DIFFUSING

Issue 09 The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge June 2021

Xaviera Simmons, *Because You Know Ultimately We Will Band A Militia* (detail), 2021. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

diffuse (v.)
1520s (transitive), "**to pour out and spread**, cause to flow and spread;" 1650s (intransitive), "spread abroad, scatter in all directions;" from Latin *diffusus*, past participle of diffundere "to pour out or away," from *dis-* "**apart, in every direction**" (see dis-) + *fundere* "to pour" (from nasalized form of PIE root *gheu- "to pour"). Related: *Diffused*; *diffusing*.

diffuse (adj.)
early 15c., "hard to understand;" also, of writers, "verbose, using many words;" from Latin *diffusus*, past participle of *diffundere* "**scatter**, pour out," from *dis-* "apart, in every direction" (see dis-) + *fundere* "to pour" (from nasalized form of PIE root *gheu- "to pour"). Meaning "**widely spread or diffused, scattered**" is from late 15c.

The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge is a serial broadsheet publication produced by the Blackwood, University of Toronto Mississauga. Initiated in conjunction with *The Work of Wind: Air, Land, Sea* in 2018–19 to expand perspectives on environmental violence through artistic practices, cultural inquiry, and political mobilization, the SDUK continues as a signature triannual Blackwood publishing initiative in 2021.

As an organization addressing the challenges of the 21st century through artistic-led research, the Blackwood's ambition is to convene, enable, and amplify the transdisciplinary thinking necessary for understanding our current multi-scalar historical moment and co-creating the literacies, skills, and sensibilities required to adapt to the various socio-technical transformations of our contemporary society. Such a commitment requires a lithe methodology that is rooted in the arts, inspired and informed by emergent methods of curatorial research, and shaped by transdisciplinary engagements with collaborators from a host of other disciplines and partners working outside the university, whether in industry, business, government, or civil society. This methodology is necessary for contemporary research-based practices because the so-called "wicked problems" that challenge the stability of contemporary societies can no longer be addressed from a single disciplinary perspective.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE DIFFUSION OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE (SDUK)

The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) composes and circulates an ecology of knowledge based on the relationship and antagonism of "useful" ideas. The name of this innovative platform is borrowed from a non-profit society founded in London in 1826, focused on publishing inexpensive texts such as the widely read *Penny Magazine* and *The Library of Useful Knowledge*, and aimed at spreading important world knowledge to anyone seeking to self-educate. Both continuing and troubling the origins of the society, the Blackwood's SDUK platform asks: what constitutes useful knowledge? For whom? And who decides?

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Because You Know Ultimately We Will Band A Militia

Xaviera Simmons

Cruiser motorcycles; an unattributed family portrait (ca. 1850); Marsha P. Johnson; dirt bikes; Ambrose Andrews' *The Children of Nathan Starr* (1835); Malcolm X; bunches of palm fronds; James Baldwin; baskets from varied African basket-weaving traditions; Ida B. Wells.

Xaviera Simmons' image series *Because You Know […]* (cover and p. 4) forms a patchwork of Black resistance and resurgence. With images that signify white antebellum wealth (parlour rooms, fancy dress, and expansive vistas) set alongside polemical, factual, and wry statements reflecting on slavery, settler colonialism, reparations, and systemic racism, Simmons' work traces the centuries-old unpayable debts that underpin American life.

Like the handheld mirrors raised aloft in *The Children of Nathan Starr*[1], Simmons' work refracts the many dynamics of race, gender, class, and power that suffuse cultural contexts throughout North America. Installed on monumental billboards in Cahuilla Territory, Palm Springs, California for Desert X 2021, *Because You Know […]* sites racial and colonial reckoning in the car-centric desert landscapes of the southwest. In a region deeply shaped by automobility, tourism, nuclear testing, militarism, water scarcity, tribal sovereignty, and the securitization of the US-Mexico border, Simmons' images call attention to interrelated and intergenerational politics. They stop traffic: the steady flow of American capitalism becomes intractable amid all-caps demands for representation and repair.

1 These are in fact badminton rackets.

How to Read this Broadsheet

This ninth SDUK broadsheet openly engages the nineteenth-century society from which the series takes its name, by considering **DIFFUSING**: how circulation, dissemination, opacity, transparency, and anonymity shape the way knowledges, materials, and media are transferred. Whereas the original Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge circulated its publications through largely one-way and top-down means, contributors to this issue explore knowledge-sharing as a more open, non-hierarchical practice.

One might be prompted by physical processes of diffusion to wonder: **How does matter move through bodies, across borders, and into inter-relations?** Sophia Jaworski and Zoë Wool (p. 8) offer a reappraisal of the 1979 train derailment known as the "Mississauga miracle," analyzing how toxic waste moves, where it gets warehoused, and how risk and contamination are normalized in late industrial societies. Forms of water circulation animate two contributions: artist Katherine Ball (p. 12) shares the schema for a functional DIY filtration system; and Liz Howard's poem (p. 28) conjures water-witching and surface tension—liquid metaphors that bespeak interconnectedness.

Shifting from causes to effects, some might ask: **How is diffusion shaped by the media it traverses?** In contributions by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Xaviera Simmons, geography and language co-constitute artistic interventions. In Simmons' artist project (cover, p. 3 and 4), the car-centric landscapes of the American southwest serve as the backdrop for probing questions and proclamations on settler colonialism, slavery, plunder, and reparations. For Simpson (p. 14), whose lyrics for the album *Theory of Ice* are reproduced here in full, song is a potent medium through which land, memory, sorrow, and Anishinaabe resurgence are carried.

Some readers might wonder **how speed and hyper-visibility in digital media are influencing new strategies for knowledge-sharing**. In a roundtable conversation led by Nehal El-Hadi, Mark V. Campbell, Elicser Elliott, and Charles Officer (p. 24) discuss how they navigate relationships to hegemonic white institutions as Black artists and scholars. Similarly, anonymity is consciously employed in an artist project by Immony Mèn and Lilian Leung for Public Visualization Lab (p. 34), who use face-tracking technology against the grain to archive experiences of anti-Asian racism.

Educators, artists, and activists might ask: **How are collaborative practices shifting the ways knowledge circulates?** Look to the cumulative and layered work-in-progress of the Neurocultures Collective (p. 30), whose research probes the intersections of cinema and neurodiversity. For other insight into ongoing initiatives, a new iteration of the SDUK's Local Useful Knowledge section by Joy Xiang (p. 36) examines activist networks that are questioning and remaking urban spaces throughout the GTHA, often in response to the differential impacts of COVID-19.

Those who gravitate toward wide-scope geographic or historical context may wonder: **How do ideas circulate across struggles, across continents, across generations?** In the first column of a three-part series, Jacob Wren (p. 38) addresses the legacies and lineages that scaffold his work, considering how the force of writing can extend and recompose political action, while Irmgard Emmelhainz (p. 18) employs speculative, critical, and poetic modes in a three-part long essay linking decolonization struggles in Mexico and Canada.

This issue concludes with a glossary, which expands, connects, and clarifies terms used in the issue. The Blackwood's complete glossary to date—across all SDUK issues and other programs—can be read online at blackwoodgallery.ca, where digital content from this issue also includes songs from Simpson's *Theory of Ice*.

YOU ARE
ENTERING THE
REPARATIONS
FRAMEWORK
LAMAR
DESERT
1842

YOU ARE ENTERING THE REPARATIONS FRAMEWORK

THERE ARE WEALTHY FAMILIES IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY THAT ONCE OWNED ENSLAVED FAMILIES FOR GENERATIONS YOU CAN TRACE ALL OF THEIR WEALTH TO CENTURIES OF FREE LABOR DONE BY BLACK AMERICANS

YOU KEEP OUR MOST BRILLIANT MINDS IN A PERPETUAL LOOP OF ARTICULATING AND TRANSLATING THE RAMIFICATIONS OF YOUR SYSTEMIC GENERATIONAL PLUNDER

UNDO UNRAVEL ADMIT AMEND ABOLISH REDRESS ORGANIZE REPAIR RETURN RESTORE MOBILIZE UNIONIZE RECONCILE RECENTER UNIVERSALIZE

WE CALL FOR A RADICAL REDISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES BECAUSE ECONOMIC PRECARITY IS ANOTHER FORM OF HARM

RUPTURE YOUR GUILT AMNESIA

Previous spread: Xaviera Simmons, *Because You Know Ultimately We Will Band A Militia*, 2021. Installation view at Desert X, Palm Springs, California. COURTESY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: LANCE GERBER.

Xaviera Simmons, *Because You Know Ultimately We Will Band A Militia*, 2021. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Four Movements of Diffusion:
Speculative Reflections on Toxicity and the Mississauga Derailment

Sophia Jaworski & Zoë Wool

First Movement: The History of a Miracle

Around midnight on November 10, 1979, a Canadian Pacific freight train carrying a deadly cargo of butane, toluene, caustic soda, and chlorine derailed, caught fire, and exploded in the city of Mississauga. The sky turned red as flames towered forty storeys high, and shockwaves spread for fifty kilometres. A total of 240,000 people were evacuated, an effort that was (until Hurricane Katrina in 2005) the largest peacetime evacuation in North American history. Astonishingly, no one was killed that night, and the event came to be known as the Mississauga Miracle. Retrospective accounts focus on the swift and heroic action of railway workers, first responders, officials, and citizens alike, but narrating this massive industrial disaster as the "Mississauga Miracle" obscures something that was in fact so starkly revealed by the plumes of chlorine gas that billowed into the eerily illuminated night sky: Mississauga is an exemplary site in the contaminated ecology of extractive capitalism—an ecology that is always also bound to projects of colonialism and state violence through industrial infrastructures that constitute "the sinews of war and trade."[1]

Drawing on an archive of contemporary reports as well as oral histories conducted on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the disaster in 2019, we tether ourselves in what follows to this "miracle" as an anchor point from which to trace the diffuse violence and toxicity of late capitalism as it moves through a seemingly peripheral place. Diffusion is key to these movements—perhaps most immediately the diffusion of chemicals combusted and aerosolized and seeping into the watershed of the Credit River. But these are not just "wayward particles behaving badly."[2] That spectacular moment of chemical diffusion has historical and material conditions, a choreography that make the movement of diffusion possible—most notably, the rail infrastructure that is an essential technology of the twinned forces of settler colonialism[3] and global capitalism.[4]

The train itself, Canadian Pacific (CP) train number 54, was 106 cars long, 38 of which carried hazardous materials.[5] At the time, in 1979, there were 56,000 such cars moving through the area every year.[6] By 1990, that number had reached 67,000.[7] "Self devouring growth" was already rolling along.[8]

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution ended, people all over the world waited in hours-long lines for gas, Margaret Thatcher was elected as UK Prime Minister, a 500-mile auto race was broadcast on TV for the first time, a gas explosion at a Warsaw bank killed forty-nine people, politician and gay rights activist Harvey Milk's assassin plead the infamous "Twinkie defence," and the Ixtoc I oil well in the Gulf of Mexico blew out, causing the worst oil spill on record (a record that would stand until the Deepwater Horizon spill in the same gulf in 2010). This was a moment on the cusp of late industrialism,[9] but not quite there. A moment still in the thick of the Cold War, though perhaps past its nadir. A moment when the engineered hazards of industrial infrastructure and chemical production were beginning to become clear, but had not yet settled into the form of knowledge and expertise we know today as environmental exposure. That genre had yet to fully form in 1979—nine years after the first Earth Day, but still a decade before the concept of environmental health hit the mainstream. In 1979, industrial risks were largely articulated in a Cold War genre that attended to logistics but not ecologies, and neither to the diffusion of acute disaster. It was the genre of "duck and cover," a muscular orchestration of fortification and mobilization that sought to protect major cities with the highways that are still with us today, many now notoriously congested thoroughfares spewing asthma-linked ozone and nitrogen dioxide.

CP train number 54 originated in Sarnia, ON—Aamjiwnaang land, then already the core of Canada's Chemical Valley and now an epicentre of Indigenous research on and resistance to environmental racism.[10] Its destination was Marathon, ON, a town birthed as a whistle stop during the construction of the CP rail, dispossessing the Anishinaabe of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg in the 1880s. A town whose fortunes were tied to colonialism, rail, pulp, and, later, gold mining. The movement of train 54—like the movement of the steel that made its tracks and the Chinese workers who laboured to make them reach the Pacific coast—is a historical inscription in and of the land.[11] This movement is a political geography: a writing of place, a making place, a putting of things and people in their place. But watch out. Because there is friction in this movement, and heat. Because movement means things do not always stay put in the way inscribers intend.

Second Movement: Diffusion Is Movement, Away Is Not Escape

"Here" is what linguists call a deictic; it only makes sense if you know the situation, the where and the when. "Away" is something else, defined by the condition of being elsewhere. But *whose* elsewhere? Whose *here* makes my *here* (or your *here*, or their *here*) an *elsewhere*? What geographies and histories converge in such place making? In making such situations? In situating some of us in a *here*, and others in an *away*? In putting us in our places? Here and away are always part of the same situation—a situation of legibility that attempts to make elsewheres and otherwises disappear, no matter how much is displaced from here to there, accumulating in landfills and aquifers, no matter how many bad smells and body burdens build up. Despite the early twentieth-century sense that diffusion was the solution to pollution, diffusion is movement, not escape.

Mississauga is often conjured as a kind of *away*. A peripheral place defined by its proximity to, and difference from, Toronto. But peripheral places are anything but out of the way. Mississauga has long been crisscrossed by industrial rail and is today a major hub for intermodal shipping. It is positioned between the two largest ports of the Great Lakes (in Toronto and Hamilton) and hosts Pearson International Airport, which handles 50 percent of all air cargo in Canada; the Terrapure plant, which recycles the majority of the country's spent lead-acid batteries; a Petro-Canada Lubricants refinery; and the St. Lawrence Cement plant. Mississauga is most definitely *in the way*, centrally defined by the movement of consumer capitalism's toxic excesses.

The origin stories of the environmental justice movement are stories of here and away. Like the story of Warren County, North Carolina, a predominantly Black, low-income community that was designated as an away. In 1982, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) dumped thousands of tonnes of PCB-contaminated soil there,[12] soil it was cleaning up from hundreds of miles of roadways that a transformer company had been using as a dumping ground for the contaminated oil collected by its tanker trucks. Borrowing tactics from the civil rights movement, environmental organizers protested, leading to over 500 arrests, but they could not stop the EPA and its relocation of 60,000 tonnes of contaminated soil.[13] They could not make their *here*-ness heard. Remediation began in 2001 and was completed in 2004. Testing revealed that contaminants had been leaking into the water for decades, cross-contaminating a further 20,000 tonnes of soil.

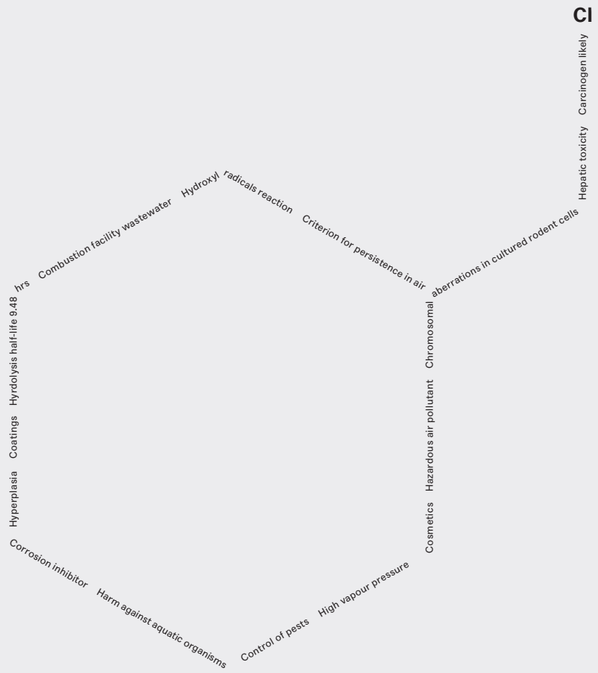
But even this origin story is not just a story of *here* and *away*. *Here* and *away* obscures movement and the diffusion that happens along chemical infrastructures. Reactivity has cascading effects, and fugitive emissions catalyze new chemical relations. The contaminated soil came from roadsides, places where *moving through* provided cover for the diffusion of PCBs, which then became concentrated in Warren County, a place the US government deemed sufficiently *away*.[14] *Here* and *away* is an all too convenient static geography. A colonial and cartographic imaginary of territorial enclosure that diffusion refuses to abide by.

