BREATHLESS
EDITED BY
ALA ROUSHAN

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Like grey, thick clouds-
in the crisis of storm;

Like breathless skies-
in warm, humid days.

-

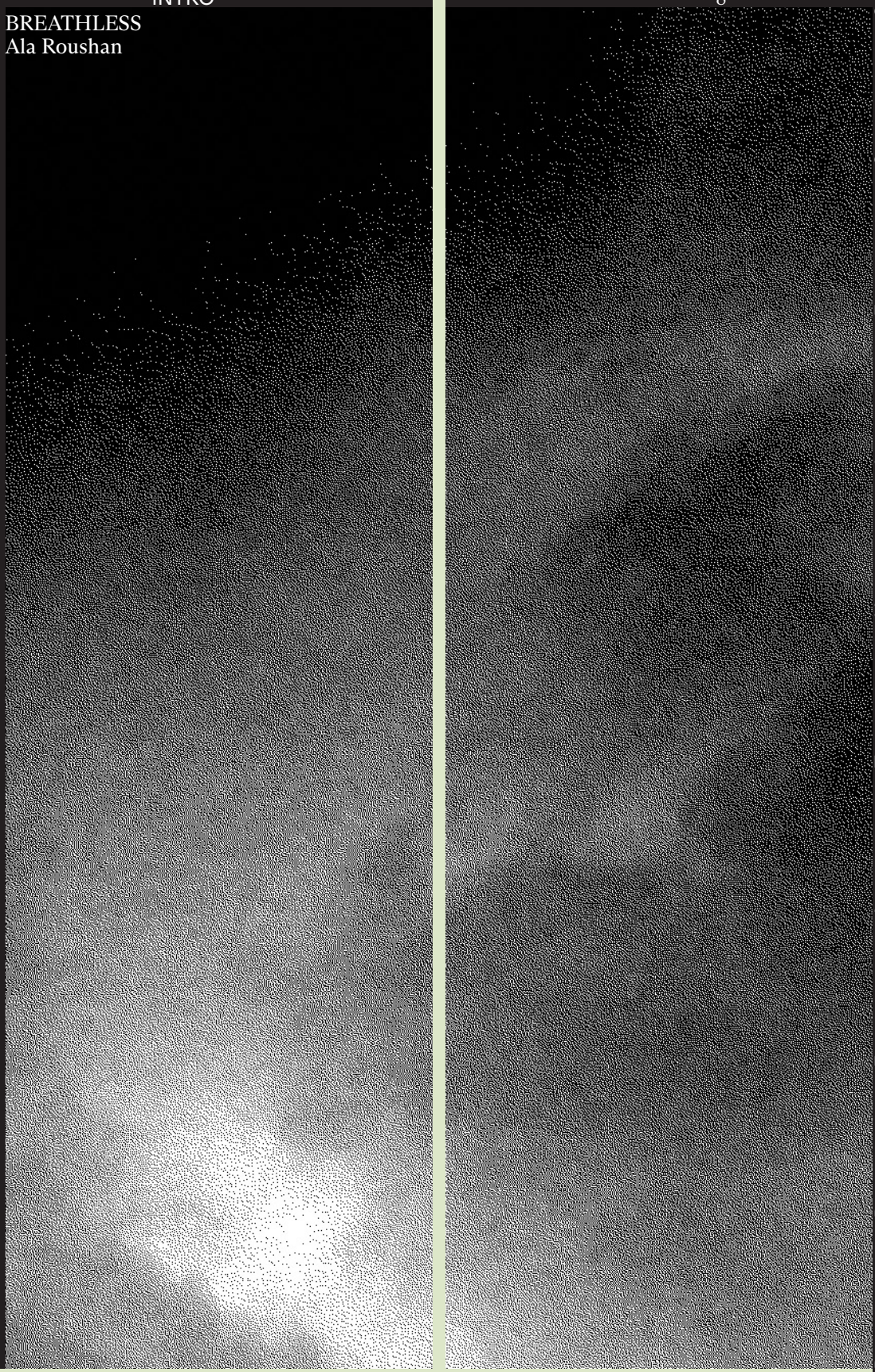
On islands adrift upon the
waters, I breathe.
I am in search of a share in the
expansive sky…

Forough
Farrokhzad

Forough Farrokhzad, "Unison," *Border Walls: Forough Farrokhzad Poems*, trans. Maryam Dilmaghani. (Montreal: The World's Poetry Archive, 2012).

BREATHLESS

BREATHLESS
Ala Roushan



We breathe through breathless times…

We breathe, as each breath pronounces our vulnerability to air.

We breathe, inviting the plurality of the outside within.

We breathe, but each breath contains, not shares.

We breathe, and if together, are seen as to conspire.

We breathe, tethered to the breath of life.

We breathe, isolated to find solace in the fantasy for uncontaminated air.

We breathe, as individuals rather than a collective… inhale… exhale… With each rhythm of breath, we confront the floating threats of viral particulates… corporeal and virtual.

We breathe on a planet in smoke and smog.

We breathe an air that's overheating.

We breathe the cruel politics of suffocation.

Consumed in an air of despair, we are breathless!

…Yet, while breathless, life propels us to continue breathing!

