the whole of the organisation. This was inspired by a desire to present an anti-cartesian conception of the body, where the body is treated as holistic and not separate from the mind. The audience were requested to remove footwear before entering the space to enjoy experiencing the work through their feet and invoking a quasi-religious experience.



Figure 7. *Interlocutor* (2018). Installation on the back elevation of Gasworks.





Figure 8. Infinite Resistance™ (2018).
Casting resin, OSB, marigold, liquorice,
camomile, ginseng, lemon balm.

Research insights

The discoveries of this research are the movement between the singular body and the institutional body and how each of these are produced through different epistemological frameworks. That the experience of a sculptural work can bring a different awareness to one's body. This was experienced by the audience walking barefooted on the work *Infinite Resistance*TM and the bathing in the imperceptible negative ions of *Interlocutor*. The work unexpectedly produced a direct experience of space and the building which recalibrated its energy, hovering between the clinical and the sacred.

The originality of this project lies in its approach to creating new epistemological models of the body achieved by placing in proximity seemingly disparate strands of processes and organisational structures which in themselves describe different conceptions of the body. In the work *Infinite Resistance*TM, the institution is conceived as a patient, a body with a potential illness. Via its labour organization – all permanent members of staff, the body of the gallery was diagnosed according to the criteria of a medical herbalist and an ameliorative remedy was dispensed accordingly. This herbal remedy became a physical material used in a sculpture and a trading patent was applied for the herbal tonic

in its name. As an artist this was an extremely productive insight and made manifest a poetic approach to other bodies of knowledge and disciplines such as science, medicine and the law.



Figure 9. Infinite Resistance™ (2018).
Casting resin, OSB, marigold, liquorice,
camomile, ginseng, lemon balm.





Figure 10. *Infinite Resistance*[™] (2018).
Casting resin, OSB, marigold, liquorice,
camomile, ginseng, lemon balm.

Dissemination

EXHIBITION

Interlocutor (2018). Gasworks, London. 3 July–18 September 2017 and 25 January–18 March 2018.

From July to September 2017 I was artist-in-residence at Gasworks, a highly respected institution known for its commissioning of highly regarded artists. I was selected as part of the Freelands Foundation national artists programme, selecting one artist per year to undertake a residency and major solo exhibition at Gasworks. The commission was highly competitive, drawing candidates who lived outside of London but within the UK. It was selected by notable jurors Robert Leckie (Director of Spike Island, Bristol), Alessio Alessandro (Director of Gasworks) and Elizabeth Murdoch (Founder and Chair of Freelands Foundation and Head of the Arts Council England). The commission was valued at £27,000 in production and residency support.

The output was visited in person by 1,333 people and a video interview has been viewed online 99,262 times. The success and recognition of this exhibition led to further significant opportunities including a commission from KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2019 which received an ACE funding award. Several works from the exhibition were acquired by Arts Council England National Collection and the Drawing Room Collection, Hamburg.

EVENTS

‘Jason Dill: A Public Reading’. Gasworks, 17 March 2018.

‘Infinite Resistance: A Herbal Medicine Workshop’. Gasworks, 3 February 2018.

‘Indebted Vision: Patricia L. Boyd and Rachal Bradley in conversation’. Gasworks, 14 December 2017.

‘Workshop: The Erotics of Infrastructure (Part 2)’. Gasworks, 11 November 2017.

‘Workshop: The Erotics of Infrastructure (Part 1)’. Gasworks, 15 August 2017.

During my residency and the run of the exhibition, I curated and organised a discursive work made up of a programme of events. This programme disseminated further the ideas and themes within the exhibition to a public audience and led to seven education sessions, employing 16 artists over a period of 112 days.



Figure 11. *Untitled* (2018). Industrial tumble dryer door, projected image, walls.

SELECTED PRESS

Eliel Jones, 'Infinite Resistance™', *MAP*, March 2018.

Emily LaBarge, 'Review', *Esse*, March 2018.

Emily Pethick, 'Four Shows to See', *Art in America*, March 2018.

Joseph Constable, 'Review', *Art Monthly* 414, March 2018.

'Editor's Picks', *Frieze*, February 2018.

Tom Jeffries, 'Experiments in the Field: Why Artists and Scientists are Collaborating', *Frieze*, February 2018.

Irene Puri-Purini, 'Artist to Watch', *Contemporary Fine Art Society*, February 2018.

Kylie Gilchrist, 'Critics' Picks', *Artforum*, January 2018.