In her articulation of an Indigenous environmental justice, Dina Gilio-Whitaker points out that environmentalism's *here* and *away* imaginary also carries with it an assumption of settled domesticity.[15] *Here*, in that imaginary, equals home. But, as she points out, such an imaginary obscures not only the movement of toxicity but also the movement of people such as the migrant farmworkers exposed to biocides with whom Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta organized the United Farm Workers of America. Unfree itineraries—whereby workers are uprooted to follow the work—illustrate the ongoing displacements of precarious labour. *Here* is not always home. In attempting to give an account, to map, to trace the diffusions of the derailment, perhaps the language of *here* and *away*—the language of dilution and concentration, the language of territory anchored in violence—must come off the rails.

Mississauga is *here*, in the midst of a landscape scarred by rail and extraction and convenience. Mississauga is some place between Sarnia and Marathon. Mississauga is a location of empire.

The train came off the rails at a place of friction. The train came off the rails at Dundas Street and Mavis Road. Dundas, named for Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, British Secretary of War. The friction of an improperly lubricated wheel on tracks laid over so many bodies is what threw it off. A historical friction. A friction that, it was said, put Mississauga on the map. A place where things came off the rails.

Benzyl Chloride C_7H_7Cl



Third Movement: The Nature of Chlorine

"All Daisy Mae will do is tell you where the gas will go."
—Ron Johnson, Headquarters Coordinator at Dow Chemical, on the company's endearingly named computer and how it modelled chlorine meteorology[16]

"We Must Learn to Live with Poisons"
—*Toronto Star* headline on the derailment, November 13, 1979

Language: it derails.

A. The nature of chlorine is brine. The chloralkali process pumps up underground salt deposits and then electrolyzes them.

B. The nature of chlorine is replacing mercury-cell production plants, the previous method of manufacturing chlorine, only eight years before the derailment. Before this, discharging mercury into the St. Clair River was seen as a necessary part of the nature of chlorine. Companies boasted that the mercury released had been "reduced to less than a tablespoon per day." Diffusion was seen as the solution to pollution and "total elimination [as] not economically possible due to the nature of the process."[17]

C. The nature of chlorine is eighty workers hospitalized in Sarnia before the derailment, when a tank at the Dow plant leaked. Chlorine dissipated. The hamlet of Froomfield evacuated. No mention of the nation of Aamjiwnaang, just 100 feet away.

D. What is the nature of chlorine, glimpsed in green, propelled 1,200 metres into the sky, assumed to be dispersed and diluted over a 100 km radius?[18] Diffusion of fumes, vapours, and particulates is not the solution to pollution.

E. The nature of chlorine is a pillar of fire and heat like a sunrise. While the chlorine was reportedly sucked to a high altitude, there were "reactions to something in the air reported outside the evacuated zone at various points in the circumference" of the bedroom community.[19]

F. The nature of chlorine is a delayed and difficult measurement that defies numerical empiricism. What is not quantified is assumed to not be exposure: lost gaseous diffusions between the midnight crash and the following afternoon.

G. The nature of chlorine is toxicological genres of expertise that occlude the corporeality of a crowd of hundreds intent on watching fireballs: the greenish-yellow Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapour Explosion. BLEVE, an evening spectacle that could imprint in lung tissue for decades.

H. The nature of chlorine is not separate from the pre-existing palimpsests of industrial exposures in Mississauga, including the experimental incineration of PCBs at St. Lawrence Cement. A Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer provided "instantaneous monitoring of the Mississauga emergency," because it was already nearby to measure this burning.[20]

I. The nature of chlorine is its near instantaneous desire to transcend molecular valences, to become body, its "properties as an oxidizing agent, reacting with the water on the moist linings of bronchial and lung tissue to form hydrochloric acid."[21] Sixty-one residents' complaints about exposure "checked" and designated benign.

J. The nature of chlorine is a pungent bleach odour while gaseous. A smell cloaking an entire city, spreading heavily along the ground, drifting into basements, lingering all Wednesday night, two and a half times heavier than air. Collecting into low-lying pools, creeping into cavities and depressions in the land.

K. The nature of chlorine is tears. Lachrymator ("tear gases") forming from pools of water, chemicals, and sunlight—an ironic departure from the intentional diffusion of chlorine into municipal drinking water as a disinfectant.

L. The nature of chlorine is speculative in its combinatory potential, as a substance necessary to manufacture polyvinyl chloride, most pharmaceuticals, and titanium dioxide. "I thought it might be a spaceship from another galaxy," said thirteen-year-old Wayne Zimmer, whose family lived close to the crash site.[22]

M. The nature of chlorine's fugitive release is a cascade of chemical relations. The explosion likely could have interacted with the "chemical factory" to the southwest of the derailment site: "Here it was hoped that frozen ground would prevent penetration by styrene and toluene."[23] Melding with polymers at the three resin factories located within half a kilometre of the derailment site.

N. The nature of chlorine could have been the halogenation of benzene from petroleum refined at the Texaco refinery in Port Credit. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, styrene, and toluene derived from oil sat in tanks on the ground south of the site, and might still be sitting in groundwater there.

O. The nature of chlorine could have been one liquid tonne of PCBs, the amount stored, for example, in 1991 at the Mississauga Brick company, 500 metres away. Despite the Ministry of Environment's official discounting of the rumour that PCBs were released in the explosion,[24] PCBs were being stored very nearby at G.T. Wood (3354 Mavis Road), with one liquid tonne; Mississauga Hydro (3240 Mavis Road), with almost five liquid tonnes; and Peel Board of Education (3214 Mavis Road), with nearly nine liquid tonnes.[25]

P. The nature of chlorine could be its reaction with plumes, leachate from hundreds of substances mixing together underground at old dump sites with unrecorded contents. Many of these sites are now parks: like the park at Dixie Road and Dundas Street, or A. E. Crookes Park, or Port Credit Memorial Park, or J. C. Saddington Park, or Erindale Park. Or nondescript places like the intersection of Church and Ontario Streets, or in a pit north of the Queen Elizabeth Way.[26]

Q. The nature of chlorine could be interacting with waste solvents and glycols from refrigerants and paints being recycled at Fielding Environmental, just up the street from the crash site.

R. The nature of chlorine could be the spilled cars of styrene and chlorine dioxide combining to form 1-phenyl-2-chloroethanone, 1-phenyl-2-chloroethanol, (1,2-dichloroethyl)benzene, (2-chloro-1-phenyl) ethene, and (1,2,2-trichloroethyl)benzene.

S. The nature of chlorine could be its reaction with perfluorooctanesulfonic acid, or perfluorooctanoic acid, or with sodium alkyl sulfate, each found in firefighting foam, like the kind used to control the explosion, which was purported to run off toward Wolfedale Creek.

T. The nature of chlorine is the future. In 1987, an air-quality study by Anachemia Solvents, a waste-solvent recovery plant just up the block, screened for fugitive emissions. Odours detected were "attributed to the chlorinated compounds (ether and chloroform-like odours), and aromatics (sweet, solvent-like odours)."[27] Methylene chloride, methyl chloroform, trichloroethylene, perchloroethylene were released continuously into the surrounding newly developed residential area. Average total organic compounds were measured downwind at 1,153 µg/m³. Today, above 500 µg/m³ is considered high.

The nature of chlorine is expansive.

Fourth Movement: Remainders

"What a stench."
—Gord Bentley, Mississauga Fire Chief, 1979–91

In 2021, Google Maps labels the location of the derailment as the "Mississauga Miracle." Clicking on the spot reveals a description as a "tourist attraction."

While no doubt intended to be uplifting and to signify the successful efforts to protect the city's inhabitants, the language of "miracle" is not neutral. Its Christian history is linked to white-settler notions of manifest destiny: the justification of imperial expansion on the basis of religious or divine right. The miracularization of the Mississauga train derailment is an erasure. An erasure of extractive settler infrastructures that had already diffused toxins throughout the land. An erasure of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, Seneca, and Huron-Wendat, in favour of some myth of a pristine "environment" that can then be returned to, rather than Traditional Territories that have their own knowledges, sets of relations, and laws governing their purpose.

Eurocentric sciences of physiography have classified this land as "the Iroquois Plain" to describe how the shoreline of "glacial Lake Iroquois" continues to be smoothed over time by wave action, a thin veneer of glacio-lacustrine sand and silty sediments.

It is unclear why, but reports written in the aftermath of the derailment describe this land as an industrial zone near "open waste ground,"[28] rendering it as waste even prior to the event.

Tonnes and tonnes of contaminated soil around the crash site were removed to a landfill after the explosion and evacuation. Through this action of soil removal, the "waste ground" is then reabsorbed into the liberal imaginary of the industrial area as "non-toxic," thereby reproducing chemicals in the white space of "settler industrialism."[29] Before the soil was removed, residents worried about onlookers and playing children "wandering through the equivalent to liquid Drano"—but not after.[30] "Clean-up" is another miracularization.

The "clean-up" of contaminated soil meant moving it *elsewhere*. To protest their backyard being made into that elsewhere, "about 20 angry farmers" lined up their tractors,[31] blocking dump trucks from entering the Chinguacousy landfill site, after 8,800 cubic metres of soil from the derailment had already been deposited there.

The watershed under Chinguacousy landfill flows south. South, well past the derailment site, ending in Lake Ontario. Leachate drifts restlessly in lively groundwater plumes, diffused over an even wider aqueous area than it would have had it been left at the derailment site.

The train came from Sarnia. Petroleum was refined there to make toluene, styrene, and propane. Brine was electrolyzed there to make chlorine. Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion wondered if the contaminated soil could just go back to Sarnia, "which has several chemical companies and has developed expertise in handling such wastes";[32] Sarnia is where most of the hazardous waste in Ontario is incinerated or landfilled. Today, Sarnia continues to be exceptionalized as a space of hazardous-waste production and disposal.[33] Logics of exposure to communities there proceed from the sacrificial logics of chemical infrastructure.

Here and away—but *away* is somebody else's *here*.

1 Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Verso, 2020).

2 Max Liboiron, Manuel Tironi, Nerea Calvillo, "Toxic Politics: Acting in a Permanently Polluted World," *Social Studies of Science* Vol. 48, No. 3 (2018), 333.

3 Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

4 Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

5 Peter Timmerman, *The Mississauga Train Derailment and Evacuation: November 10–11, 1979: Event Reconstruction and Organizational Response* (Toronto: Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Toronto, 1980), 1.

6 Anne Whyte, *Final Report to Emergency Planning Canada* (Ottawa: Emergency Preparedness Canada, 1980), 1, https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/hv%20554%20f56%201980-eng.pdf.

7 Julius Gorys, "Transportation of Dangerous Goods in the Province of Ontario," *Transportation Research Record*, no. 1264 (1990): 61.

8 Julie Livingston, *Self-Devouring Growth: A Planetary Parable as Told from Southern Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

9 Kim Fortun, "Ethnography in Late Industrialism", *Cultural Anthropology* 27, no. 3 (2012): 446–64.

10 See the website of Aamjiwnaang Solidarity against Chemical Valley at https://aamjiwnaangsolidarity.org/.

11 Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*.

12 "PCB" stands for polychlorinated biphenyl, used as a coolant.

13 Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* (New York: United Church of Christ, 1987).

14 Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

15 Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock* (Boston: Beacon, 2019).

16 Steve Donev, "Daisy Mae the Computer Puts 240,000 out of Their Homes," *Toronto Star*, November 13, 1979, A7.

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Katherine Ball, *Water Filtration System: Floating University Berlin*, 2018. PHOTO: DANIEL SEIFFERT.

Water Filtration System: Floating University Berlin

Katherine Ball

How will life change as our relationship to water transforms and we shift from being consumers of water to stewards of water?

Floating University Berlin is a nature-culture learning site. It is located in a polluted rainwater collection basin connected to Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin. During Floating University's inaugural year, artist Katherine Ball helped design, build, and maintain a water filtration system that uses biological filters to clean polluted water on site.

Floating University was erected on a concrete basin built to gather rainwater runoff from Tempelhof Airport (the Nazis' prized airport during World War II), and this location provides layers of history that contribute to the symbolism of experimental water usage and conservation. Floating University began in 2018 as an experimental offshore university for cities in transformation convened by the architecture group Raumlabor. It brings together neighbourhood residents and students from universities across Europe and the world to conduct interdisciplinary educational experiments reimagining how we can live together in contemporary urban space. In its inaugural year of 2018, over 10,000 people visited and participated. A successful citizens' referendum against the construction of high-price housing in Tempelhof has frozen all development there, and so the mid-century infrastructure of the rainwater basin must remain in place until the development debate has been resolved. Today, Floating University is stewarded by an association of 40 members, called Floating e.V.

Water Filtration System

At Floating University, experimental water systems are constructed at every possible avenue. Water cascades down the laboratory stairs and spirals through a series of biological filters. Then, the filtered water journeys to the university's kitchen, bathroom, auditorium, and greenhouse.

The filters are made out of plants, mushrooms, biofilms, sand, activated carbon, molluscs, and bacteria. They are located in a "spiral of bathtubs," a membrane filter, and a moving bed reactor.

The spiral of bathtubs consists of nine bathtubs suspended from the ceiling of the Laboratory Tower. The membrane filter turns rainwater into drinking water and provides water for washing dishes. Finally, the moving bed reactor filters the university's dirty dishwater so well that it is clean enough to irrigate the greenhouse, which grows thirty-five varieties of tomatoes from across Europe.

Water Qualities

Four different types of water are available at Floating University to experiment on:

Rainwater takes a six-kilometre skydive. On its descent through the urban atmosphere, it absorbs particulate pollution, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. This tainted rainwater spills off the roofs of the university buildings and funnels through a collection system for reuse.

Basin water comes from rainwater that lands on the Tempelhof Airport building and airfield as well as on Columbiadamm road. Currently, this tonic of automobile oil, vulcanized rubber, cigarette chemicals, and other trash drains into the large open-air basin where Floating University "floats" and then drops into the canal system and flows to the Spree river.

Greywater is water that becomes "dirty" when it is used. There are various "shades" of greywater. For instance, greywater from the university's offshore kitchen is laden with grease, fat, and food particles, while greywater from bathroom handwashing is laced with E. coli bacteria.

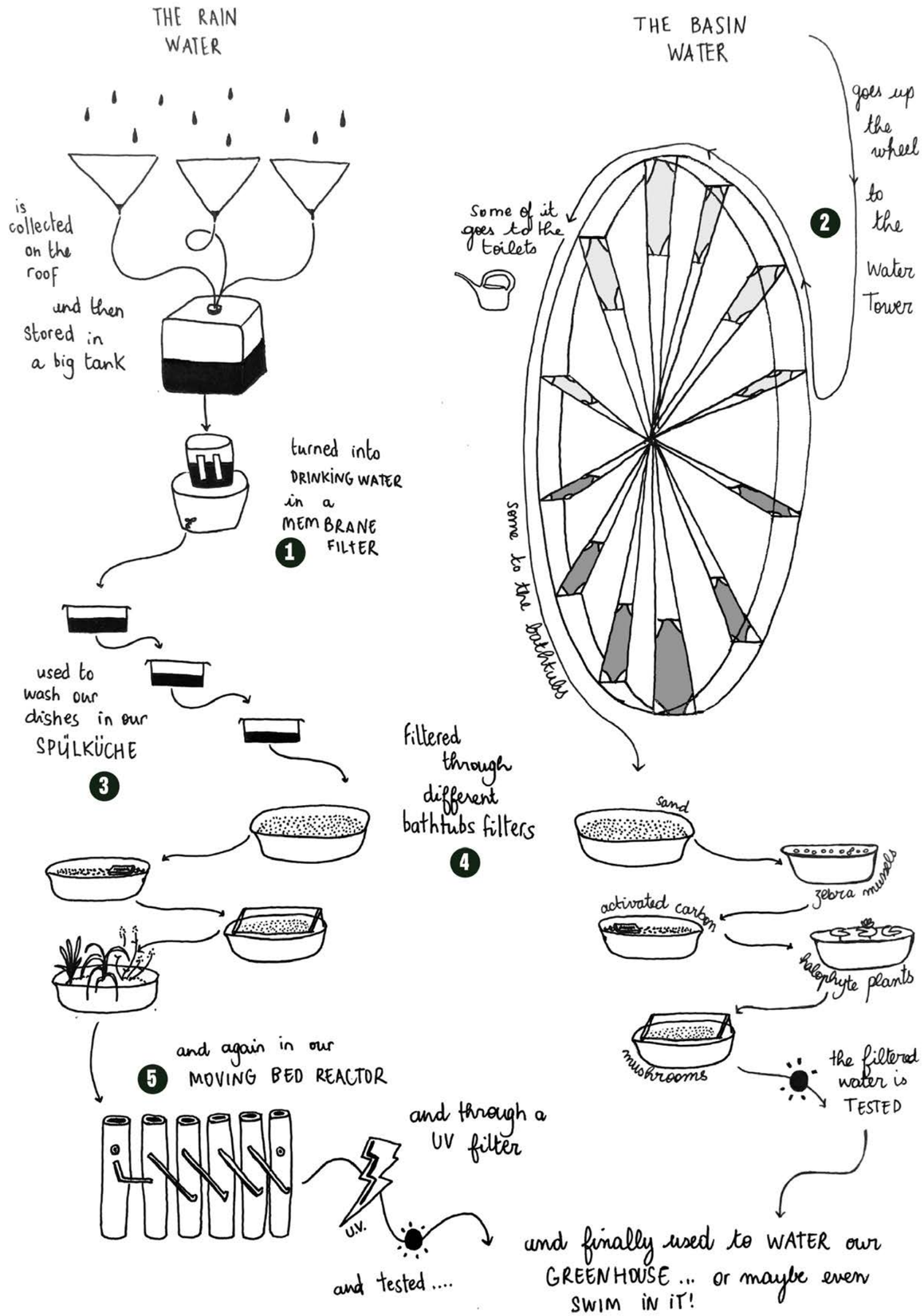
Blackwater is the most delicious. Produced by toilet water's interaction with human waste, blackwater is full of nutrients for plants as well as pathogens. It is possible to use aerobic decomposition to turn blackwater into fertilizer and anaerobic digestion to create methane gas for cooking.