It is such breathless times that evokes a heightened sensitivity to air and the air we breathe, including the air of a respiratory pandemic, racial injustice ("I can't breathe"), forest fires, carbon emissions and uncertain futures. The breath, unequally distributed, encompasses diverging spectrums of a vital need. On the one hand binding the human experience and shared sense of dependency, and on the other hand proving that inequality and difference exists in our varied abilities to access breathable air.

BREATHLESS is an exhibition and a publication that considers the tensions, contradictions and urgencies of the breath within the shared air of our closed world. BREATHLESS forms a contained exhibition space, a public space that is experienced individually—breathing without the other. The pavilion simulates the air of a protective bubble, one that we have assigned to privileged domestic space. A place that conflicts the simultaneous realities of care and protection, with exclusion and separation, a bind we seem to be unable to untangle.

Conceptually, BREATHLESS, builds upon a recent history, post-war, when a threat from the air was imminent. Under the fear of nuclear winter and the thick smog of London's extreme air pollution, Alison and Peter Smithson developed their speculative project *House of the Future* (1956) that took place as an exhibition. They imagined the house as a hermetic enclosure, sheltering only it's selected inhabitants. The air conditioning system was a central feature of this seductive cave, reinforcing the closure and ensuring the selected few with a cleansed atmosphere. As a new technological possibility at the time for Western homes, the air conditioner optimized interior temperatures at the cost of the exterior temperature of the future, feeding the ecological calamity that compromises the air of our shared environment. The result was the materialization of the house as a hygiene machine for the privileged—a closed system that reveals an uncanny overlap with the present.

On the south terrace of The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, BREATHLESS takes shape as an immersive installation within a contained architectural volume, a pavilion developed in collaboration with Ala Roushan, Alex Josephson (Partisans), Bryan Schopf (Maffeis Engineering), Charles Stankievech (UofT). Several elements of the pavilion connect to the *House of the Future* through the problematics of air—drawing attention to our breath. The air filtration system provides a key element in the exhibition architecture, creating a purified atmosphere to breathe in the context of the current pandemic. But unlike the *House of the Future*, the filtered air of BREATHLESS is open to all and includes diverse bodies. In the original exhibition of 1956, the architecture was a theatrical set occupied by a chosen four that the public observed, but with BREATHLESS the inaccessible inner private courtyard becomes a publicly accessible space. Even though experienced individually by visitors, BREATHLESS is a public space and folds outwards into its urban surroundings. The architectural envelope mediates between exterior and interior with inflated ballast-like lungs, creating tension through the invisible yet powerful pressure of air.

As an inhale, the exhibition BREATHLESS spatially collects contradictions in the air, including: the breath as collective ritual and the breath in isolation, sharing particulates of pigmented dust that forms a new ground (Flaka Haliti); the breath that is unequally granted and the breath that carries narratives across multiple temporalities (Donna Kukama); the consequential breath that transforms the non-human, an evolution towards fictional fantastical creatures of disembodied respiratory tracts (Marguerite Humeau); and the air of our simultaneously sublime and horrific landscapes on fire, overwhelmed in an atmosphere of smoke and smog (Julius von Bismarck).

As an exhale, the book BREATHLESS shares contributions on the paradoxes of air, atmosphere and the breath with key texts and artworks. Immersed in the smog of our current predicament, philosopher Dehlia Hannah proposes a new vocabulary for air in her text, "Inversion Layer". Following the flow of air, Flaka Haliti's installation "Speculating on the Blue" opens a portal to an artificial atmosphere, demarcating a sensorial experience that defines boundaries of a closed reality. Connecting to other parallel worlds, philosopher Achille Mbembe's "The Universal Right to Breathe" captures the complexity of a thickened planetary atmosphere with a global perspective on the urgency of the breath, offering direction to alternative trajectories beyond suffocation. Marguerite Humeau's speculative sculptures that have survived suffocation imagine a species that has evolved exclusively to breath. Charles Stankievech exhumes the voices of Clarice Lispector and Lygia Clark as an interconnected mystical encounter in a text titled "Breathe With Me, A Breath of Life". In "Twilight of Sighs," psychoanalyst and philosopher Alireza Taheri analyzes a sigh with

a set of poetic propositions. With the same intensity, Donna Kukama re-narrates history with her performance "Chapter Q: Dem Short-Short-Falls," as she breathes the memory of an invisible event. Invisibility of viral and virtual particles are positioned in the context of other times in history in Ala Roushan's text "Air of Our Closed World," articulating the inversion experienced today within the domestic bubble/bunker. "The Air Without" by Kate Whiteway connects illness and metaphor to consider the paradoxical air that both oxygenates the lung and the air that breathes diamond dust. With a granularity greater than dust, Heather Davis's text "Molecular Intimacy" situates us at the nanoscale to grasp bodies and the atmosphere they breathe. This final text loops back to the start of the book in considering the air of our contemporary sky and the breath that exists in its precarious state. Under this arched sky, the book ends with "Fire with Fire," engulfed in the smoky aftermath of forest fires in the work of Julius von Bismarck.

BREATHLESS gasps in the *air of our closed world* with an invitation to breathe!