"Artist Rachal Bradley has turned Gasworks into a negative ion. Not to fret—this is a good thing, or so we are told. Negative ions, produced by nature in the way of waterfalls and thunderstorms, are positive forces that are said to improve health. Sans the name, the things themselves don't actually look all that threatening. That is, if you are not intimidated by the 150 meters of blood-red cable veining Gasworks's walls, or the alien-looking, purpose-built units (shells to the negative ion generators) that are affixed as architectural additions to the building's exterior, making up *Interlocutor* (all works 2018). If you missed the units on your way in, you are invited to check them out in the back of the building. You can take the stairs, walk through the kitchen into the patio, where the line of quasi-futuristic, minimally-designed aluminium shells is waiting. Presumably they are not waiting at all, as one assumes them to be fully in motion, trying to keep everyone happy. On the way there, you might bump into one of Gasworks' studio artists or members of staff. It is tempting not to judge the interaction as a test of the effect of Bradley's intervention on people's moods; my exchange was brief, but pleasant. If this reads as somewhat agnostic, it is not because of a lack of commitment to this exhibition, because I absolutely love it."

(Eliel Jones, 'Infinite Resistance™', *MAP*, March 2018).

“New conditions require new remedies, which Bradley offers in no small measure. The gallery floor is encased in alabaster resin and infused with a medicinal tonic designed by the artist’s herbalist sister, to heal gallery staff of sundry institutional disorders. Elsewhere, ion generators are affixed to the gallery’s facade. Inconspicuous save for a trail of crimson cables, they emit polarized molecules valued for salutary effects. Bradley’s work engages the infrastructure regulating systems of production and exchange. The artist’s use of alternative therapies is an intervention and inoculation that transposes public and private while imbuing the exhibition space with elements of magic. With these tactics, Bradley creates an arena for different values, formed through collaboration, which surreptitiously counteract the ills of our present day.”

(Kylie Gilchrist, ‘Critics’ Picks’, *Artforum*, January 2018)

“For another interesting show I saw this week, at Gasworks, young British artist Rachal Bradley has transformed the building into a negative ion generator, employing a series of custom-engineered, vacuum formed units connected by a network of power cables winding through the galleries and stairwell. The free-Flowing negative ions are supposed to be good for your health, so the idea is she’s spreading positive energy throughout the space. In addition, Bradley has covered the gallery Floor with a resin infused with an herbal tonic and installed a sculpture of a washing machine that has a film running inside it. I like the curatorial approach of the program at Gasworks; it’s consistently critically sharp, and formally imaginative and surprising.”

(Emily Pethick, ‘Four Shows to See’, *Art in America*, March 2018)



Figure 12. *Infinite Resistance*[™] (2018).
Casting resin, OSB, marigold, liquorice,
camomile, ginseng, lemon balm.



Impact

My artistic profile was significantly enhanced by this body of work, which provided more opportunities for my research to develop as a direct consequence. These include a commission with KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin. The work *Interlocutor* was acquired into the Arts Council Collection in 2019. The exhibition also led to my nomination for the Paul Hamlyn Award in 2018, a highly prestigious award for visual artists selected from over 100 fine art practitioners.

The specific thesis of the *Erotics of Infrastructure* developed in the events programme has also led to further commissions from High Art, Paris—a commissioned exhibition text upcoming in May 2019, and a further exhibition at TG, Nottingham in December 2019. *Interlocutor* was featured in a group presentation at Liste, Basel, 2019. This is a highly respected international art fair where artworks are presented in a global commercial and critical context and was sold to the Drawing Room Collection, Hamburg.

A specific event of the *Erotics of Infrastructure* programme has been commissioned into a full publication, *Indebted Vision*, by Divided Publishing, to be published in Spring 2021.

For Gasworks, the exhibition had a significant impact, generating extensive press attention and audience attendance which heightened their profile as an arts organisation. The exhibition was seen by 1,333 in person audience and 99,262 online. Moreover, the work generated an artistic approach which moved the Director and Curator of Gasworks, Alessio Alessandro, to comment as follows:

“Interlocutor was a significant exhibition for Gasworks in terms of material and conceptual ambition. The works helped us to reflect on our position as organisation and the discursive intersection of the art work with the operation of the institution, using subtle, experiential methods it opened up a new scope for critique. The critical acclaim garnered by Rachal Bradley’s exhibition, directly helped to secure further funding for the continuation of this residency programme from the Freelands Foundation as it ensured the quality and innovative approach of Gasworks”.