Water Cycles

How might our participation in urban hydrology nudge society toward an ecological balance?

How will we adapt our practices to rapidly changing cities and a rapidly changing planet to keep water affordable and abundant?

How can we be radical dreamers of utopia while keeping our feet on the ground—or in the water, as it may be?



Katherine Ball, *Water Filtration System: Floating University Berlin*, 2018. ILLUSTRATION: JEANNE ASTRUP-CHAVAUX.

BREAK UP

i step over
watery edges

he pulls the canoe
across the ice

she paddles to the edge to collect candles
for her old ones to melt and then drink

you shoot ducks
while it's still easy

they gather at the edge
thinking

they gather in the sky
rethinking

they swim towards light
thinking otherwise

sun hits you from above
you melt from the inside out
faint ice as membrane
spreads sound across skin

aabawe: the first warmth of spring
aabawe: the loosening of the mind
to forgive

we gathered
in the winter lodge
formed from earth
and ice

we slowed
prayed
sang
dreamt

earth below
world above
waiting things out
but together

the upper parts
are exiled to the bottom
the lower parts
deported to the surface

there is euphotic rising
and falling
orbits of dispossession
and reattachment

achieving
maximum density:
39 degrees fahrenheit

you relax
at the surface
spread apart
cooler holding warmer

regular
repeated
ordered
locked

lake as one mind

OK INDICTS

i saved fallen snow
on my backbone
i saved fallen snow
from the front row

forsaking tomorrow
slow burning today
the sky is falling up

i saved shards of hope
in my sky blue coat
i saved drops of light
you paved paradise

i saved your mistakes
etched them into my skin
the sky is falling up

i sang like thunder
spilled anger like fire
the sky is falling up

please don't mourn me

skin departing bone
ice abandons snow
my skin's departing bone
pain instead of snow

a choir is spilling
the morning sun
the sky is falling up

archiving blindness
in meticulous ways
the sky is falling up

sweating bits of time
leaking pools of kind
dissolving bits of spine
drowning in sublime

skin departing bone
ice abandons snow
my skin's departing bone

you never saw me
and i never called out
the sky is falling up

foiled by indifference
melted by greed
please don't mourn for me
please don't mourn me

VISCOSITY

calling out
calling in
you're not fooling me

tethered to the kinship
of disassociated
zeros and ones

shining your crown
of neoliberal
likes

yelling the loudest
in the
empty room

gathering
followers
like berries

feeding
fish
to insecurity

sliding
into
reckless moment
after reckless moment

we witness:

too many holes in your hide
the broken skin of a canoe
the brightening of a mind
tracks, leading nowhere

at the
beach
we build a fire

sit in our
own
silence

peel off
blue
light

lie back
on
frozen
waves

breathe
in
sharp air

warm
into
each other

careful moment
after careful moment

SURFACE TENSION

and the road only goes one way
and you can't get lost
the trees drive by
and we carry the river

i ask you four questions
you give me four answers:

the ininiwish that lived here
the book that changed your life
and the river only goes one way
and you can't get lost

the akiwenzii that assigned you
the oil rig, it sang marx
we keep the critic in the back seat
i keep the answers
in the hollow part of me

and the river only goes one way
and you can't get lost

there are simple stolen moments
these are simple stolen moments
and we love when we are able

and there are beating wings reminding me if you fly
forever you can have two summers
and the river only goes one way
and you can't get lost

FAILURE OF MELTING

the frozen sighed
and gave up

the lake wrote
their letter of resignation

july 15
30 cubic meters

just like
the Gwich'in always said

i bring you coffee
a blanket
moonlight

i bring you stitches
a feather
three books

the caribou
sit
measuring emptiness

the fish
study
giving up

the molecules
calculate
the effects of hate

you breakdown
to a less
ordered state

july 15
30 cubic meters
just like the Gwich'in always said

the ice breathes
and gives in

the lake runs
out of options

the ice breathes
and there are
all kinds
of ways
to fail

i bring you coffee
a blanket
moonlight

i bring you stitches
a feather
three books

THE WAKE

hello my friend i've come
to see you again

everything we tried to grow
this year has died

you've tripped
inside my head

numb calm
dulled light
cold red

wearing just the lake
diminished in the wake

inside a commune of night
there's no way to make this right

acorns and fallen stars
a child that wasn't ours

ashes in my eyes
crushed fires
and shattered skies

injured certified
i wish i'd held you when you died

you've tripped
inside my head

numb calm
dulled light
cold red

acorns and fallen stars
a child that wasn't ours
ashes in my eyes
crushed fires

everything we tried to grow
this year has died

ashes in my eyes crushed fires
and shattered skies

HEAD OF THE LAKE

in a basement full of plastic flowers
pierogis
cabbage rolls

at the head of the lake
thinking under accusation

at the mouth of the catastrophic river
disappearing our kids

at the foot of the nest
beside trailer hitches, coffee, spoons

we made a circle
and it helped

the smoke did the things
we couldn't

singing
broke open hearts

i hold your hand
without touching it

we're in the thinking part of the lake
faith under accusation

at the mouth of the river
and the specter of free

at the foot of Animikig
beside bones of stone and red silver

in a basement full of increasing entropy
moose ribs, wild rice

in realization
we don't exist without each other

she says: there's nothing about you
i'm not willing to know

Theory of Ice was issued by
You've Changed Records, 2021.
Lyrics also excerpted from
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Looking for a Cure

Irmgard Emmelhainz

“El amor romántico es al patriracado lo que el nacionalismo es al Estado.” (Romantic love is to patriarchy what nationalism is to the state.)
—Yásnaya E. Gil

“We live in an ecosystem of hurt.”
—Mindimooyenh, quoted by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

1. The Future through the Looking Glass of the Past

Back then, family time meant watching the same content on a black screen. The zeitgeist of my childhood was to maximize the physical and mental productive potential of bodies to generate as much surplus value as possible. This used to cause a lot of anguish in adults and children, so entertainment leveraged algorithms to appease collective epidemics of anxiety. Our ecological practices and green consciousness—more than actually helping to prevent climate catastrophe—helped to calm shared dread about our climate’s future. We were convinced we were taking steps to palliate the toxic damage of human predatory presence on Earth: consuming organic products; rejecting plastic straws; recycling (as I did with the toilet tubes I wanted to make something creative from—although my mom very much preferred to get rid of them instead); buying “sweatshop-free” clothing; donating PET bottles to rebuild homes after the 2017 Morelos and subsequent earthquakes; biking rather than driving; signing petitions to rescue animals in endangered natural areas. In sum, we had put a series of measures into place that made us feel like we were doing *something*, including by being very well informed. In these and other subtler ways, an invisible apparatus of control subjected the population (voluntarily) to a grid of information distribution modelled after human brains, which was, in turn, manipulated by algorithms designed to accumulate value.

One summer, back when we used to recycle, ride our bikes, hear birds chirping when we woke up, post photos on Instagram and make TikTok choreographies, and watch hummingbirds visit the pots of colourful flowers on the patio, I was sent to Canada to Forest School. The place was a Mississauga Anishinabeg reserve belonging to Alderville First Nation in Southern Ontario. On the southern shore of Lake Ontario, 323 people lived in 1,200 acres, and maintained 100 acres on nearby Sugar Island. The community had been displaced a century back from the Bay of Quinte, their original territory, by the English. Agreements with the Canadian government guaranteed them some rights, the two fragmented grounds, and protection of their customs and traditions. They spoke about “resurgence,” “cosmogony,” and “recovery.” They had a huge solar-energy farm, and my favourite activity was the drumming class. I also have beautiful memories about the turtle nursery, a project to reconstruct endemic biomass along the shores of the lake and invite turtles back to nest. The community planted thousands of native flowers to restore the earth and attract pollinators, which I learned included not only bees but also wasps, butterflies, and flies. My Ojibwe friends, teachers, and hosts lived in log houses: long, single-room structures that housed from one to three families. Each of the ten Forest School guests were hosted by a family in one of those wonderful homes. But do not get me wrong! The Ojibwe also had modern houses with all the usual comforts. But back then, in the era of resurgence, they were working to recover their traditional lifeways and we were there to learn from them. My mom wanted me to learn how the Ojibwe sustained their lives collectively and cultivated ways of living together, grounded on a cosmogony transmitted from the Elders that honoured their ancestors and all beings on Earth.

The Ojibwe believed that the Creator of all things had flooded the Earth because its inhabitants were permanently at war. Only Nanaboozhoo and the animals survived the destruction (which, in retrospect, began to look like the destruction that had been extending all over the world and that we then called “the climate crisis”). From the flooded depths, they gathered soil for a new land: Turtle Island, the originary place of the Ojibwe.[1] I always thought that the community of Alderville was a little bit like Turtle Island: a space to rebuild, recuperate, to be born again. I was lucky enough to go three summers in a row to see my friends. After that—in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic—transportation got too expensive. My mom was a writer and her job enabled us to live well, without luxuries. She was a member of a government system of cultural producers that paid for her research and writing for three years at a time. But the scholarships suddenly disappeared. Flying (and transportation in general) became impossible to afford, and so did food, clothing—everything—as fuel prices skyrocketed. A group of conscious people began a movement where they refused to travel long distances, consuming great amounts of fossil fuel. A famous Swedish activist had been crossing the Atlantic by boat for years, and Europe by train. Flying came to an end for most of Earth’s inhabitants, and we went back to my great-grandparents’ times, in which only very few people could afford commercial flights.

In those days, I would hear adults talking about a new president who made some people very angry and others hopeful that all the chaos, toxicity, and vacuity we lived in would be finally transformed into true collective happiness, prosperity, and peace. My friend Sergio would say he was “only the new foreman” of the country, and, for many, the Tlatoani’s rejection of the signs of power and his criticisms of corruption were mere populist eccentricities that further entrenched his power. I heard fragments of conversations in which adults were outraged by extreme violence against women, corrupt politicians who got away with rape and theft, and children who walked into their schools with guns to kill teachers and peers. My school had surveillance cameras everywhere, and this made me very angry, because it thought that adults were actually extremely afraid of children. And, generally, it’s the other way around.

When I compare the past and present, I realize my childhood landscapes seemed all the same, like the content in children’s series from digital-streaming platforms that had killed television and reinvented time. On weekends, I had permission to watch some film or other for no more than two hours. The shows were pretty much all the same, as were the flavours of the candy I ate, the colours of my toys, the music notes and lyrics from the radio we listened to during the long commutes in intense traffic across the city. My friends’ parties took place in special hired venues filled with machines and other kinds of devices that ensured children would be safe and have fun. To be entertained (and happy) was our obligation. There was no room for boredom (for “poetry to emerge,” as my mom would say), to be curious to observe adults’ ways. There was also no time to lie on our stomachs to observe the life within a crack on the ground: better to bug-spray it, just in case.

Once, I remember my mom suggested we catch the rabbit inhabiting the bushes in the middle of the yard of our cottage in the countryside. She’d made a cage for us out of a cardboard box leaning on a stick tied to a string. We were supposed to pull the string when the rabbit came out to collect the gift waiting for her inside the box: a softened carrot. We sat for hours on chairs a good distance away from the cage—enough to not scare the rabbit away, but close enough to see and pull the string at the right moment. That day, Carlitos (the son of our house’s caretakers) spent some time with us. He had a nasty blister on his hand, which he had gotten, he told us, for being willing to play with those who give orders. I thought he had gotten it holding the rope from which a wheel hung, where Luca had been swinging for a while. I didn’t yet understand the dynamic between the “outside” and the “homegrown” kids, but Carlitos did for sure.

Back then, there were not many noticeable differences between living in the country and living in the city. Perhaps rural areas were less dense, the internet speed was maybe not as good, there were fewer things to buy, and, well, the country didn’t look like the city. But actual life was very similar. People sought salaries for working-class jobs that could be done anywhere (plumber, carpenter, property caretaker, butler, gardener, cook, cleaner). They would buy their food in supermarkets or mobile markets that offered goods also sold in cities. And even though there were no movie theatres, the pirate DVD market kept rural populations up to date on Hollywood and Disney productions. I remember that my country friends were not that different from me: we had pop culture references, toys, games, dreams—many things—in common. My family began spending longer periods of time at the country house. First, because of the successive lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic; then, because the water shortages in the city led to chaos everywhere, and to school and office closures. Next, the city became unlivable. Water shortages and skyrocketing fuel and food prices made life in the city even more precarious and dangerous than it had been before. So we moved permanently to the countryside.

There was a massive migration of city dwellers to rural areas. I remember the long rainy days when we took cover under our raincoats to run through the dense forest, playing hide-and-seek, or picking berries in our labyrinth and turning the sugary, fruity mixture in a gigantic clay pot for hours with a wooden spoon. Sometimes we would go for long bike or horse rides. People were still able to afford food for leisure animals, but with the drought, leisure horses began to disappear—most of the time, to appease human hunger. By the time I graduated from online high school, horses, cats, and dogs were gone. Our dogs and horse died natural deaths, I have to mention; we never replaced them.

Around the time we moved to the countryside, Carlitos’s father and five other men from the village disappeared. Mutilated bodies of women from adjacent towns had also begun to appear in the forest. It seemed that the murders had no purpose other than generating terror among people who refused to leave their homes. They knew that forced disappearance and terror had led elsewhere in the country to land dispossession. But everyone stayed, despite being terrified, and even though they had sold large portions of their cornfields to foreigners like us, who had transformed them into luxury leisure gardens for foreigners; but no one knew how to work the cornfields anyways. In 1915, the Agrarian Reform had redistributed land to the community of forty families who had established themselves there. A small hacienda in ruins and an obsolete hydroelectric plant were reminders of that era. Decades later, the communal lands had been fragmented and sold to foreigners, who had acquired the land to spend weekends and vacations on. For years, abandoned gigantic trash bags had been the mark of the weekend visitors. Aside from the originaries and the foreigners, some thirty families had come to live on the land alongside the highway, because they had been displaced from their original lands a few hundred metres away. Representatives had convinced them to sell their properties, and a real estate development company bought them off for very cheap. By the time we moved to the village, the real estate company had developed a massive sustainable luxury complex, and while it had a state-of-the-art water-collection system, it had still also hijacked the whole community’s main water source. This situation generated a lot of tension, partly because of land disputes among families, the newcomers (us and other foreigners and our displaced neighbours), the lack of water, food, and work, and the constant outages of electricity and communications infrastructure. Yet, many of our neighbours worked as cleaners, gardeners, and nannies, or doing maintenance jobs for the inhabitants of the luxury complex.

One day, at the magic hour when the sun is gone but there is still light, a hoard of tlacuaches (Mexican possums) began to unhook from the branches of the oyamel trees surrounding the village; then, a cloud of monarch butterflies flew through like quickly dissipating smoke. When the light was gone, fireflies arrived in a massive flock, illuminating the tlacuaches’ dramatic collective death in the main square. It seemed like the butterflies and fireflies’ passage had been a kind of a farewell to the possums. But almost nobody saw these events, because it was a holiday and the tlacuaches’ screams had been choked by the sounds of the firecrackers exploding well into the early hours of the next morning. By midday, the inhabitants found the bodies of dozens of tlacuaches lying in the main square. They discovered that they had died of toxic levels of lutein, the substance mixed into chicken feed to produce eggs with bright yellow yolks. The villagers had sold a small collective for egg production to the municipality and adjacent towns. While their chickens had become optimized machines, the chemicals used to “better” their food had intoxicated the tlacuaches.