ARTISTS

FLAKA HALITI
(Untitled) 2021, from the series *Speculating on the Blue*

MARGUERITE HUMEAU
Waste I - 1 (a respiratory tract mutating into industrial waste), 2019

DONNA KUKAMA
Chapter O: ...,_. 2021

JULIUS VON BISMARCK
Fire with Fire, 2020

ARCHITECTURAL PAVILION CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT & DESIGN

ALEX JOSEPHSON
(Partisans)

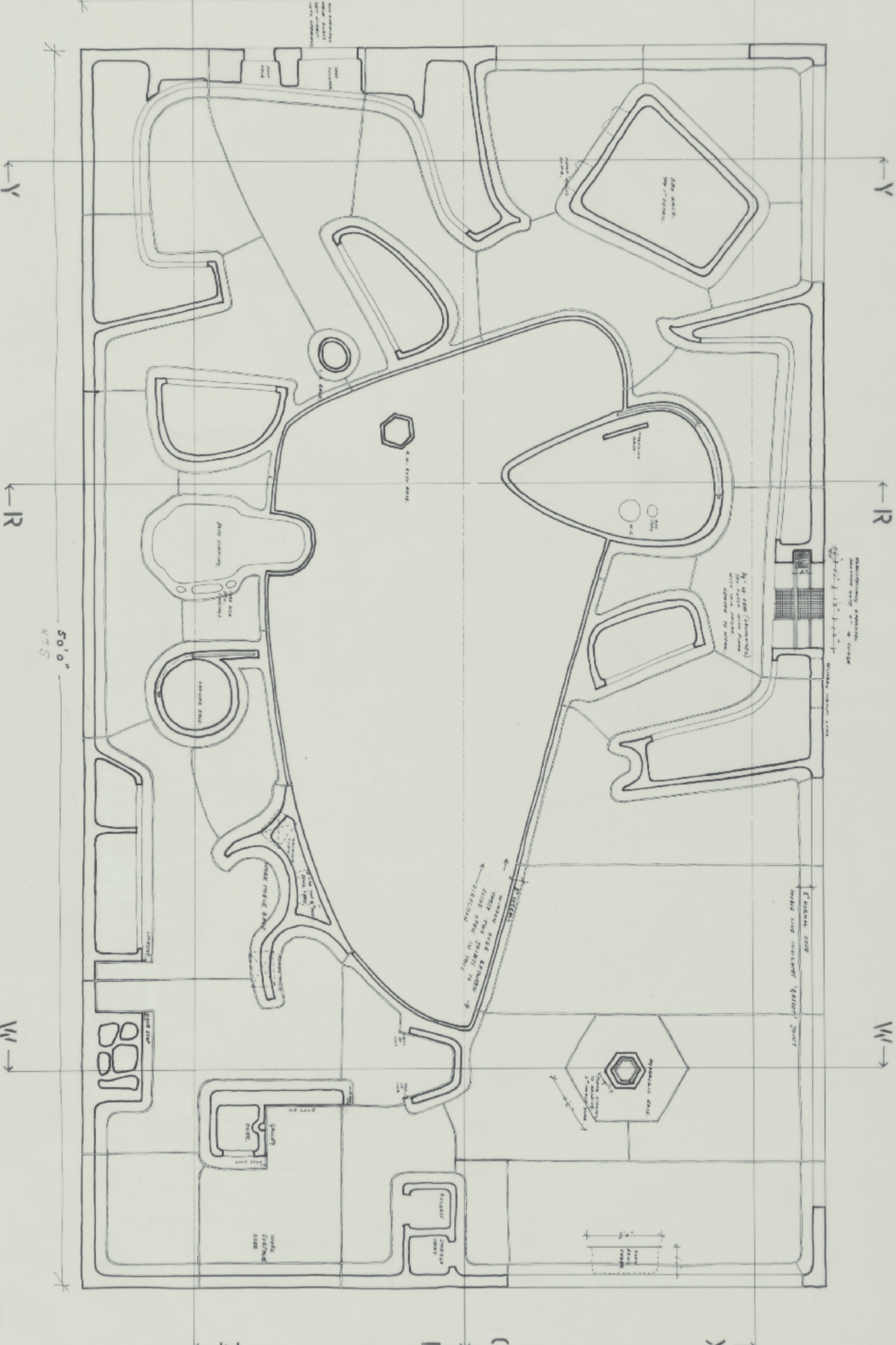
BRYAN SCHOPF
(Maffeis Engineering)

CHARLES STANKIEVECH
(University of Toronto)

ALA ROUSHAN

House of the Future (courtyard)
BREATHLESS Pavilion
(courtyard inverted).

Following Page:
Alison and Peter Smithson, architects, *Plan for House of the Future*, Daily Mail Ideal Homes Exhibition, London, England, 1954. Courtesy: Canadian Centre for Architecture.


50'0"
N.T.S

INVERSION LAYER
Dehlia Hannah

In 2020 the act of breathing became newly fraught. Any question of air's invisibility was put to rest by the necessity of preventing an airborne virus from being shared. Masks, ventilation, and various forms of personal protective equipment expressed an acute awareness of how far particulates and droplets of moisture are transported through "empty" space—*open air* now measured precisely by distances between breathers. A two-meter cushion of air became the most basic demand of interpersonal etiquette, an ongoing choreography of avoidance that signaled care for oneself and others. Quite suddenly, each microcosm became a quantum of a shared state of affairs encompassing the whole world. Borders closed. Flights grounded. Air became conspicuous as the fluid medium of all social relations, in which each person's presence radiates outward in spherical waves like a stone dropped into water.