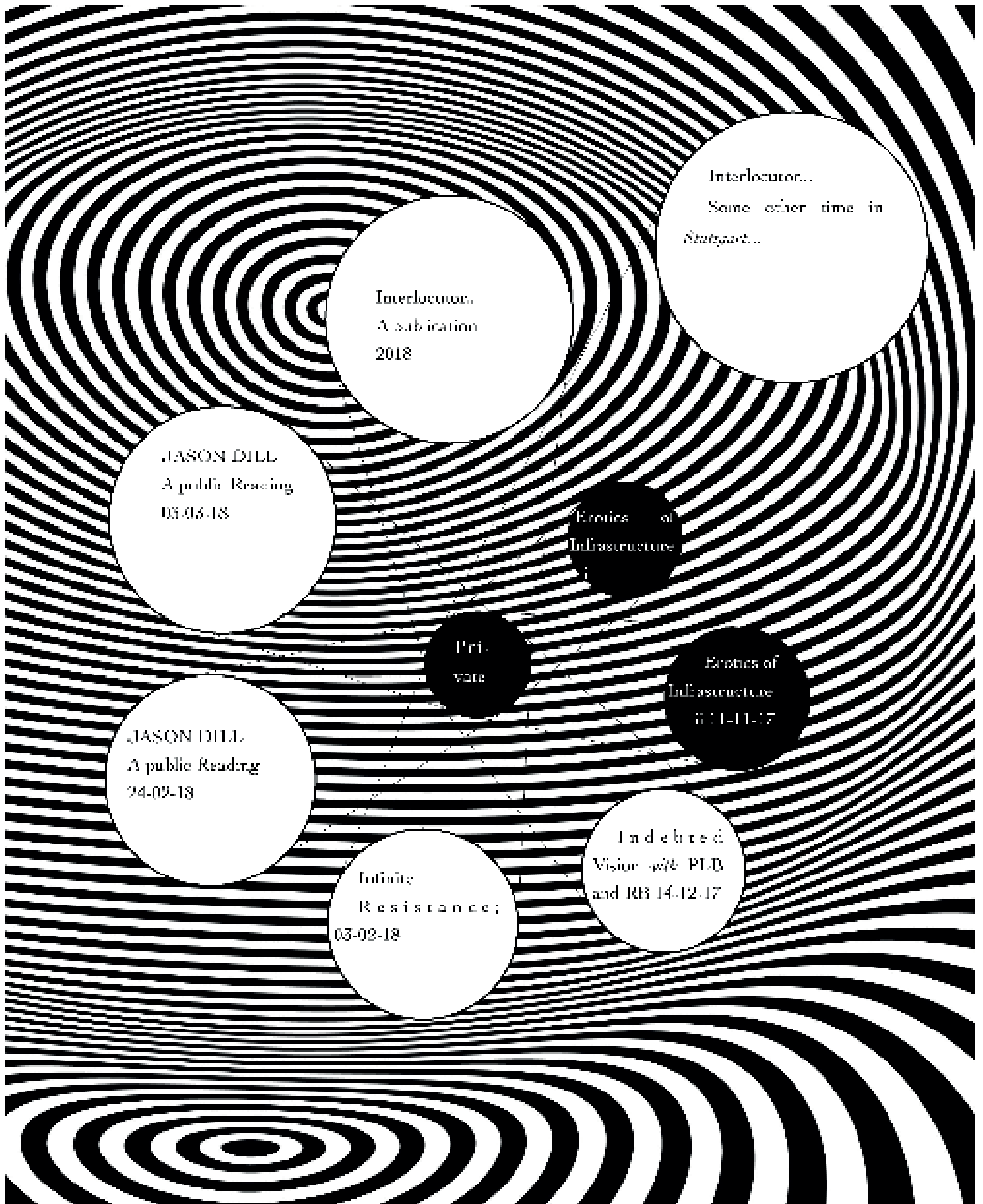


Figure 13. *Erotics of Infrastructure* (2018). Discursive programme, workshops, seminars, and public reading.

frieze



Experiments in the Field: Why are Artists and Scientists Collaborating?

With global issues cutting across disciplines, a number of projects are showing where the mixing of art and science can prove productive

T BY [TOM JEFFREYS](#) IN [OPINION](#) | 21 FEB 18



'Are we working *for* the corals,' asks artist Sonia Levy,¹ or *with* them?' Levy – whose previous projects have included collaborating with a whale researcher in Iceland and recreating 20th century crystallization experiments – is currently working in the basement of the Horniman Museum in south London, where, for the very first time, marine biologists have successfully induced corals to spawn within a captive environment.

That alone makes 'Project Coral' noteworthy. Launched under the umbrella of the Horniman's so-called 'Living Collections', the research involves a range of international partners and has seen nine corals transplanted from Australia's Great Barrier Reef to an aquarium laboratory deep in the bowels of the museum. By their very existence, corals complicate convenient categorizations – between animal, plant and mineral or between individual and community or even between the living and dead. Corals, notes Levy, *collaborate* (with algae). Their exoskeletons form landscapes that shelter other forms of life. Corals provide rich metaphors but they are also real beings – out there in the world, and now inside the museum laboratory.

Figure 14. Press article *Frieze* magazine, by Tom Jeffreys, including discussion of *Interlocutor*.

Indebted Vision

Rachal
Bradley
& Inka
Meißner



Figure 15. *Indebted Vision*, forthcoming title published by Divided Publishing (expected Spring 2021).

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