These scenes—the tlacuaches’ bodies sprawled in the main square, the violent loss of family members, water scarcity, electricity problems, the lack of money and work, and tensions between the foreigners or those who command, also known as patrones or “reason people,” and the villagers—prompted the villagers to begin to autonomously organize. Before, the politicians had instated laws favouring reason people over the interests of originary inhabitants. Including turning a blind eye to the water source theft perpetrated by the luxury complex. But after the villagers organized—rejecting the government’s structures—us foreigners had to legally cede our properties to the originary inhabitants in order to be able to permanently live in our country homes. This meant we gave up the right to demand that the law act on our behalf. Then, we had to establish a rental and barter scheme. In our case, we gave up legal possession of the house and transformed the garden into arable land, in exchange for being able to live there. All the foreigners and older inhabitants came to realize that we were interdependent, and that mutual survival was at stake.

Why were we allowed to stay after the villagers declared autonomy? Sometimes I thought we were incredibly lucky. Maybe they felt protected by our presence. Or maybe it was because we brought technology and know-how of the modern world, like solar panels, money, sophisticated water-collection systems, and the internet. We also knew how to build greenhouses and where to buy the best and cheapest materials. They shared their land and knowledge of working the soil. We were aware of our privileged situation, our shaky

intercultural relations, and how much work needed to be done to undo centuries of damage and trauma from hubris, prejudice, racism, and the caste system.

Adults began holding collective assemblies to make agreements in everyone's best interests. There were weekly meetings to discuss community tensions that felt like group therapy. An assembly met twice a week to work through colonial and *mestizaje* trauma. In a third group, originary people could confront the foreigners with their qualms and anger. A mediator from a neighbouring town came to help in dealing with the tensions. We were all aware this work was being done for the common good. The very first intercultural assembly was carried out to decide how to best implement an independent network of satellite communications. After winning a legal battle against business magnate Carlos Slim and his communications monopoly, Telcel (which provided mediocre coverage for the village), we hired Communitarian Indigenous Telecommunications (TIC-AC)—who implemented highly functional cell phone networks in the area. The second task of the assembly was making collective decisions to establish a medium-term plan to build infrastructure to capture, filter, and store rainwater.

Around that time, a group of First Nations activists from the north had come to Mexico to offer workshops on reckoning with colonial racist stigmas and traumas to build a road to recovery and resurgence. The villagers requested a weekly workshop in the community centre, and began a process of self-construction through the revitalization of their Matlatzinca and Nahua roots. With my friends from the village, I practised and exchanged some of the knowledges I had learned at Forest School in Canada: how to make small knives, how to observe the weather to make predictions, and how to heal small wounds with plasters made of plants that I grew in a small parcel of the garden behind the kitchen window. I also took an interest in figuring out ways to restore endemic biomass in the area, and so I joined the community's delegation to begin reforesting, following the First Nation Elders' wisdom: "Trees are good because they are simultaneously networked into the sky, the dirt and the breath. They feel everything and they record it in their tree bones."[2]

The belief that reason people's fossil fuel addiction was the root of the spiral of self-destruction and destruction of the world had become ubiquitous. It had also become common knowledge that autonomous ways were the solution. Territories in secession from the nation-corporate-state (like ours) began to proliferate, even within militarized, hyper-surveilled, and automatized urban areas. To establish security from the threats of the militarized state and as an autonomous zone, a territory had to first become a "safe zone" by buying self-defence equipment. In the process, autonomous zones wrestled, to varying degrees, with their own increasing militarization and the political necessity of violence. The most popular equipment was sold by the Israeli company Zahal. In other cases, communities had been transformed into autonomous zones through struggles for territorial defence. They were called ZADs: *zones à defendre*, or zones to defend. For example, the Atenco ZAD was constituted through an action against corporate and government appropriation of the land to build a new airport for Mexico City. The inhabitants of Atenco won the fight, recycled the infrastructure for the airport that had already been built (some 70 percent of it) and transformed it into greenhouses and water reservoirs, and then claimed secession. They not only seceded from the state but also rejected invasive technology and automatization along with corporate presence, including fibre-optic, satellite, and electricity networks. They began to use radio waves to communicate, inspiring many other communities throughout the shrinking Mexican nation.

Every day, our community dealt with the legacy of colonization, with long-standing tensions surrounding the former status of reason people and bosses, and for the rest, contending with the traumas inflicted by a school system that did not recognize their cultures, languages, knowledges, histories, and life experiences. For many generations, their traditional ways of life had been criminalized and deemed inferior. Yet, inspired by Indigenous resurgence and Oaxacan communality, we discussed ways to transform our predator links to the land and to cultivate relationships based on respect, non-interference, self-determination, and freedom. We came to consider nature not as a "resource" but as a gift we have an obligation to reciprocate. We were determined to build a future that rejected heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and capitalist violence through a collective process of decolonization, finding ways to deeply reorganize life. I will not get into how the community splintered due to contradictions, resentments, miscommunications, and a general lack of trust. I think focusing on what we *did* achieve is more important.

By the time I was eighteen, autonomous communities defended by community vigilantes had become a major form of self-governance across the world. The largest militarized zones back then were Gilead and the Islamic Republic. Both were anti-consumerist theocracies and militarized economies focused on solving the population's fertility problems. They were definitely not places where I would have considered living. There were also smaller militarized zones dispersed across semi-autonomous territories in old cities across the world, still identifying with the nation state schema. Walled in, they coexisted with the autonomous, or rebellion, zones, united in a confederation linked by secession from the nation states that had once overseen their territories. Aside from rejecting corporate forms of technology and the state, autonomous zones banned productive work and cultivated belonging and interdependence through collective and reproductive work. Three pioneering autonomous zones remain the leading examples for many others: transgender, drug-user, and orphan communities that established themselves in an abandoned cemetery on Delhi's periphery at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In India, transgender and intersex people were traditionally known as hijras, and many made a living as sex workers. As a community, they represented the redundant population (those excluded from the consumption and production cycles of the old pre-ZAD capitalist system), seen as the excess of India's neoliberal nationalist project. Similar to parachuteros and barzonistas in Mexico City, they occupied the cemetery's grounds on the outskirts of Delhi and created a care and mutual aid structure, like an extended, multigenerational family. They slept in improvised tents among the tombs, planted vegetables, and re-envisioned human family beyond the division between the living and the dead. Theirs was an exemplary paradise of the vulnerable with the capacity to recover and survive, together. Three other communities that inspired the autonomous zones were the liberated refugee camp in Calais, in northern France; the Tornillo refuge home for migrant children in western Texas, some seventeen kilometres away from El Paso at the Mexican-American border; and the Canal Bordo community in Tijuana. In the two first, NGOs and corporations like IKEA donated tents for migrants stuck in transit. Eventually, they declared themselves ZADs and began to self-govern and to establish stable mutual aid and sustenance microeconomies. But, in truth, it all began in Acapulco.

2. The Past Present: Our Dark Era Illuminated with Light Stemming from Black Screens

Our lives and societies around the world have been transformed by technology. We have trusted big tech and celebrated the internet as an ungoverned space with unlimited emancipatory potential. But the collapse of reality under surveillance capitalism and the monetization of our personal data is not an accident: it was always a long-term objective of technology companies. We are living in a scenario imagined by the dystopian TV series *Black Mirror*: a narcissistic reflection, addressing a self that has been dissociated and dislocated from its reflection in an opaque mirror—a mirror that obliterates not only the alterity of the image but also the existence of the other, of alterity itself.

The internet, moreover, has become as a complex propaganda apparatus to which content is irrelevant. The capitalist capture of information is not about policing content but about keeping information circulating. We don't know yet the full extent of the manipulation of Facebook, Google, and Amazon in the last two US elections. But we do know that digital platforms are executing censorship. For instance, Zoom cancelled a meeting on its platform hosting an event involving Palestinian human rights activist Leila Khaled last October, and a month before, Facebook and Twitter censored information detrimental to Joe Biden's presidential campaign. The same companies intervened last year when they shut down pro-Trump accounts, including Donald Trump's own accounts. What is at issue here is not whether digital platforms are partisan actors, but rather the fact that their immense power goes unchecked. They have reshaped human civilization under the cybernetic episteme, which is one of the elements making us oblivious to the challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

The "cybernetic episteme" describes how our relationship to technology and machines (which are inseparable from capitalism) gives shape to how we understand the world.[3] Cybernetics results from the modern episteme of knowledge production, which views the world through scientific and mathematical models: as calculable, measurable, extractable, exploitable. The digitalization of everything is grounded in the belief that it is possible to formalize all knowledge, to transform everything into data. In other words, cybernetics means the subsumption of social worlds into the digital through techniques of statistical forecasting and data modelling.

The cybernetic episteme also stems from a Eurocentric world view, which began with the so-called discovery of the New World and the creation of empires and colonies, which is inextricable from the scientific revolution. In this sense, cybernetics is inseparable from the Western civilizing project for the whole world, which connected the world through technologies like the telegraph, steam shipping, and fossil fuels and has culminated in globalization as the deregulation and financialization of the world economies.[4] The Western civilizing project (based on Enlightenment values: equality, peaceful public life, access to modern science, the rule of law, democracy, technology, and progress) came with the creation of infrastructure to unify nations and the world,[5] or what is known as the "technosphere," comprising the digital world, machines, factories, computers, cars, buildings, railways, and the technologies we use to produce food, extract material resources, and convert and distribute energy—increasingly, all the tools that keep us alive. In the present, the infrastructure of our world—the technosphere—is fused with information. The world we inhabit is designed by data.

The technosphere is not insignificant or abstract. Its mass amounts to fifty kilograms for every square metre on Earth's surface: a total of 30 trillion tons that coexist with the diminishing hydrosphere (water, cryosphere, frozen polar regions) and the biosphere (all of Earth's living organisms).[6] The cost of the technosphere is the denial of life cycles (thinking of death and illness as aberrations to be suppressed), climate change, environmental devastation, and the decimation of the biosphere and hydrosphere. Like humans, the technosphere needs external energy input, which is not sustainable as long as it comes from fossil fuels that will eventually deplete. Our environment now, including nature, has been constructed by humans, and large parts of it are social and technological artifacts—including climate change. An invisible infrastructure dominates—an infrastructure that always remains partially occult: we are alienated from it just as we are produced and managed by it.

A model for human existence that sees the brain as the site of all consciousness is bound up with the cybernetic episteme and regimes of datafication. This model is based on the mind/body and nature/culture splits, which produce dangerous, reductive, and obsolete oppositions between humans and their environment. We have more recently confirmed that the gut is also a locus of human bodily intelligence, as its mission is to facilitate our capacity to adapt to our environment. The cranial and computational paradigm based on centring intelligence in the brain implies that human intelligence processes statistical structures. However, according to art historian Caroline Jones, this is a limited way of relating to the Earth based on the fetishism of representation.[7]

The gut-immune-brain axis works in a much more sophisticated way: mobilizing memory, adaptation, and an understanding of our environments based on visceral sensation. This non-consciousness related to the gut-immune-brain is in charge of maintaining homeostasis, optimizing the organism's operating systems, and navigating the environment. Clearly, the body is part of and exists in symbiosis with its surroundings: not through a bracketing or reduction of it (as the Western phenomenological model of perception suggests). Human environments may not, after all, be the product of a representative structure but, instead, the outcome of a symbiosis between humans and planetary systems that gives shape to our consciousness and enables us to learn, navigate, and remember. Jones thus proposes that this non-cerebral consciousness grounded in the gut means that the mind is distributed throughout our bodies. For instance, autoimmune illnesses due to the presence of toxic substances in our environment (pollutants, chemicals, pesticides, biocides, industrialized foods, medicines) are mutations or adaptations of our bodies to our surroundings. Insofar as we conceive of technology as an extension of our cognitive apparatus—as a prosthetic—we leave out everything else. What is at stake—in our structures of thinking, and therefore of technology—is our capacity to adapt to an environment in upheaval due to climate change: a job done by the gut, not by the brain.

3. The Limit of Liberal Values

"Mestizo es decir desindigenizado
por el Estado."
(Mestizo [in Mexico] means
de-indigeneized by the state.)
—Yásnaya E. Gil

Wars under the conditions of globalization are terrorizing practices exercised against populations living under military occupation by corporate states, which govern through necropower and necropolitics. The 2014 disappearance of forty-three student teachers from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Mexico demonstrates clearly how corporate states have become nothing other than death-distribution machines. They are unstoppable, even though populist power has recognized that, as just one example of many such devastating events, "Ayotzinapa is a thorn [of state violence] nailed to our souls."[8] It is not populist rhetoric but rather collectives of civilians searching for disappeared relatives who have been fighting against the machines that distribute death and authoritarianism. The state has been incapable of naming forced massive disappearance, and the necromachines refuse to back off.

How is it possible that we came to live in a world that globally accepts a system that thrives on destruction and death? For many, the present emerges from the European "world-making" of the sixteenth century: colonization and imperialism amid a scientific revolution that stoked Europeans' fervour to "civilize" the world by imposing first their religion and language (as in Latin America), and then their science and culture. The European world view was also achieved by exporting the political technology of the nation state and by connecting nations through technologies like the telegraph, steam power, fossil fuels,—precursors to market globalization and economic deregulation. Yet, the European promise of modernity has not been fulfilled for everyone. The romance of progress has obscured dispossession, environmental destruction, and mass alienation. Political theorist Achille Mbembe asks how anti-colonial leaders bought this vision of the modern world: How did Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Jawaharlal Nehru agree to this? According to Mbembe, it was because they fell in love not with the material aspects of modernization but with the Enlightenment values of equality, universality, and public peace. Anti-colonial thinkers, therefore, spoke in good faith about ending poverty through modern development.[9]

In continuity and solidarity with anti-colonial thinkers, liberals have put discussions of restitution, recognition, inclusion, and decolonization on the table, with the desire to build a new order that is more plural and equitable. Yet this is clearly impossible without systemic change. We are all born with differently pigmented skin, yet "race" remains a cultural

construction that impacts human beings differentially, establishing the place everyone occupies in the world, variously distributing privileges and degrees of access to modern lifestyles and inscribing vulnerability. We live in a stratified global caste system, divided into privileged and redundant populations. The first inhabit modern enclaves with access to education, health care, jobs, and entertainment; the second live in sacrifice zones, where the colonial relations at a global scale materialize through devastation and death. While "difference" is sought out and celebrated in the global culture industries and Hollywood, liberalism will remain unable to reproduce a formless and kaleidoscopic heterogeneity of differences unless colonial socioeconomic structures are upended. As Mixe writer Yásnaya E. Gil has argued, the identification of liberals with movements supporting the rights and claims of Indigenous Peoples casts both light and shadow. In her immense generosity, Gil grants that non-Indigenous people have established healthy and respectful relationships with Indigenous cultures across Mexico, supporting their struggles, learning their languages, and becoming immersed in their cultures. At the same time, the recognition of originary languages and cultures, for Gil, hides a deep reality: ongoing prejudice that has transformed originary cultures into "folklore" and thus a consumer product perpetuating the "good savage" myth, simplifying and appropriating their lifeways and idealizing or caricaturizing their cultures. It also produces an obsession with erasing difference.[10] In spite of liberal good intentions, the colonial blind spot of modernity continues structuring hierarchies and creating institutions that normalize and harvest forms of pedagogy, which get implanted in bodies with repressive force. According to Bolivian Aymara feminist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, the Mestizo is incapable of producing citizenships of difference because their subjectivity is constituted by fissures of self-negation and parody. In other words, modernity is the demand to repress and expel the "Indian" within. This expulsion is still the dream of the Latin American elites, understood as progress[11]—a myth of a colourless society where the neutrality and secularity of state universalism grants citizenship for everyone, even in spite of differences. The question is whether to struggle to insert originary populations (insofar as their status is that of subalterns) within the circuits of citizenship or to instead get rid of the nation state.

Early in May 2021, in a ceremony in the Maya city of Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador apologized for the five centuries of discrimination and abuse committed against Maya peoples by national authorities and foreigners during the Spanish conquest, comprising the three centuries of colonial domination and the two centuries of an independent Mexico. A hundred metres away, a contained protest was taking place against the Mayan Train, a megaproject of death that will displace numerous Maya communities and radically change their lifeways and livelihoods.[12] So while there is official and overt recognition of dispossession and injury to originary populations, damage nevertheless persists in the name of modernization and progress,[13] with the government offering citizenship to Indigenous people by connecting their lands to global markets through extractivists projects and exploiting them as cheap labour.

At the same time, elites want to forget the past that involves them as the dominant pole of a colonial axis. A true mirror reflection of this forgetting is the current nationalist narrative in which *all* Mexicans (including descendants of Europeans and Mestizos) now identify with the splendour of the pre-Hispanic past. Claiming to be the descendants of cultures like the Aztecs or the Toltecs, they appropriate the spectral remains of the pre-Hispanic past through clothing, ceremonies, and folklore. Thus, in the current Mexican historical imaginary, *all* Mexican citizens are the victims of Spanish colonization. This narrative is perpetuated through government policies such as the creation of the diplomatic posts of the "consuls of memory" and through the academic attachés in Mexican embassies in charge of documenting damages perpetuated upon Mexico by the Vatican and the European aristocracy during the Spanish Empire.