As the air between us grew thick and foreboding, the skies above cleared, a consequence of an unprecedented drop in transportation and fuel combustion. Spectacular photographs of the Himalayan mountain range towering above cities across northern India—a sight unseen for an entire generation—captivated the world. Blue skies appeared over typically smog-choked cities from Paris to Jakarta, allowing residents to glimpse an alternative atmospheric reality. Anxious awareness of the dangers carried by bodily emissions was juxtaposed with previously unimaginable reductions in air pollution. Beyond the visible spectrum, clear skies correlated with equally impressive reductions in invisible pollutants such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, and methane—key drivers of anthropogenic climate change.

In the midst of a global health, economic, and humanitarian crisis, a brief moment of euphoric hope flashed across the airwaves—hope that the climate crisis would finally be attended by a response on the scale of that addressing the pandemic. Hope not merely that the pandemic response itself would limit CO2 emissions enough to put a dent in the warming trend, a hope quickly dashed. Rather, it was imagined that the experience of rapid mobilization in the face of a shared danger would promote a will to address anthropogenic climate warming like an acute emergency. Bruno Latour compared the pandemic to a dress rehearsal for the climate crisis.[1] "Essentially COVID-19 is the story of anthropogenic global warming on speed," observed an anonymous commenter on the climate science news site realclimate.org.[2] Comparisons were drawn to the temporary dip in emissions associated with the 2008 Financial Crisis, (only to rebound the following year). Could the present situation, asked the philosopher Eva Horn, offer "an experimental space in which to test out how things might be done differently—proof that it is possible after all to limit travel and transportation, to reorganize work and communication, [...] reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, [and] even present an opportunity to reinvent international cooperation in the face of a global threat?"[3] These insights carried a mix of exasperation and relief: *We told you (pointing to charts and appealing to reason)! Now you can see for yourself!*

Why did the pandemic become such a captivating analogy for climate change?

Watching the skies offers clues. Thermal inversions in the atmosphere are often visible as a dense layer of hazy air, above which the sky appears clear and bright. Air normally cools as it rises, driving processes of atmospheric convection, wind, and weather patterns. Inversion layers occur when cooler air becomes stuck below warmer air at higher altitudes, trapping moisture and particulate matter, as well as ongoing emissions, near the earth's surface. A phenomenon responsible for misty valleys and urban smog islands alike, inversion is also suggestive as a meteorological metaphor. The rapid spread of an airborne virus, via interpersonal contact and international travel, has led to profound transformations in the discursive terms of air—terms that set the stage for discussions of pollution and climate change by establishing the parameters of what we notice, care about, and take as actionable. Tracing recent virally-induced inversions within the concepts of air, climate, atmosphere and related terms, hints at a post-pandemic cultural landscape shaped by different assumptions, and perhaps also different appetites for risk, cooperation, and abrupt transition.

In contrast to comparatively slow and invisible greenhouse effects, the sudden assault of COVID-19 on our shared airspace fundamentally altered attention to atmospheric conditions in a way that climate change activists could only dream of. Truly global in scope yet local in its effects, the pandemic overcomes the problem of scale that bedevils the comprehension of global climate, itself a statistical abstraction. Bodily vulnerability, though unevenly borne, condensed the time frame of risk from an expansive and indeterminate future into the minutiae of

daily life. The attribution problem: solved. For unlike severe storms and wildfires, which are merely made more likely by rising CO_2 levels, the virus causes illness directly. The slow violence of the Anthropocene (cf. Nixon) tumbles down like an avalanche under the cumulative weight of ignored warnings and predictions: about wildlife habitat loss, industrial farming, air pollution, warming temperatures, disrupted phenological rhythms, frenetic air travel, high population density, and fragile health care systems, among numerous other factors that foster the emergence of new infectious diseases and render us increasingly vulnerable to them. As Horn argued, the ongoing catastrophe of business as usual that is constitutive of the Anthropocene gives way to a "tipping point"—an *event* that demands immediate action.[4]

Indeed, what makes the present pandemic so explosive is that COVID-19 found its ecological niche not only in our bodies but in the global technosphere. Stowed away on airplanes and cruise ships, this virus is a disease of infrastructure. In order to slow its transmission, it has been necessary to shut large parts of that infrastructure down, even at the cost of untold economic hardship and human suffering. In order to be fine-meshed enough to control the movements of a microscopic entity, a life form known for just over a century (since 1892), the lockdown necessarily catches people in its net. It should come as no surprise that, within this social context, conspiracy theories and disbelief have proliferated wildly, appealing, in part, to circles of society already steeped in manufactured doubt about climate change. Refusing masks and social distance, they insist on breathing together—a literal return to the root of the word conspiracy *[conspirare]*. In a certain way, they see things clearly: to concede that COVID-19 is real is to concede that the emergency measures taken by governments are (in principle—if not in particular) justified. To concede the reality of climate change would imply, by the same logic, that drastic changes to social and economic organization are warranted. Indeed, this is precisely what many activists and scientists are calling for in order to avert a climate catastrophe that now seems imminent. One only hopes that, with the benefit of a half century of foresight on climate change, Climate Lockdown might be accomplished with less blunt instruments.[5]

The pandemic and its aftermaths can be framed as a massive unplanned experiment on numerous aspects of earth systems—a chance to study how the atmosphere behaves and ecosystems respond when humans retreat.[6] At the same time, social scientists may observe how cultures, political structures, and economies fair under the present *state of exception* (cf. Giorgio Agamben). On the climate change front, 2020 saw a drop in global CO_2 emissions of an estimated 6.4 percent, yet the "United Nations Environment Programme estimates that the world would need to cut carbon emissions by 7.6 percent *per year* for the next decade to prevent the globe from warming more than 1.5 ºC above pre-industrial levels—a goal set in the 2015 Paris climate agreement."[7] What if we don't turn the engines back on? What would it look like to sustain such a low emissions scenario for a decade—or longer?