This narrative has likewise been adopted into mainstream "liberal" culture. In a scene from Palestinian filmmaker Elias Suleiman's *Happy End* (2019), we see settler Mexican actor Gael García Bernal stating his grievances against the 500-year-old conquest of Mexico, which continues through Hollywood's imperial conquest. García Bernal declares in the film, "by seeking to produce a film about the conquest in *English*, and starring a Spanish actor, Benicio del Toro." In the narrative, García Bernal appropriates the status of the colonized person, and this is how he demonstrates allyship with Suleiman, and thus with the Palestinian cause. Suleiman's film is about hubris as a naturalized way of relating to others in everyday life, and everywhere: in his Nazareth neighbourhood and a restaurant there; in France trying to find a chair by the Tuileries Garden fountain; and in the display of power by a military parade crossing the streets of Paris. García Bernal's appearance (which occurs when Suleiman is visiting a producer in New York who has agreed to make his film) is symptomatic of the colonial blind spot that has enabled descendants of Europeans in former colonies to claim the status of the oppressed. The same goes for the academic term "Global South," which erases the fact that, for the most part, academics and cultural producers living in the former Third World actually live privileged lives, as precarious as the lives of our European and North American peers. As urban dwellers, our privileges are sustained by the ongoing dispossession, displacement, and exploitation of originary populations.

Perhaps this is the reason why the universalist or multiculturalist liberal world views have become unsustainable, even delegitimizing. Fragmented worlds and inequality prevail, underscored by the impossibility of drawing a world in common, a shared future. While originary peoples in Mexico and elsewhere have a voice in multicultural forums to discuss racism and linguistic dispossession, a scarcity of solidarity with territorial and resource defence demonstrates the ongoing hubris of settlers. For instance, Gil's village, San Pedro y San Pablo Ayutla, has been embroiled in a war for water since 2017, ever since a group of armed men from a neighbouring community occupied the lands containing the water source for her region. This water dispute is taking place amid the intensification of extractivism, dispossession of the commons, and a political economy based on selling resources to the global market, with the collateral effect of destroying the environment and the means of human subsistence. In the meantime, across the country there is a hunt for leaders of struggles to defend their territories and women to facilitate extractivist projects. But this is also occurring in the context of the recognition and celebration of a plural Mexico.[14]

"Decolonization" for those of us descended from European occupiers should mean "demodernization" or "becoming unmodern." Consider that the Wiwa people of northern Colombia believe that Westerners are their "little brother"—irresponsible, misguided, mischievous, and ignorant—and that the Wiwa's task is to protect the Earth until he grows up, hopefully before he destroys it for good.[15] Clearly incommensurability, not difference, is necessary. We must adopt a critical stance toward tools, concepts, vocabularies, and organizational practices that characterize the landscapes of struggle today, because the instruments we are using to change unjust structures come from them. We must acknowledge that the nation state is submerged in capitalism, and thus will never grant justice, reparation, and citizenship to everyone. This is why activism means not only putting our words, energy, and bodies in solidarity with struggles for territorial defence, but also imagining something alternative to the nation state, which concentrates the majority of wealth in few hands.[16] In the medium term, we need to foresee the damaged caused by our current cycles of production and consumption and the futility of the state: there is no social contract in contemporary civil society, only self-elected political entrepreneurs acting in their own interests. When we blame the state, accuse it of being "bad" or "failed," we are giving up our true powers of organization, mutual aid, and a possible future in common.

1 This story is told in many contexts by Indigenous Peoples, including, for instance, by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arp Books, 2011).

2 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 65.

3 According to its Greek etymology, "episteme" is a system of understanding. In *The Order of Things*, philosopher Michel Foucault takes up the term "épistémè" to mean the historical, non-temporal, a priori knowledge that grounds truth and discourses. Several épistémès coexist at a given time as the parts of various power-knowledge systems.

4 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "World-Making, 'Mass' Poverty, and the Problem of Scale," *e-flux journal*, no. 114 (December 2020): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/114/366191/world-making-mass-poverty-and-the-problem-of-scale/.

5 Chakrabarty, "World-Making, 'Mass' Poverty, and the Problem of Scale."

6 Nikos Katsikis, "Operational Landscapes and the Planetary Thünen Town," *Technosphere Magazine*, May 29, 2019, https://technosphere-magazine.hkw.de/p/Operational-Landscapes-and-the-Planetary-Thunen-Town-wEHRDNXmerHhSqB7jYXGuC.

7 Caroline Jones, "Questioning the Cranial Paradigm," *Edge*, June 19, 2019, https://www.edge.org/conversation/caroline_a_jones-questioning-the-cranial-paradigm

8 As stated by Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in a press conference in the state of Guerrero on February 25, 2021. For more, see (in Spanish): Roberto Garduño, "Ayotzinapa, una espina en el corazón de los mexicanos, dice AMLO en Iguala," *La Jornada*, February 24, 2021, https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2021/02/24/politica/ayotzinapa-una-espina-en-el-corazon-de-los-mexicanos-dice-amlo-en-iguala//

9 Chakrabarty, "World-Making, 'Mass' Poverty, and the Problem of Scale."

10 Yásnaya E. Aguilar Gil, "De chairos, izquierdas e indígenas," in *Ää: manifiestos sobre la diversidad lingüística*, ed. Ana Aguilar Guevara et al. (Mexico City: Almadía, 2020), 97.

11 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un undo ch'ixi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2019), 36, 38.

12 Roberto Garduño and Néstor Jiménez, "Estado mexicano ofrece disculpas a mayas por cinco siglos de oprobios," *La Jornada*, May 4, 2021, https://www.jornada.com.mx/2021/05/04/politica/005n1pol.

13 Angela Davis, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Nikita Dhawan, "Planetary Utopias," *Radical Philosophy* 2, no. 5 (Autumn 2019): https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/planetary-utopias.

14 A beautiful book in solidarity with Ayutla's water struggle is Saúl Hernández Vargas and Juan Pablo Ruiz Núñez, eds., *El lugar del agua. Palabras para Ayutla* (Oaxaca: Yagular, 2021).

15 As stated by a Wiwa Elder in the first episode of the Colombian TV series *El Buen Vivir*. The episode is available online: "El Buen Vivir | Capítulo 1: Curar con los espíritus," YouTube video, 26:01, posted by Canal Trece Colombia, May 11, 2020, https://youtu.be/YpoBz3UTCAM.

16 Davis, Spivak, and Dhawan, "Planetary Utopias."

Legible Motivations: “Not Everything Is Genuine”

Nehal El-Hadi in conversation with
Mark V. Campbell, Elicser Elliott, and Charles Officer

The archives can take many different forms and behave in many different ways. They can be material or digital, selective or undiscriminating, regulated and uncontrolled. They can be housed online, or in buildings with security and climate control. But these aren’t the archives I’m most interested in—the archives I prefer to work with the most are messy with unclear boundaries, maintained by informal infrastructures, catholic in their criteria, fluid in their scope, and responsively open to those interested in them. I’m drawn to the ways in which these repositories are managed and accessed, the ways in which order emerges through patterns.

When I was asked to convene a panel on “diffusion,” I pictured ideas, images, languages, stories moving from areas of high concentration into those of lower concentration. This year has seen these flows happen organically and politically, but we’ve also watched as the conditions of our Black lives have contrived the dissemination and distribution of our emotions and narratives. I thought of the work of filmmaker Charles Officer, DJ and academic Mark V. Campbell, and artist Elicser Elliott—three Black men in film, music, and the visual artists—and the ways in which their work has provided reference points for my own understanding of Blackness in Toronto.

I’ve taught Officer’s music videos, documentaries, and films in university classes looking at social policy, storytelling geographies, and critical media. Campbell’s North Side Hip Hop Archives project both confirms historical legacy and celebrates Canadian contributions to a global cultural phenomenon. Elicser’s murals are some of the most recognizable in Toronto, and his work enlivens neighbourhoods around the city—I don’t know what kind of city Toronto would be without his art.

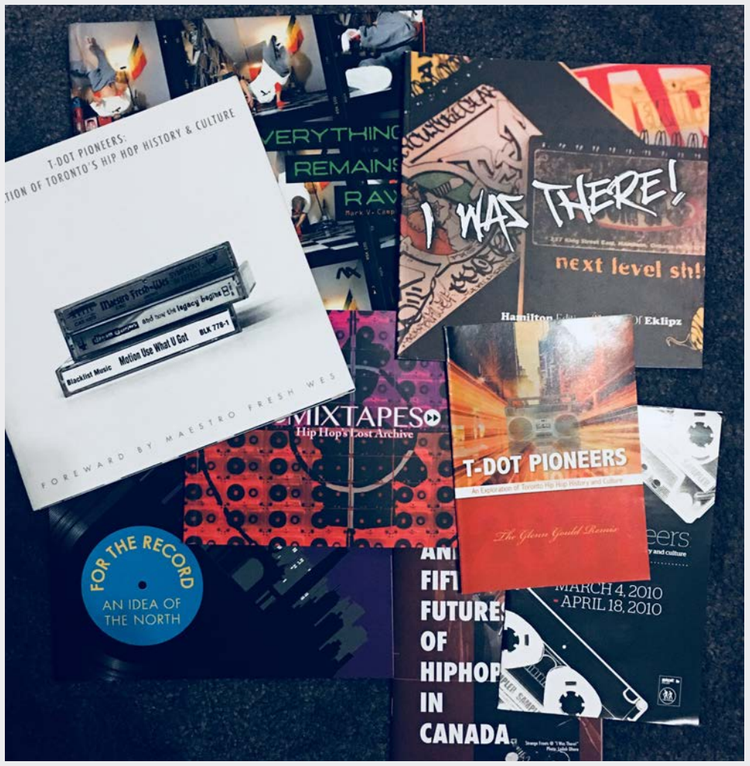
I brought them together for a conversation about the effects and temporalities of their work, most significantly as Black artists engaged in cultural production during a time when to be Black and alive is to be insisting on Black life. The conversation took place online: Campbell and Elliott were in Toronto, and Officer was in Winnipeg, MB, where he was working on a television series.

Nehal El-Hadi: I wanted to start with why you do the work that you do, and who you do it for.

Charles Officer: I felt like there was a massive gap. It’s a choice: you can either be in front of the camera or you can construct the stories. I felt like it was important to focus my energy on learning how to create the canvas that would allow talented Black people to work on this canvas. I felt there was this really important space of archiving our stories cinematically. There’s a not a lot of space that we’ve been allowed to occupy in this particular industry. I wanted to change that, one story at a time.

When I got into film, “Who’s your audience?” would always be the question. “Who do you want to reach?” And I realized—very quickly—what they’re trying to get you to do is make something for all the white folks. And if my work wasn’t speaking to them, it wasn’t valid. You can make something for an audience member from your family, someone who you love, who’s close to you, that you want to speak to. I often make these films for my nieces and nephews. That’s my audience. My mom. My aunts, my uncles—you know? Because they are reflections of my community, and I try to personalize it that way. And if I speak to them, the audience is actually larger.

Mark V. Campbell: My audience has changed over the last decade. When I started doing [the North Side Hip Hop Archives], I wanted to create resources for students and educators. Now my audience is the architects and pioneers of hip hop, trying to get them to see their legacy and to historically contextualize their achievements so that they can understand what they achieved. In the little tiny context that we live in, we may not see our value and our impact. But when you zoom out, our speech patterns have completely transformed North American culture, even if we don’t get credit for it. I try to do this kind of work to give people a larger context in which we can understand our value better.



North Side Hip Hop Archives exhibition catalogues, 2010–2018. COURTESY MARK V. CAMPBELL.

Elicser Elliott, *Giants of the Danforth*, 2020. 975 Danforth Avenue, Toronto. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Elicser Elliott: I’m an artist, and at least part of my duty is to talk about my day and times. That’s why I [paint murals], to educate the passer-by. If the person doesn’t know ackee and saltfish, let’s say, I put it in there, and they’re like, “What is that? Is that scrambled eggs?” No, that’s ackee and saltfish. So they go home, they research and find stuff, little tidbits to take away.

Especially my work on the street, for my community, for my surroundings, for the props getting up. It’s turned into more like I’m talking to the community. When I do a big mural, it’s usually funded by a grant from the city, so I have to encompass everybody. So sometimes it breaks down to taking the whole idea of the community and putting it in the mural, but somewhere in there, there’s the Black perspective. That’s my audience, sometimes.

Then when I’m just painting for myself, I tend to just go right out there. I can get really literal because I paint figuratively. But I try to not do it in the literal sense, so the viewer interprets it how they want to interpret it, instead of me pushing the full narrative on them. If they can see it from their perspective, it sticks with them a bit more.

NE: Have you ever found your work in places that surprise you?

MVC: I love libraries, but I don’t know nothing about the library sciences. What’s surprising to me is that the US Library of Congress hit me up: “Can you come talk about North Side Hip Hop?” And I’m like, “What am I going to tell you guys—you’re the Library of Congress. You should know everything there is about preserving.” It shocks me, because not only am I completely intimidated to go talk to archivists about this work I’m doing without training, but, in my mind, if they had valued Black life, I wouldn’t even need to exist. The work that I’m doing wouldn’t need to happen. It seems really curious to me that people are really interested once you start doing the work without the resources or the infrastructure. I think that’s the most surprising place that the work has shown up. I’m not doing anything radically different than anyone else in the archival sciences. I’m just storing it, preserving things, and talking about them. But it seems like there are other groups of people that pay attention.

CO: *Unarmed Verses* (2017) going to South Korea in 2018 [for EBS International Documentary Festival] was eye-opening. There’s this idea of the struggle of those who live in a lower income bracket, but it was surprising that the film—about this young twelve-year-old Black girl in Villaways here in Toronto and her experiences—resonated with so many people in South Korea. I’ve always known that’s the amazing power of cinema, the reach of it.

I was having a conversation with a guy blatantly telling me that he’s a racist, and then I’m in an audience that’s embracing my film. The experiences are interesting because he doesn’t know that I’m a filmmaker while I’m there [in person], but it’s amazing what that conversation would have been if he’d seen my film and then met me after. It’s always an interesting experience with cinema—what they assume you are, and then, when you’re in the cinema and they’ve seen that you’ve made that work, how they treat you. It’s fascinating that way.

NE: Elicser, what’s resonating for you?

EE: It’s being in different scenarios and

Charles Officer, *Unarmed Verses*, 2016 (film still). 86 minutes. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CANESUGAR FILMWORKS.

Charles Officer, *Unarmed Verses*, 2016 (film still). 86 minutes. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CANESUGAR FILMWORKS.

the idea of: How do you come off without the context of your work? That's a thought a lot of artists sometimes grapple with, I think.

NE: How do you grapple with it?

EE: I don't know. There are situations where you're in one arena where they're talking about your work, and they're speaking about it in this way, and you try to go to another place, and you're treated in a different kind of manner. It's like [Jean-Michel] Basquiat trying to catch a cab after the show. It seems like everybody treated him one way in the gallery, but as soon as he stepped out of the gallery, he was looked at in another way.

NE: This is something that I'm sure you guys are dealing with: How do you move through the fact that your work comes into demand in the wake of tragedies? How does it affect the way that you think about its production and dissemination?

MVC: I always get phone calls from the media when there's a shooting or they want an expert opinion about a rapper. And I always say no to them. And these horrible articles still run, and they usually get an American perspective on something that happened on Spadina. As I do the work, I start to close down the legibility of the work that I'm doing, so it's legible to the people I want it to be legible to. I'm thinking about Charles making films for his family members. This is part of our blessings. We've always been speaking in code, and hip hop being cryptic is an extension of that.

The work always gets taken up at the worst times. Outside of saying no to discussing your work with certain people, I also make sure that the work becomes legible in certain kinds of ways. When I'm talking about mixtapes or something like that, then I'm speaking to certain kinds of people who know about these things. Opacity.

NE: The right to be opaque.

MVC: Yup.

CO: We've been doing our work for the reasons that inspire us, for our communities, for our people, and for our own survival. These tragic moments that happen—we've been experiencing them for a long time. And these last ten or twelve months have been crazy. But we've always been here. We've been talking about things for a long time. I kind of equate it to the idea of blood money. Suddenly, there's this situation where organizations and institutions want to play some sort of role in our well-being. There's been centuries of them abusing us. I'm not fooled by the idea that now they're suddenly on our side and they want to see us prosper. Every time something happens, I can't tell you how many times I've been asked to do these things that I have to vet: Who's asking me and why? And for my own well-being, there's rarely the consideration that we're actually experiencing something. I've had moments where I've turned down these requests and I'm getting a backlash, like I'm not trying to participate. It's like: Yo, I've *been* participating. You haven't been participating. So don't put that on me, not now.

There is that advantage right now for Black artists to finally get their shit done and take advantage of this moment. But I don't think that should be at the cost of your own mental health, your own well-being, or against your principles. You know what I mean? All this to say: through this whole process, you have to understand that not everything that is coming out of this right now is genuine.

NE: Thank you, Charles. Elicser, how do you make the choices in your career that you do?

EE: It feels sometimes like there's an underneath reasoning why they're picking you for a particular gig or campaign. And you feel weird about that. I got a request to put my work and images on one of these e-cigarette campaigns—basically, put your pieces on e-cigarettes for the preservation of Black life. I just didn't even answer that email. But the fact that emails like that could go around … I just don't care to have a say on it.

NE: I wonder if you all think about the temporality of your work—how your work exists over time. Elicser, we'll end with you, because I'm also interested in the ways that your work is put up and sometimes painted over. First, Mark: How do you think about temporality and distance over time for your work?

MVC: March was the ten-year mark for the North Side Hip Hop Archive. If something happens to me, what happens to North Side Hip Hop? It has forced me to think about how to become a platform for the work, and to become infrastructure for our community. It feels like I'm doing public education work and also creating not just the language but also the platforms so that people can begin to archive their own work. I think about temporality all the time. With digital archiving, I constantly keep my finger on the pulse. If I disappear, what happens? Is North Side in the cloud somewhere? Will it always be accessible? What happens to the physical materials? How many students have I trained to take over? How many people know how to do this with nuance? I think about that more than I think about the things in the archive. Some people want to be encyclopedias of information, and I've got to figure out how to make a digital asset and what an NFT looks like and what does that mean for archiving Black stories going forward, if we're trying to do share splits on songs that never got copyright, or where labels went under.

CO: One of my inspirations getting into filmmaking was that cinema actually immortalizes. And what I understood was that these ideas, well after you're gone, will remain. It's one of those mediums that—whether or not it was going to be true for me—I felt was an important space. It had a natural connection to archiving our stories. But for myself as well as my own work over these years, I had to realize that I made my first film in 2000. Last summer, the University of Toronto reached out about archiving my work, and they actually expressed that they don't have Black filmmakers in their archives. There's a young filmmaker working with our small company [Canesugar Filmworks] who's going to be helping to put that material together. It also triggered her mind about how she's going to be taking care of her stuff as she's moving forward, so it gives her a nice pathway into preparing to archive her own work.

For me, it's the "each one, teach one" vibe: Make sure that the next generation is inspired, and they're continuing that lineage of work. That's the way that you can contribute.

EE: We already have that in the graf community, the sense of archiving. If we're going out on a mission to go paint trains somewhere at three in the morning, you better have good cameras. Like, right after—take a flick and get this, coz the piece is going to roll away. But in the sense of the city and painting murals, sometimes pieces fade or whole buildings get built in front of my pieces.

Preserving the work of Black artists appears to take on new urgencies when the infrastructures that promote and support their art rely on a market that mythologizes exceptionalism and rewards tokenism. But none of these circumstances are surprising, exceptional, or new, and treating them as such challenges the authenticity of the work that Black artists somehow manage to produce consistently and in defiance of what they have to contend with on the daily.

As If Our Future Past Bore a Bad Algorithm

Liz Howard

*

A few particles ambushed the past
I opened my mouth to laugh and laughter
fell from the television
I said to myself
it's almost better than real sugar
This happened yesterday as I traded
my own scalp for grain

Gold loaded our skulls
onto the backs of the born
and no credit was given
where no credit was due

Expectation
having grown so heavy
in its basement

In between accident and arrival
we are suspended
A significant horizon of downcast fire
in a public moment
my head tilted to the side
like, what?
The cogito
is the body
is nature
is the backward glancing continuum of Western history
writ in blood?

It's as if these winters have nothing on a chin
tilted upward
speaking plainly, it is easier to tide
the lunar part
We are bound
and the world is what I can feel
up against this boundary
The sentence
becomes my future mail, my student debt,
these heads of nine crows I retreat
into storage

Scrolling through the temple of your name
I become locked into the commute of this
falling night
still dressed for the office
with my thighs awake
As if any art could reify
what time has taken away
The fact so brief I could not see
the temporal bind in front
of my face

*

History could be
my mother smoking in her truck
out a cracked window
The bluish greys eddying
toward escape
as all known stars accelerate
A bloodstream of dark matter
and the truth I'll never contain

In another history
a grandmother sleeps on a bed of hay
while the night sky screams a green light
of solar rays. Across the province
a grandmother picks burrs from her worn skirt
in a shack at the edge of the reserve.
A moose has been shot but where does she go
for her water?

Here I am filming my mother this past summer
demonstrating for a young cousin how to witch
for a well:

"Hold a saw by its edge with both hands
and bring the handle up to your chest
let it fall then count the bounces
that's how many feet down the water is"

*

The future history of mind
takes everything to forgive
the impulse to rue the day
I met you at the university
I cannot make peace with that
which will not leave me
to test the surface tension
of deeper blues

If I hollow the morrow could you love me
as the poppet of your lost youth?

I can make an occasion of the hour known as 3 a.m.
for us to seep so readily into confusion

A young man pisses on the sidewalk in front of us
unknowingly
pushing a gasp up from his throat before he cuts
and runs down the residential street

Could it be that I've lived too long
with an idle mouth and my boots untied?

The bones of some medieval boy
discovered in the dying lips
of an uprooted tree
in the news today

Call me a taxi when the dawn is incendiary
the green of this could never have known me
not entirely

Dream apartments we could live in but never rent
The sun hunts me and everything I hold against my sense

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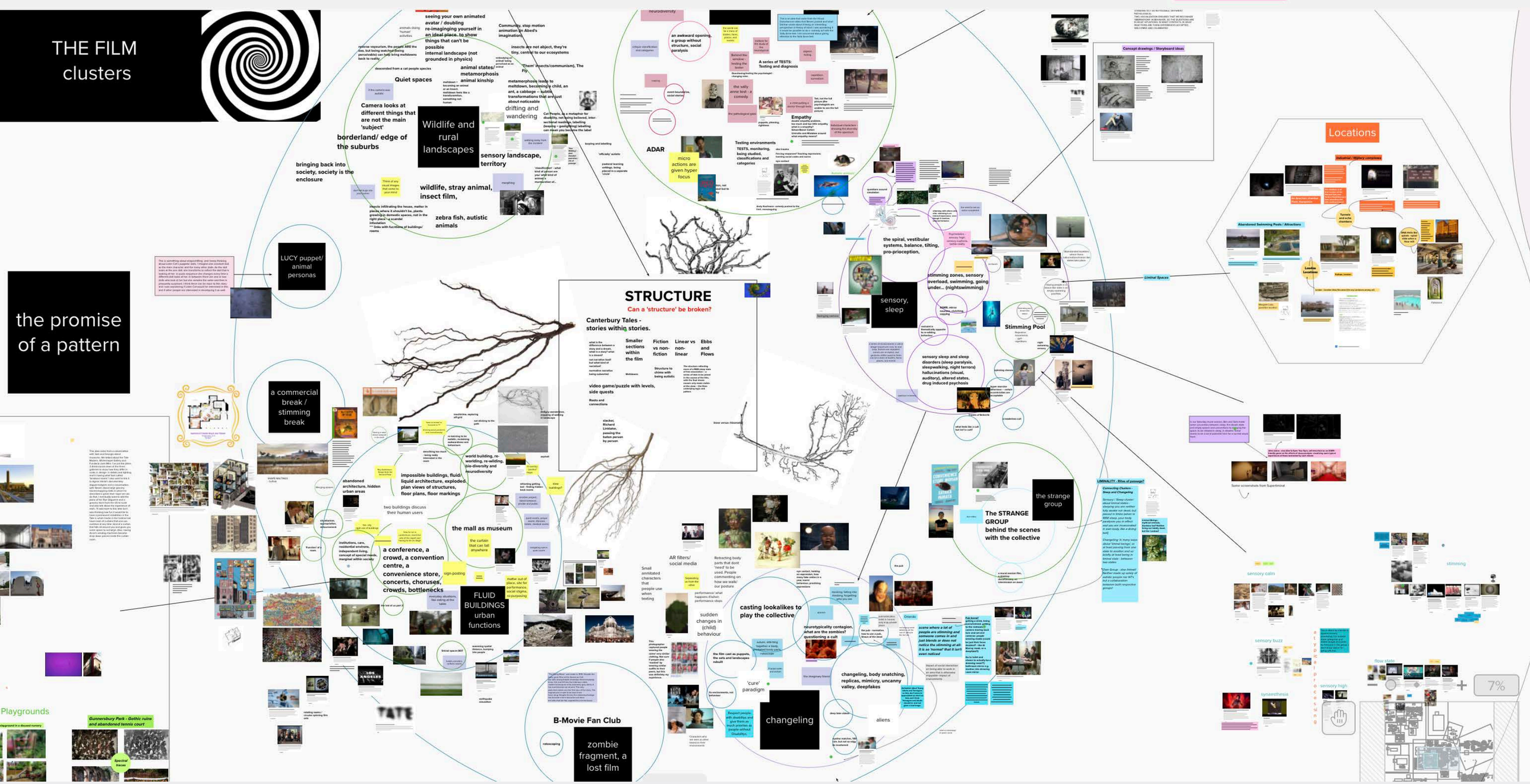


The Neurocultures Collective:
Co-creating Moving Images

In 2019 and 2020, a number of film workshops were held in the UK and online as part of a research project titled *Autism through Cinema*, led by film archaeologist Janet Harbord and artist-filmmaker Steven Eastwood. It was not autism under the microscope in these workshops, but rather the cinema itself was placed in the laboratory, its norms dissected. Workshop participants from the neurodivergent community considered the cinematic face, body proxemics onscreen, and event boundaries. Eye-tracking technology—often used in testing the perception and attention of autistic individuals—was reverse-engineered to reveal how a normative cinematic operation conditions the way the viewer looks and sees. Backgrounds and peripheral details were given status beyond the intentions of the source films, through enlarging and reframing film images. Interventions were made into existing film soundtracks in order to privilege environmental sound over insistent dialogue and score. Through this process, the assumed neurotypicality of the cinema came into focus, with its reliance on economies of body gesture and comportment, inferential shortcuts, and orthodoxies of social interaction configured around the emoting face.

The shared findings of the *Autism through Cinema* events established that autism—along with so many other marginalized ways of being in the world, and our many attention differences—cannot be encountered within existing cinematic forms. An alternative moving-image language needs to be parsed, highlighted, invented. One that does not look at autism through the neurotypical gaze but expresses itself as neurodivergent experience.

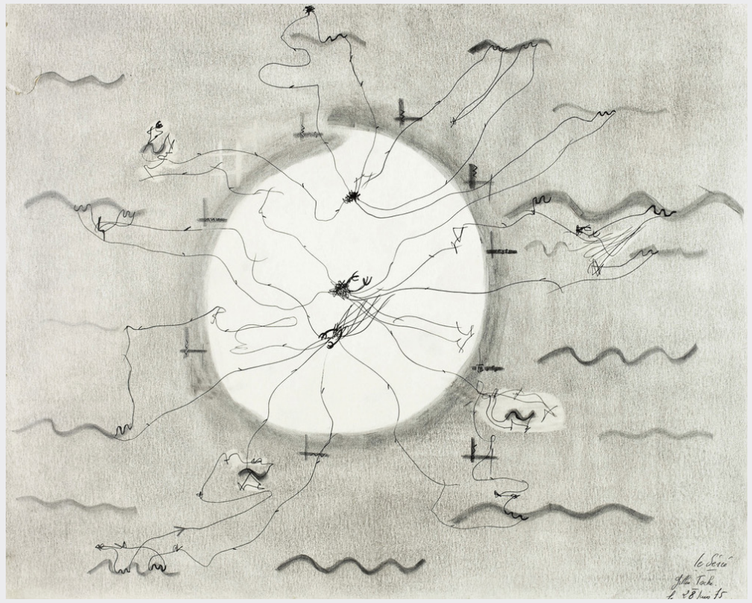
The workshops were designed to act as building blocks toward the formation of a neurodivergent community of people, whose ideas, experiences, and skills would come together in the co-creation of film practice. The Neurocultures Collective, formed at the end of 2020, comprises seven autistic artists: Sam Ahern, Georgia Bradburn, Benjamin Brown, John-James Laidlow, Robin Knowles, Anupama Mann, and Lucy Walker. The collective is collaborating with Steven Eastwood to devise and make a feature-length film, the working title of which is *Neurocultures*, and a multiscreen gallery installation titled *STIM CINEMA*. One shoot, two artworks.

The co-creation process has adopted a range of platforms and methods, including notation involving diverse media and, owing to distancing requirements under the COVID-19 pandemic, online visual collaboration through MURAL—a platform that lends itself to visual rather than textual thinking. An outline has emerged, one

that resists classification and instead offers a series of interlinking sequences, films nested within films, spiralling into and through each other. The content reflects a number of the co-creative group's key concerns, which include masking and camouflage; critiquing the psychological structures that inform testing and diagnosis; rewilding social spaces with eradicated gestures; shape-shifting states; stimming;[1] pleasure in repetition; and fascination in recurring patterns, such as the spiral. This kind of circularity and recurrence is in the DNA of the moving image, beneath its stories and temporal chronologies. Nineteenth-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge's moving-image experiments are like prototype GIFs. The *actualités* of the early filmmakers the Lumière brothers prompted return visits by early film audiences to view the same single shots. As far back as the zoetrope, introduced in the 1830s, humans have displayed the desire to see an action repeatedly conducted and completed.

The Collective's murals have become topographies, landscapes to glide over, but in their detail they have been cultivated as flowers, with propagating spores, image seeds, radiating petals, and extending roots. Each flower is a concept formation, pollinated by collective members as they hover across clusters, picking up and dropping associations, discourses, images. The form of the spiral in particular has enabled an arabesque in thought. In one cluster: a network of balances and imbalances, propositions for images that swing, rock, rotate, stim, and the ear canal, itself a spiral. In another: the convenience of the convenience store and the conventions of the convention centre are questioned, with liquid buildings rushing in as solutions to the crowds and cacophonies emblematic of the old normal that we might resist returning to, rather than long for . . . Spin classes, liminal spaces, bots, rotating rooms, aerial views of civic traps and escape routes, exploded architectural views envisaging sensorially-pleasurable buildings, synthetic landscapes of societal possibilities, slow buildings, quiet spaces. In a third cluster: zoological perspectives on the human species, metamorphosis and meltdown, insects and ecosystems, becoming a stray animal, the drifting camera, a film with no centre . . .

The process of co-creation has cultivated its own unique methods, working with slowness and deep listening, and continually reframing how art happens collectively. This reciprocal process makes hierarchies level, and deliberately intervenes in cultural and social acts of "looping"—philosopher Ian Hacking's term for the effects of the classifiers, classification, and classified on each other—in this case, how autistic readings of expert models, for example, theories of mind, can give rise to resistance and change. The methodology also borrows greatly from the radical frameworks of other organizations and thinkers. These include collaborator Project Art Works, a charity based on the south coast of the UK that works with neurodivergent artists to develop a process-based, tactile, material studio practice—a sharing in mark-making receptive to the inclinations and movements of those working within and outside verbal language; and the Participatory Autism Research Collective, established in 2015 by autistic scholar and activist Damian Milton and others to build a network through which those wishing to see more significant involvement of autistic people in autism research can share knowledge and expertise. The Neurocultures Collective also takes inspiration from the anti-psychiatry of pedagogue Fernand Deligny and his concepts of "primordial communism" and "lines of flight." Deligny's free-associative, linguistically plastic terms—which came into being as a result of living in communes in France for autistic children and young adults, and working with the residents there—include the "Arachnean," or the network as a mode of being. The spiralling mural clusters produced by the Neurocultures Collective resemble not only wildflowers but spider's webs . . .



A map of movements by Janmari (student of Fernand Deligny) traced by Jean Lin, June 12–13, 1975. Reproduced in Fernand Deligny, *Cartes et lignes d'erre: Traces du réseau de Fernand Deligny, 1969–1979* (Paris: Éditions L'Arachnéen, 2013).

1 Stimming is the practice of physical repetition as a way of expressing or alleviating anxiety, or simply taking sensory pleasure in recurrence.