Returning conceptual inversions, according to the philosopher Luce Irigaray, the *forgetting of air* within a philosophical tradition preoccupied with *groundwork* constitutes a forgetting of embodiment, a luxury not historically afforded to women.[8] COVID-19 has deprived everyone of this luxury, in effect rectifying a deep elemental bias. Even as we long for the freedom to breathe closely once again, we might endeavor to retain the memory of breathing within a global atmosphere.

D.H.

ENDNOTES

1 Bruno Latour, “Is this a dress rehearsal?” *Critical Inquiry*, March 26, 2020, https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/03/26/is-this-a-dress-rehearsal/. Originally published in French: Bruno Latour, “La crise sanitaire incite à se préparer à la mutation climatique,” Le Monde, March 25, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/03/25/la-crise-sanitaire-incite-a-se-preparer-a-la-mutation-climatique_6034312_3232.html.

2 Gavin Schmidt, “Coronavirus and climate,” *RealClimate*, March 20, 2020 http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2020/03/coronavirus-and-climate/

3 Eva Horn, "Tipping Points: The Anthropocene and Covid-19". *Pandemics, Politics, and Society*, ed. Gerard Delanty, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 123-138, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110713350-009.

4 Ibid, 123.

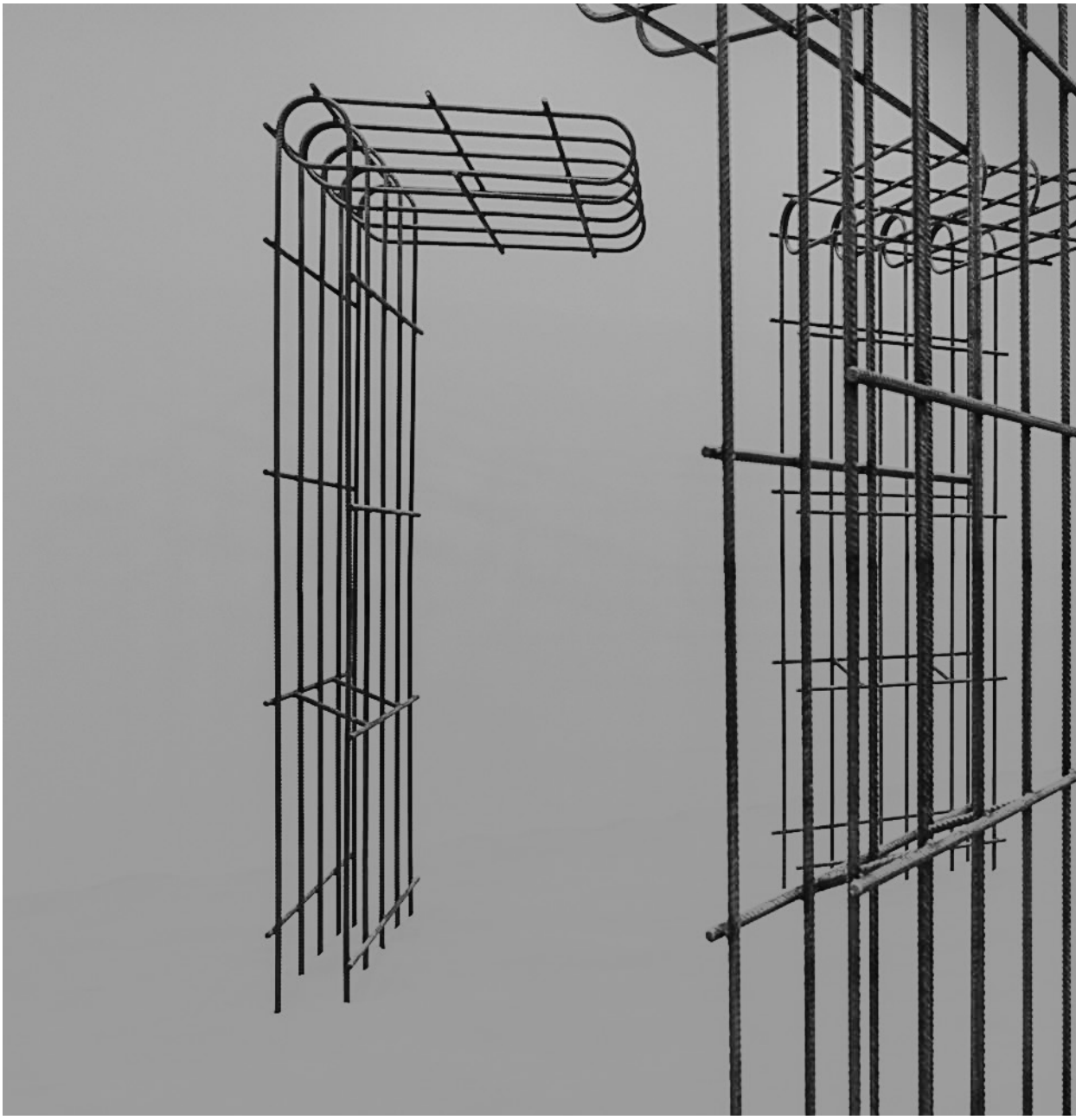
5 Initiated by the curator and architectural historian, Carson Chan, Climate Lockdown was offered as a form of “protest-in-place [which] reframes the sheltering in place many of us are doing as a form of protest, of resistance to shortsighted environmental planning while we, as a planetary community, gain resistance to this new coronavirus.” https://www.climatelockdown.com. The term has also captivated the business sector: “Under a “climate lockdown,” governments would limit private-vehicle use, ban consumption of red meat, and impose extreme energy-saving measures, while fossil-fuel companies would have to stop drilling. To avoid such a scenario, we must overhaul our economic structures and do capitalism differently.” Mariana Mazzucato, “Avoiding a Climate Lockdown,” *World Business Council for Sustainable Development*, Oct. 21, 2020, https://www.wbcsd.org/Overview/Panorama/Articles/Avoiding-a-climate-lockdown.

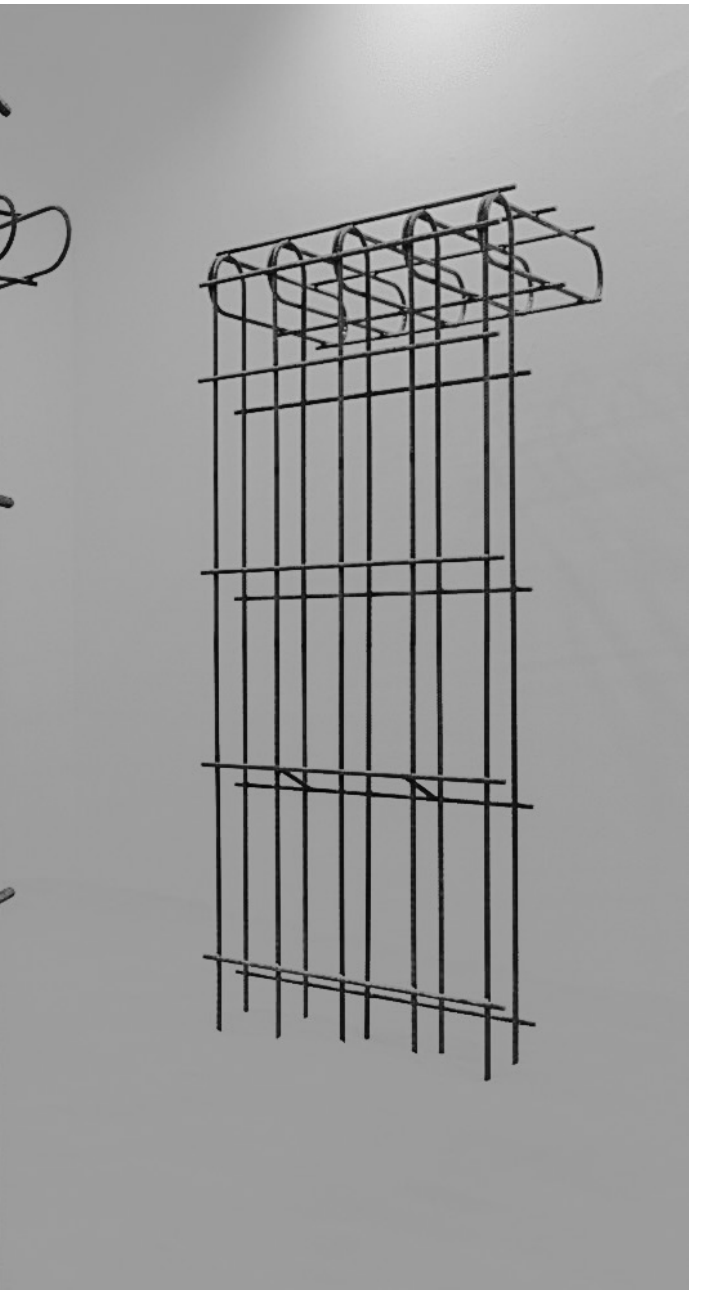
6 Diffenbaugh, N.S., Field, C.B., Appel, E.A. et al. *The COVID-19 lockdowns: a window into the Earth System*. Nat Rev Earth Environ 1, 470–481 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43017-020-0079-1.