Receipts

Immony Mèn and Lilian Leung (for Public Visualization Lab)

In this conversation, Immony Mèn and Lilian Leung reflect on the recent project Receipts *(2020), which documents the ongoing shadow pandemic of anti-Asian racism. In addition to the direct health impacts of COVID-19, Asian communities are experiencing parallel escalations of racial discrimination and violence, housing precarity and homelessness, and isolation, which disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. Originally presented inside a shipping container at the Bentway, under Toronto's Gardiner Expressway,* Receipts *is a multimodal interface that receives (via voice, video, and text), anonymizes, archives, and performs (on the web and in public) the testimony of people who have experienced or witnessed anti-Asian aggression in public spaces. At its core, this project asks: How can anonymizing testimonies of racist aggression create structures of accountability, solidarity, healing, and community? How can data collection be mobilized as an activist tool, counter to the regimes of surveillance in which it typically operates? The artists hope to build on this prototype in order to develop a more robust and flexible tool that equity-seeking groups can modify and employ to influence political decision-making.*

Lilian Leung: Growing up in BC, my Chinese Canadian identity didn't play a significant role in my life. Of course, Cantonese culture was a large part of my life growing up, but thoughts of belonging and othering have become more present within the past few years. My own work has been centred on learning more about Chinatowns over the past two years—and this endeavour to learn more about Chinese Canadian history has only intensified and broadened now.

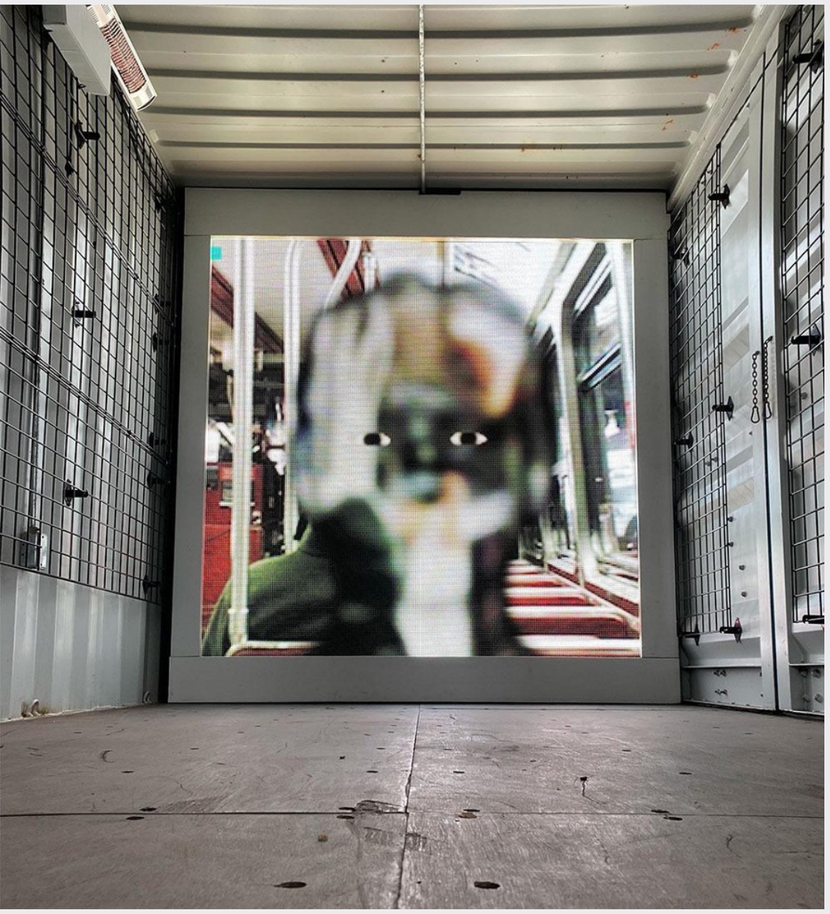
Immony Mèn: *Receipts* assembles stories from individuals who have experienced anti-Asian racism. these testimonies scroll across the screen as Watson (a speech-to-text AI) affirms that these sentiments and actions occur in public spaces, in our neighbourhoods, to our loved ones, to people we don't know yet. The hypervisibility of faces and the racialization of the pandemic become palpable, and an anonymized voice asks viewers to feel the weight of the participants' words. Anonymity is key to this project. It applies technologies and processes commonly used to recognize faces, voices, and bodies, and re-envisions them as a way to protect the identity of individuals who wish to share their experiences. We are working on developing a different type of recording—one that uses computer vision, speech-to-text, and character re-enactment—to protect the immigration status, professional networks, and personal relationship of participants. This platform was developed with the intent of offering it to other vulnerable communities outside of the South, Southeast, and East Asian diasporas on Turtle Island. While various forms of movement tracking and artificial intelligence are often used to identify patterns and build racist predictive surveillance, we are also interested in how it could humanize experiences and memories, performing words that I am too familiar with.

LL: I'm often struck by the strange sense of both wanting to be seen and unseen at the same time. And the anonymization of these stories offers something unique: it both provides safety for individuals and absents the body. This gives people an opportunity to voice their own experiences differently, legitimizing that it is not only the most brutal and tragic experiences that should be shared—but the pervasiveness of these experiences as well.

IM: I am physically distant from my family and my home city of Montreal, and in the summer of 2020, I was searching for ways to remain present. The Groupe d'Entraide Contre le Racisme Envers les Asiatiques au Québec were sharing their experiences of increased vulnerability and visibility: at Costco, Korean markets, metro stations, and other familiar locations. In the group's comments section, strategies were being shared, condolences offered. Participants organized records into social media threads to support identifying actions against offenders. Being in this space inspired me to develop a way to safely record and share testimonies; a space to listen and understand how gestures, bodily fluids (spit), and rhetoric are weaponized; a place to connect with all those who have to think twice about how they move as their bodies become increasingly more vulnerable during this time.

LL: Having spoken with elders in the past year, it's has been heartbreaking to hear their stories of anti-Asian racism. Many individuals who grew up during the time of the Chinese Exclusion Act—before it was repealed in 1947—felt that fear returning to their lives. These experiences and stories don't exist in isolation, and there's been a re-emergence of solidarity between other racialized and marginalized individuals, like the Black community. Though our experiences are our own, a project like *Receipts* is an opportunity to come together and organize for the changes we want.

The visual documentation of Receipts *was taken during the* Safety in Public Space *exhibition at the Bentway during October 2020.*



Public Visualization Lab, *Receipts*, 2020. Installation view at the Bentway, Toronto. COURTESY THE ARTISTS.

Weaving a Local, Grassroots Web

Joy Xiang

In an excoriating year, on many fronts and unequally felt, mutual aid and long-standing activist and abolitionist movements have become mainstream, in wide popular and digital media circulations, where folks are helping each other survive, materially, emotionally, politically. Local groups are, and always have been, fighting in the arenas of public and community space for the equitable consideration of all. But whose public space? And who is given rights to public space and resources, anyways, in so-called Canada, on land stolen by colonizers and parceled out in property models, often under coercive treaties?

In Hamilton, Keeping Six (K6) is a peer-based harm reduction action league formed in 2018 out of the opioid crisis, by organizers who met working together at the city's first safe injection site, in an effort to give voice to people who use drugs. Since the pandemic, K6 has been doing direct outreach sessions instead of its weekly drop-ins, which included food, socializing, planning, and sharing what people were hearing on the streets. But the organization's art and writing drop-in at Wesley Day Centre is still running, and artists can submit to *Keeping Six Quarterly*—a zine outlet and tool of visibility.

The zine features personal stories, survival tips, bad-drug alerts, visual art and fiction, and updates on city policies on encampments. Kelly Wolf, K6's arts coordinator and a theatre maker, says the publication has been a release for people who are ignored or criminalized in the public realm. Outside of the direct community, the quarterly also circulates in places like coffee shops, and K6's "Love in the Time of COVID-19" issue was nominated for *Broken Pencil*'s 2020 zine awards. That visibility "becomes part of the landscape of our city, like there's this organization that's looking out and sharing and reminding you of these people," Wolf says. "Art can't not be political, even in the absence of political statements."

Last year, K6 was part of a coalition of medical and legal groups that successfully filed an injunction with the provincial Superior Court to prevent the City of Hamilton from tearing down large encampments downtown. The Hamilton Encampment Support Network (HESN) emerged from this organizing, and its members de-escalated and legally observed encampment removals after the injunction and participated in the two-week protest and sit-in at Freedom Camp, which rallied to defund Hamilton police and instead invest in free housing. Out of this groundwork, HESN officially launched in May 2021 to connect people with food, resources, clothes, and art supplies, and has a hotline for supply requests and alerts of city teardowns. Gachi Issa, an organizer with HESN, imagines a scene in the city directed by the needs of houseless people and grounded in relationships, disability justice, agency, and boundaries, and not saviourism, which is rooted in whiteness. "We've never seen this many people on the ground before," says Issa. "This is exciting—I think we're building power in Hamilton that wasn't [previously] there."

HESN also looked toward and consulted with the Encampment Support Network (ESN) in Toronto. Mobilized in the spring of 2020 by a group that includes many artists and musicians, ESN started with painting slogans on signs that encampment residents requested. The colourful, graphic signs ("We Are Not the Virus!", "We Need Permanent Housing Now!") can still be seen all over encampments and other parts of the city, disrupting and influencing the imaginary of public space. Temporary housing and aggressive encampment evictions (because bylaws state no camping on public property) only further displace houseless people, forcing them to move again and again, or to invisibilize themselves to keep safe. The bylaws don't recognize encampments as their own communities, necessitated out of the very failure of policies and official social supports.

In addition to delivering supplies, ESN has an online toolkit for pushing back against imminent evictions, a newsletter, active social media, and a podcast—*We Are Not the Virus*—that tells stories from encampment life, arranged elementally around earth, water, wind, and fire. Artist Jeff Bierk has spoken about intentionally politicizing these mutual-aid actions to reveal gaps in city agencies, which lose connection to actual people the more that their processes become centralized (and alienating).[1] Together, these efforts are demonstrative of what Aliya Pabani, producer of the podcast, says about creating counternarratives, where unhoused people give their own analyses, and thus "reconfigur[e] existing relationships between neighbours, housed and unhoused," practicing new solidarities.[2]

Other anti-displacement work includes advocacy for adequate and affordable rental housing, and for new conceptions of development that do not rely on dislocating pre-existing communities, especially affecting racialized and working-class neighbourhoods. Organizers recently saw Little Jamaica, concentrated around Eglinton Avenue West in Toronto, officially designated for a study to become a heritage conservation district,[3] through a unanimous city council vote in April 2020. This came after more than two years of advocacy by groups including Black Urbanism TO (BUTO).

One strategy of this advocacy was the "cultural mapping study" Black Futures on Eglinton (BFoE) in 2019–20, developed in partnership between BUTO and the nonprofit urban planning firm CP Planning, led by Cheryll Case, which took both a creative and human rights approach. Case emphasizes the importance of BFoE in recording and preserving the rich cultures of Little Jamaica, through publishing a poem book, producing videos and events, hosting live reggae nights, and involving people who do not normally take part in alienating policy conversations.[4] The resulting report intentionally translated the lives and cultures already extant in the neighbourhood in order to make them readable to policymakers and the very language of policy, where action, in this case, was possible.[5]

Many grassroots initiatives strategize through creative expression, subversion, and intervention, including the Friends of Chinatown Toronto (FOCT), who launched its first public campaign in 2019 with a parody development sign—the first non-English one in the city, mimicking an official one located at 315-325 Spadina Avenue. The site, hosting restaurants and places of ineffable and unrecorded communal movings, has been a grounds to fight gentrifying issues facing Chinatown specifically, as well as city cultural enclaves, widely and internationally. At a FOCT virtual town hall in February 2021, more than 160 people attended, listening to the exploration of establishing a community land trust (CLT) in Chinatown.[6] CLTs are one non-profit tool to take land off the real estate market and place it under community control—leveraging the act of owning under settler capitalism to self-govern properties, which leaves room to establish accessible housing and communal public space, and to resist destructive development. Other examples of Toronto CLTs include the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust and Kensington Market Community Land Trust, which FOCT is looking to as a model, as well as, elsewhere, the Boston Chinatown CLT, Bay Area CLT in California, and Sogorea Te' Land Trust, also in California. Yet, CLTs are only part of an ecosystem of other tools for building community agency, as indicated by urban planner Chiyi Tam 譚奇—meaning continual collective care and reciprocal feedback have to be part of CLTs' operations to avoid replicating predatory landlord practices.

Thinking about local anti-displacement work raises the question: What are the processes by which discounted peoples enter into recognition, here and everywhere? Grassroots movements mark direct, measurable, connected, and cumulative acts, often in coalition with each other. It's necessary to also attune to the ways "culture" may be weaponized to create "attractive" urban areas and to act on the responsibility of artists, many familiar with precarity themselves, to resist.[7] These times call for adopting infinite (and strategic) flexibility, continually asking questions. Like moments of action, or dancing to fill space; as the actor Bruce Lee said, be like water: fill the container of violent systems, choose when to flow and when to crash.

Illustration: Michael Deforge. COURTESY ENCAMPMENT SUPPORT NETWORK.

1 Jeff Bierk, "Mutual Aid during a Pandemic: Why Artists Helped Form Toronto's Encampment Support Network," interview by Yaniya Lee and Leah Sandals, *Canadian Art*, December 10, 2020, https://canadianart.ca/interviews/mutual-aid-during-a-pandemic-why-artists-helped-form-torontos-encampment-support-network.

2 Aliya Pabani, "Grammars of Trust," in *Back Up Your Data!* (Mississauga, ON: Blackwood Gallery, May 2021), 15, https://content.blackwoodgallery.ca/media/pages/publications/back-up-your-data/d5ba4edbeb-1620226860/blackwood_back-up-your-data.pdf.

3 Under the Ontario Heritage Act, heritage conservation districts give cities the power to restrict demolitions and alterations to properties within.

4 Sam Dharmasena, with Cheryll Case, "Black Futures on Eglinton Bring Community Concerns to Forefront," February 2021, CJRU The Scope at Ryerson, radio broadcast, https://soundcloud.com/scopeatryerson/black-futures-on-eglinton-cultural-mapping-study/s-W4J7c6JgqN5.

5 Case speaks about the study categorizing things in the neighbourhood as "cultural processes" or "cultural objects," according to a federal task force that recognizes culture as one of four categories of sustainability. This understanding was leveraged to preserve Little Jamaica.

6 See a recording of the town hall: "A Community Land Trust in Chinatown?," YouTube video, 1:12:52, posted by FOCT – Friends of Chinatown TO, March 5, 2021, https://youtu.be/w6RnqljkswQ; and the full report: Zeina Ahmed, Thomas Kempster, Sanjida Rabbi, Chiyi Tam, and Nick Vo, *Community Power for Anti-Displacement: An Inclusive Future for Downtown Chinatown* (Toronto: Friends of Chinatown TO, December 2020), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Q_D9h4jW-C6HmMbVe-7avWm3za8sTgK-/view.

7 "If [artists] do not resist speculative interest in the neighbourhood, their very success might lead to their own displacement." The Public, *Art, Design & Gentrification: A Primer* (Toronto: The Public, n.d.), 13, https://thepublicstudio.ca/files/No11_Art_Design_and_Gentrification_Primer.pdf.

The First Chapter

Jacob Wren

The first chapter of the book I'm currently working on is entitled "The moment I no longer wanted to be famous," and, for me, the implication is that once one truly understands the science and the full situation of our current ecological collapse, all other concerns should somehow fall away and one should dedicate oneself only to deep political change. But, strangely, it doesn't quite work that way. This feeling that the planet we live on and with, our home, is rapidly becoming uninhabitable, and that many (but not all) of us are the perpetrators of this situation—this feeling is both everywhere and nowhere; it is too diffuse. I continue to do all the things I've always done while at the same time feeling that instead I should be doing something else. If everyone stopped everything they were presently doing and engaged in 24/7 civil disobedience until the problems were solved, I assume it wouldn't take long. It wouldn't take long until we found a completely different way to organize society and our lives. But not only can *everyon*e not seem to do this, I can't even seem to bring *myself* to do so—to bring myself to believe that to do so would do any good. It might be said that a good part of my paralysis exists because I benefit far too much from the systems I would also like to see dismantled. I constantly ask myself: To what degree do I actually want to see these systems dismantled? In my lack of convincing answers, I fear I am not alone.