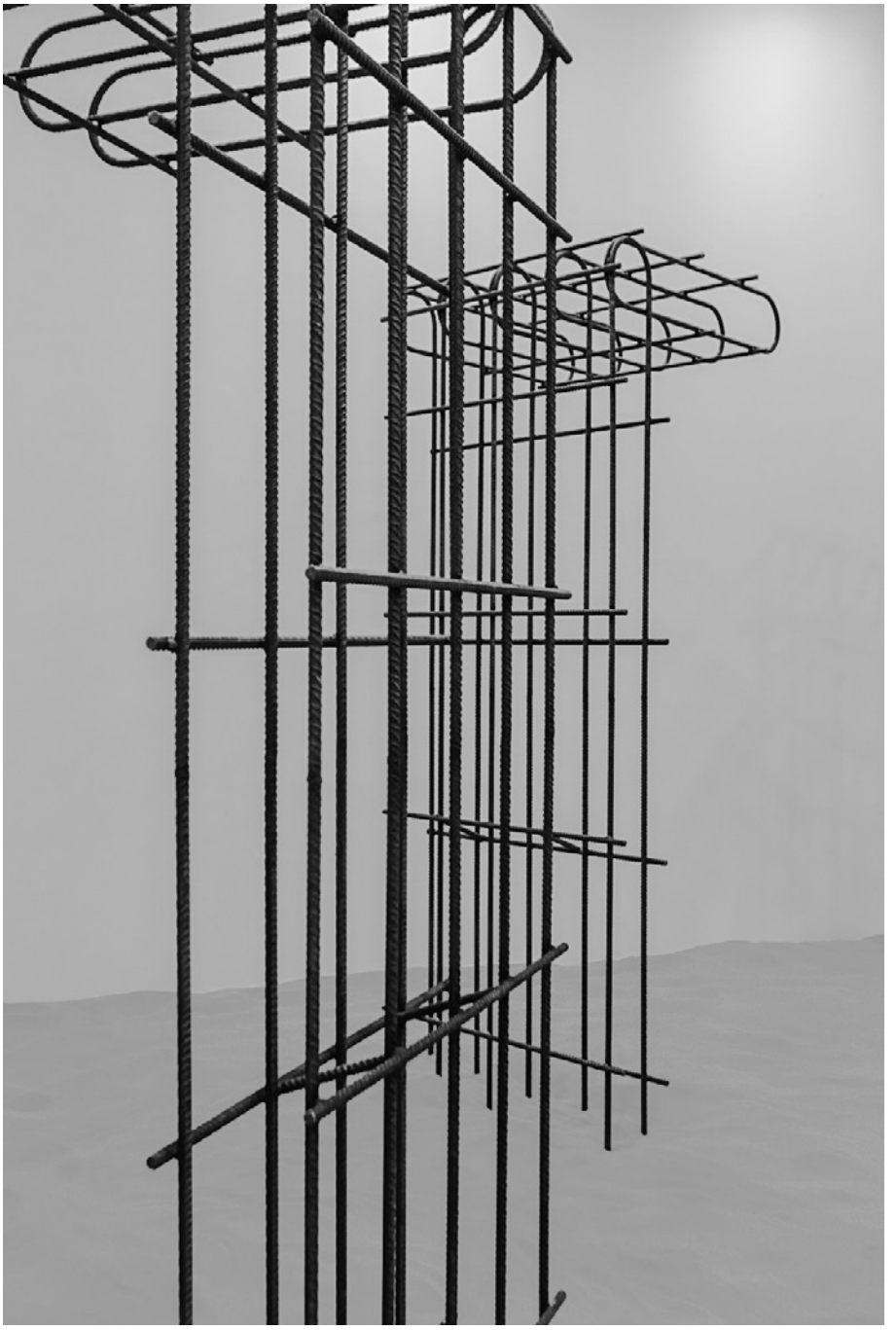
7 Tollefson, J. “COVID curbed carbon emissions in 2020 — but not by much,” *Nature* 589, 343 (2021) doi: https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-00090-3. Accessed Jan. 18, 2021.