I'm remembering a poem I wrote when I was a teenager, something about "when our turn for extinction arrives," a moment I, at that time, felt was somewhere in the distant future, a moment I currently feel is more or less now. Unless we act. A global refusal of the status quo more overwhelming than any seen in previous human history. A global refusal of the status quo that could be truly up to the task at hand. Meeting the situation's diffusion (of feeling, if not of impact) with an equally focused solidarity and intensity. Of course, this is a fantasy. But so many of our actions are based on at least a certain degree of fantasy. Whatever we imagine the future will be like—apocalypse or solar-fuelled possibility—I believe exists (to such an uncomfortable degree) at the level of our imaginations. So many writers, activists, thinkers, and radicals have imagined a different future and continue to actively do so. If you haven't read them already, I might suggest: Grace Lee Boggs, adrienne maree brown, Ejeris Dixon, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Renee Gladman, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Saidiya V. Hartman, Jas M. Morgan, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Nora Samaran, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Kai Cheng Thom, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Sylvia Wynter, and of course so many others. I continue to write while wondering if perhaps it would be better to read other writers instead of me. But, if I'm honest with myself, I know I can't stop. (I sometimes say I'm too much of an artist for my own good.) And I'm not sure stepping aside would do any more good than, for example, trying to do the exploring and understanding I'm attempting here. But neither am I certain it wouldn't.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about how polemic or not polemic my writing should be—how concentrated or diffuse—and what exactly writing in more (or less) polemic ways might actually do, in the world or upon the consciousness of people perhaps a bit like you, dear reader. I can't quite imagine anything I write is going to change much in the world, and I can't even really imagine that it's going to significantly change your mind or your position. Yet still it must do something. (But this something is so diffuse. And this very diffusion might also be what is best about it.) What is most alive in the act of writing is the fact that I can never know—sending words out into the world that might go beyond what I intend, that might reach someone and unsettle their thoughts in some small or large way. And that, most likely, will go out into the world and achieve less than nothing.

When I allow myself to drift toward polemic, this is the sentiment I find myself hammering out over and over again: that everything needs to change. Almost anything I'm able to think about regarding how our culture thinks or conceives of itself cannot remain the way it currently stands. (Someone might ask what I mean by "our" culture. Monotheism onward? The Enlightenment? The nation state? Mediated experience? Western art and literature? Liberalism and neoliberalism? Capitalist realism? Colonialism and white supremacy? All of this, and so much more.) The difficult questions that feel most pressing to me revolve around three things: money, punishment, and competition. If we could completely get rid of all our current ideas around money, punishment, and competition, what might our culture look like then?

The fact that punishment is one of the points on this rather short, and obviously incomplete, list is a direct result of the fact that I recently finished reading Mariame Kaba's *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*. If you haven't read it yet, I would highly recommend you do so. There are so many passages in this book I find myself thinking about over and over again, but perhaps this one most of all:

> And how much hubris must we have to think that we, as individuals, will have all the answers for generations' worth of harm built by millions and millions of people? It's like I'm on a five-hundred-year clock right now. I'm right here knowing that we've got a hell of a long time before we're going to see the end. Right now, all we're doing as organizers is creating the conditions that will allow our collective vision to take hold and grow.

If the world we want—after considerable struggle to get there—arrives in 500 years, what might we be doing now to at least be heading in something resembling the right direction? I don't know the answer, but worry far too much that, whatever it is, I am not currently doing it. Too much diffusion makes all future intergenerational goals feel vague and out of reach. Nonetheless, 500 years gives us room for an enormous range of imaginings, every kind of evocative abolitionist prognostication, and the work of turning such fantasies into concrete action remains never ending and more necessary than ever.

Part one in a serial column exploring the intersections of political action, ecological collapse, futurity, and writing.

Biographies

Katherine Ball is a habitat for fungi and bacteria located on planet Earth. Their artistic interventions reimagine the infrastructure of everyday life, including: living in a floating island building mushroom filters to clean a polluted lake, bicycling across the USA looking for "solutions" to the climate crisis, coordinating a national day of action against banks and corporations influencing state laws, and apprenticing with nature to learn the biological counterpart to civil disobedience.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, musician and member of Alderville First Nation. She is the author of books including the newly released *A Short History of the Blockade*, and the novel *Noopiming: A Cure for White Ladies*. She has released four albums including *f(l)ight* and *Noopiming Sessions*, and her new work, *Theory of Ice*. Her latest book, co-authored with Robyn Maynard and entitled *Rehearsals for Living* is forthcoming in 2022.

Mark V. Campbell (aka DJ Grumps), founder at Northside Hip Hop Archive, is a DJ, curator, and scholar. Mark has organized exhibitions related to Canadian hip hop, including the *T-Dot Pioneers* trilogy, *Mixtapes: Hip-Hop's Lost Archive*, *…Everything Remains Raw: Photographing Toronto Hip Hop Culture from Analogue to Digital*, and *For the Record: An Idea of the North*. He has published widely in academic journals, and his co-edited collection *We Still Here: Hip Hop North of the 49th Parallel* was released in 2020 by McGill-Queen's Press.

Nehal El-Hadi is a writer, researcher and editor whose work explores the interactions between the body, place, and technology. A science and environmental journalist by trade, she completed a PhD in Planning at the University of Toronto, where she studied the relationships between virtual and material public urban spaces. She is based in Toronto, where she is the Science + Technology Editor at *The Conversation Canada*, and Editor-in-Chief of *Studio Magazine*.

Elicser Elliott is a Toronto-based aerosol artist whose creations adorn the cultural landscape here and abroad. An integral part of Toronto's street art community, his work has been featured in many publications and hung in the Art Gallery of Ontario and Royal Ontario Museum. A Montreal native, Elicser grew up in St. Vincent. On return to Canada, he was introduced to street art at the Etobicoke School of the Arts, and began to pursue it as an occupation after being encouraged to study animation at Sheridan College by a guidance counselor.

Irmgard Emmelhainz is a translator, writer, and researcher based in Anahuac Valley. Her work about film, the Palestine Question, art, and neoliberalism has been translated to many languages and presented internationally. Her book *The Tyranny of Common Sense: Mexico's Neoliberal Conversion* (2016), is currently being translated to English for publication by SUNY Press. She has also published *The Sky is Incomplete: Travel Chronicles in Palestine* (2017) and *Jean-Luc Godard's Political Filmmaking* (2019). Also forthcoming is *Toxic Loves, Impossible Futures: Feminist Lives as Resistance*.

Sophia Jaworski is a PhD candidate in the faculty of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. Her research interests problematize "medically unexplained chronic illness," reimagining how volatile organic compounds and petrochemical exposures are figured as toxicants by technoscience. Her dissertation examines environmental sensitivities, using ethnographic fieldwork and experimental methods to interrogate how atmospheres shape, and are shaped by, a politics of life and capitalism in Canada.

Liz Howard's debut collection *Infinite Citizen of the Shaking Tent* won the 2016 Griffin Poetry Prize, was shortlisted for the 2015 Governor General's Award for poetry, and was a *Globe and Mail* top 100 book. Her poetry has appeared in *Canadian Art*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Poetry Magazine*, and *Best Canadian Poetry 2018*. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph. She is of mixed settler and Anishinaabe heritage, born and raised on Treaty 9 territory in northern Ontario, and lives in Toronto.

Lilian Leung is an interactive designer, artist, and community-based researcher with over six years of industry experience spanning design direction, UX, and workshops. Currently located in Tkaronto and on unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territories, their practice circles methods of placemaking and placekeeping in virtual reality, trans- and post-media practices, and interactive documentary. They are a recent graduate from the Digital Futures Master's program at OCAD University, and received their BDes from the University of Hertfordshire.

Immony Mèn is an artist, educator, community-based researcher, and Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Design at OCAD University. He has exhibited nationally and internationally. His research focuses on theoretical frameworks for understanding (specifically Khmer/Cambodian) diasporic experience through media praxis, critical race theory, and community engagement. Mèn's practice take the form of research-creation projects: interactive installations, interdisciplinary performances, social artworks, and participatory community projects.

The Neurocultures Collective is part of the *Autism through Cinema* research project, which asks: What kinds of moving images are possible when they derive from neurodivergent experiences? Neurocultures focuses on generating progressive images and providing alternative readings of being in the world. Neurocultures' innovative model has collective members take up apprenticeships in key film production and artwork installation roles. The project includes partnerships and collaboration with Project Art Works, scholar and activist Damian Milton, professor of psychology Sebastian Gaigg, producer Kate Wilson, curator Gillian Fox, and curator Christine Shaw.

Charles Officer is an acclaimed writer, director, producer, and founder of Canesugar Filmworks. His film works include the recent crime-noir *Akilla's Escape*, and feature documentary *Mighty Jerome*. Officer's *Unarmed Verses* cemented his distinct visual brand of storytelling, winning awards at Hot Docs and TIFF Top Ten Festival. From garnering record setting CSA nominations for his debut feature *Nurse.Fighter.Boy* to his truth-to-power documentary *The Skin We're In*, he is committed to amplifying diverse stories. He is a founding member of Canada's first Black Screen Office.

Xaviera Simmons' work spans photography, performance, video, sound, sculpture, and installation. She defines her studio practice as cyclical rather than linear—rooted in an ongoing investigation of experience, memory, abstraction, and present- and future-histories surrounding landscape. She is committed equally to the examination of different artistic modes and processes, keeping her practice in constant and consistent rotation, shift, and engagement.

Zoë H Wool is Assistant Professor in Anthropology at the University of Toronto Mississauga, where she teaches about toxicity, disability, and the tyranny of normativity. She is author of *After War: The Weight of Life at Walter Reed*, co-founder of Project Pleasantville, a community-engaged archive of Black leadership and environmental racism, and will soon launch the TWIG Research Kitchen, a convivial feminist space for work on toxicity, waste, and infrastructure.

Jacob Wren makes literature, performances, and exhibitions. His books include: *Polyamorous Love Song*, *Rich and Poor*, and *Authenticity is a Feeling*. As Co-Artistic Director of Montreal-based PME-ART, he has helped create performances such as: *Individualism Was A Mistake*, *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information*, *Every Song I've Ever Written* and *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*. Most recently PME-ART has presented the online conference *Vulnerable Paradoxes*.

Joy Xiang is a writer, arts worker, and perpetual late-bloomer living in Tkaronto. Her work engages desire, migration, material flows, and media nostalgia and futurity. Her first zine *cold blood* explores creative and survival-focused adaptation strategies. She has been on the editorial team of *Milkweed*, *re:asian*, and *Canadian Art*; written for Mercer Union, Ada X, and Hamilton Artists Inc.; held positions at Blackwood Gallery and Vtape, and is a member of the feminist working group EMILIA-AMALIA.

GLOSSARY
An entangled lexicon for a rapidly changing world

Aabawe: with gratitude to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's translations from Anishinaabemowin, aabawe derives from "abaab": a key, to open with something, release, or loosen. When written as "aabawe wendamoowin," the term takes on meaning as "to forgive, to warm up to or loosen one's mind, to loosen or unlock one's feelings" (Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 2015 [Winnipeg: Arp Books], 46–47). In Simpson's *Theory of Ice* (p. 14), aabawe evokes land-body relations between the coming of spring, and openness to new ideas.

Anonymity: being anonymous, unknown, unidentified; a way to refuse identification in order to counter surveillance, data mining, and policing. Anonymity also enables individuals to speak candidly with reduced personal risk (see Mèn and Leung, p. 34); or can be a method to represent oneself otherwise, as in the Neurocultures Collective's murals (p. 30), which visualize neurodiversity through collaborative work that eschews individual attribution.

Archive: A collection of things, often describing collections of documents rooted in Eurocentric knowledge systems. However, archives pre-date colonial eras, as groupings of materials and objects have been found throughout history. Many forms of archiving exist, historically and contemporaneously, such as through mapping, oral tradition, counter-archiving, and community-driven archiving (see Mark V. Campbell, p. 24; Simpson, p. 14; Simmons, cover and p. 4).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer programs designed to simulate aspects of human intelligence, often to provide a function (i.e. translation, playing strategy games, chatting, driving, screening job applications). AIs that perform such tasks are described as **weak AI**, whereas some researchers aspire to develop **strong AI**—computers capable of learning like humans. AI and machine learning often raise ethical questions: How do the underlying datasets reproduce existing biases? How much decision-making power should be given to AI? What are the consequences of aspiring to create sentient beings? For one approach to working with AI, see Mèn & Leung, p. 34.

A **cloud** is a wispy formation of water vapour (see Moore, p. 7 and Sobecka, p. 8 in *SDUK02*). **Cloud computing** refers to files stored on remote servers, rather than a local computer. Critics of technology have characterized cloud computing as a misnomer, considering the immense physical infrastructures and energy demands of the internet (see Diamanti in *SDUK03*, p. 16); or highlighted tech giants' monopolies over "the cloud," which diminish its utility as an open file repository (such as Mark V. Campbell, p. 24). Because of their mutability, clouds remain a persistent metaphor for thought (see the Neurocultures Collective's diagrams, p. 30).

Code is a system, program, or set of instructions. In computing, code determines how software behaves. Despite its assumed neutrality, code can reinforce programmers' biases (see Broussard, Coleman and Kantayya, *SDUK08*, p. 7). For others, communicating in code is a way of eliding surveillance or comprehension (see El-Hadi et al, p. 24).

Cripping: To enact, embody, or highlight how disability and neurodiversity disrupt "normality," and in turn are both subversive and generative (see The Neurocultures Collective, p. 30). Cripping often involves questioning "normal" social expectations of how individuals think, move, and occupy space, and their relationships to time. As an active verb, "cripping" reclaims harmful language to reflect a practice rooted in disability justice, where disability isn't seen as a deficit. Instead, it strives to undo ableism in all facets of life (see McArthur and Zavitsanos in *Take Care* broadsheet, p. 16).

An **encampment** is a site where an individual or group sets up temporary accommodation, consisting of physical structures (i.e. tents, huts, shelters built with found materials). Circumstances dictating their formation include military operations, or refuge from environmental disaster or political persecution (see Emmelhainz, p. 18). A lack of affordable housing and limited shelter capacity in many cities has increased encampment occupancy. These communities are frequently confronted by law enforcement, who forcibly displace occupants. Anti-displacement and mutual aid organizers mobilize communities in support of accessible housing and policy change (see Xiang, p. 36).

Often defined scientifically as a biological or engineered system for separating solids from liquids or gases using a filter medium, **filtration** has distinct meanings within optics (transmission of light through a lens), computing (sorting and processing data), and mathematics (an algebraic formula). The filtering of pollutants from water (see Ball, p. 12) or dust from air (see McCallum in *SDUK05*, p. 25) may provide alternative models for reducing hazardous waste, and repurposing filtered by-products in beneficial ways.

The **gut** typically refers to the digestive system (the gastrointestinal tract and the organs that support it), which is responsible for breaking down food, absorbing nutrients, and expelling waste from the body. Far from a discrete system (see Emmelhainz, p. 18), the gut is also responsible for supporting the body's immune responses, and is connected to the brain via neurotransmitters, making it also a sensing and regulatory organ.

Incendiary: flammable, extremely hot, or designed to cause fires (see **Combustion**; Hobler in *SDUK06*, cover). With connotations of destruction or replenishment, "incendiary" is often used metaphorically to describe polemical speech, writing, action, music (or "the dawn," see Howard, p. 28; also see Wren, p. 38).

A **land trust** is a legal entity that has been given jurisdiction over a property of land by its owner. As a collective and legal measure used for preservation and/or affordability, land trusts employ conservation and stewardship tools to hold federally protected lands in trust for future generations (see also **Trust**). Working on behalf of communities, non-profit corporations that form community land trusts serve as long-term stewards for affordable housing, public and commercial spaces, and other community holdings (see Xiang, p. 36).

Mestizaje, at its most basic, is a term that describes racial mixing in Latin America—in Mexico (see Emmelhainz, p. 18), it refers most commonly to mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. In a contemporary context, the term is often used to celebrate cultural hybridity—however, across former Spanish and Portuguese colonies, "mestizaje" has also been mobilized to serve various nationalist and caste-based rhetorics, and the term's connotations vary geographically.

Coined by sociologist Judy Singer in 1998, **neurodiversity** refers to the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits. Neurodiversity strays from the hierarchical understanding of cognitive capacity latent in the popular autism "spectrum"; instead, it reflects a non-linear understanding of neuro-capacities (see the Neurocultures Collective, p. 30, whose research challenges the notion of a neurotypical cinematic form).

Opacity can refer to both the physical, optical quality of being impenetrable by light (see Emmelhainz on the opaque screens of media technologies, p. 18), and the state of impenetrability, unknowability, or untranslatability of an idea. As put forward by the Martinican writer Édouard Glissant, opacity describes how some knowledges, stories, experiences, and modes of communication must not be made comprehensible to all, as a way of resisting colonial knowledge systems that seek to measure and delineate in order to enable domination. Opacity can include "speaking in code," or refusal to make aspects of one's experience available to those seeking to instrumentalize it (see El-Hadi et al, p. 24). A major strategy in contemporary Black thought and cultural production, opacity has been taken up by numerous writers, thinkers, and artists (see MICE Magazine Issue 04: *Opacities* for further detail).

Toxic: may refer to the condition of being poisonous, or in a harmful situation that develops immediately or cumulatively. **Toxicity** may describe how hazardous something is to humans or other living organisms, whether a chemical substance or an ideological system (capitalism and colonialism, per Emmelhainz, p. 18). Industrial activities such as mining and oil extraction release toxicants that have detrimental environmental and societal impacts, disproportionately affecting Indigenous communities (see Wool & Jaworski, p. 8, Halpern in *SDUK06*, p. 10; see also **environmental racism**).