8 Irigaray, Luce, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

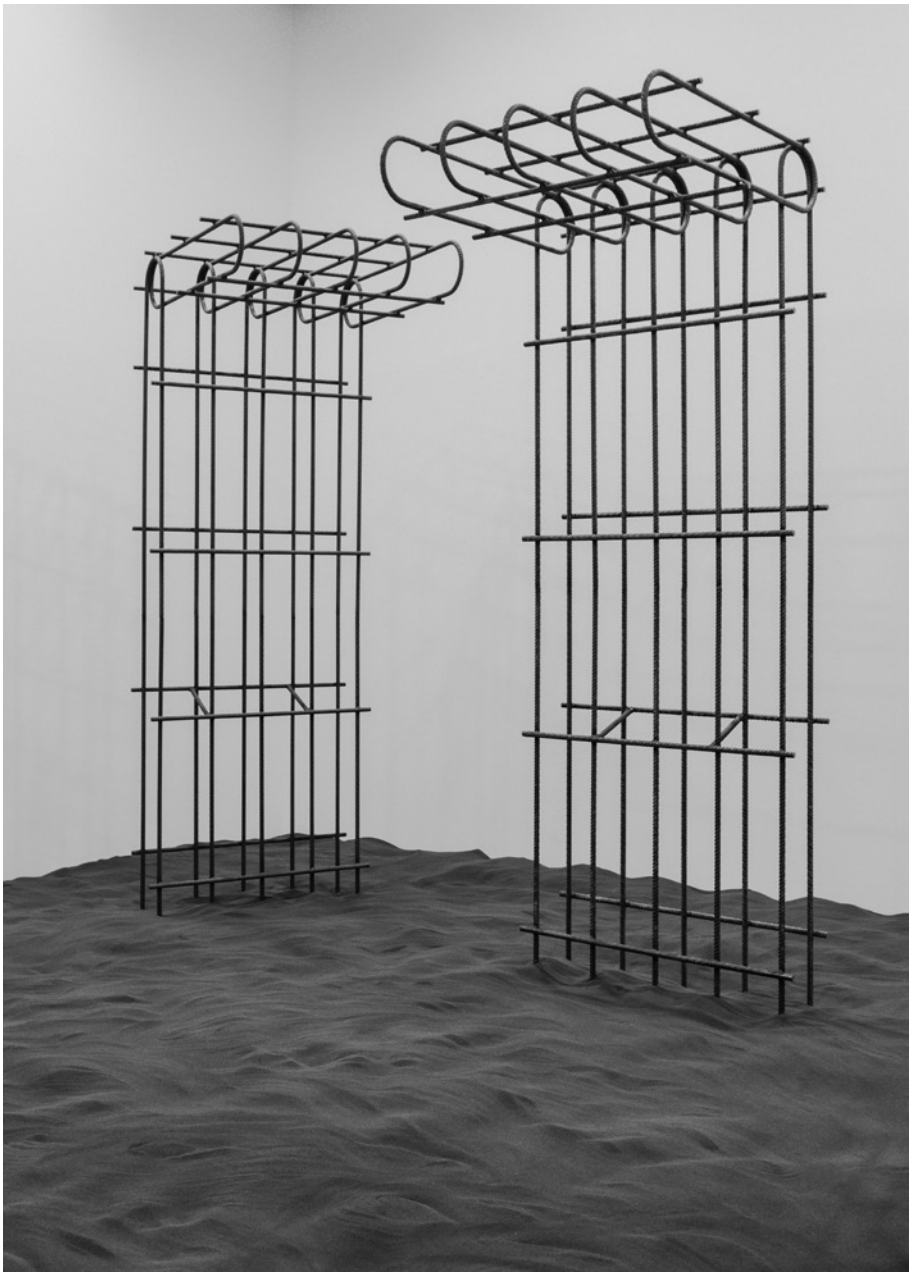
FLAKA HALITI







Flaka Haliti, *Speculating on the Blue*
Installation views from "Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo,"
56th La Biennale di Venezia, 2015, sand, metal, light.
Photos by Marc Krause;
Courtesy the artist and LambdaLambdaLambda.



THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO BREATHE

Achille Mbembe

13 APRIL 2020

Already some people are talking about post-COVID-19.[1] And why should they not? Even if, for most of us, especially those in parts of the world where health care systems have been devastated by years of organized neglect, the worst is yet to come. With no hospital beds, no respirators, no mass testing, no masks nor disinfectants nor arrangements for placing those who are infected in quarantine, unfortunately, many will not pass through the eye of the needle.

1.

It is one thing to worry about the death of others in a distant land and quite another to suddenly become aware of one's own putrescence, to be forced to live intimately with one's own death, contemplating it as a real possibility. Such is, for many, the terror triggered by confinement: having to finally answer for one's own life, to one's own name. We must answer here and now for our life on Earth with others (including viruses) and our shared fate. Such is the injunction this pathogenic period addresses to humankind. It is pathogenic but also the catabolic period par excellence, with the decomposition of bodies, the sorting and expulsion of all sorts of human waste—the "great separation" and great confinement caused by the stunning spread of the virus—and along with it, the widespread digitization of the world.

Try as we might to rid ourselves of it, in the end everything brings us back to the body. We tried to graft it onto other media, to turn it into an object body, a machine body, a digital body, an ontophanic body. It returns to us now as a horrifying, giant mandible, a vehicle for contamination, a vector for pollen, spores, and mold. Knowing that we do not face this ordeal alone, that many will not escape it, is vain comfort. For we have never learned to live with all living species, have never really worried about the damage we as humans wreak on the lungs of the Earth and on its body. Thus, we have never learned how to die. With the advent of the New World and, several centuries later, the appearance of the "industrialized races," we essentially chose to delegate our death to others, to make a great sacrificial repast of existence itself via a kind of ontological vicariate. Soon, it will no longer be possible to delegate one's death to others. It will no longer be possible for that person to die in our place. Not only will we be condemned to assume our own demise, unmediated, but farewells will be few and far between. The hour of autophagy is upon us and, with it, the death of community, as there is no community worthy

of its name in which saying one's last farewell, that is, remembering the living at the moment of death, becomes impossible. Community—or rather the incommon—is not based solely on the possibility of saying goodbye, that is, of having a unique encounter with others and honoring this meeting time and again. The in-common is based also on the possibility of sharing unconditionally, each time drawing from it something absolutely intrinsic, a thing uncountable, incalculable, priceless.

2.

There is no doubt that the skies are closing in. Caught in the stranglehold of injustice and inequality, much of humanity is threatened by a great chokehold as the sense that our world is in a state of reprieve spreads far and wide. If, in these circumstances, a day after comes, it cannot come at the expense of some, always the same ones, as in the Ancienne Économie—the economy that preceded this revolution. It must necessarily be a day for all the inhabitants of Earth, without distinction as to species, race, sex, citizenship, religion, or other differentiating marker. In other words, a day after will come but only with a giant rupture, the result of radical imagination.

Papering over the cracks simply won't do. Deep in the heart of this crater, literally everything must be reinvented, starting with the social. Once working, shopping, keeping up with the news and keeping in touch, nurturing and preserving connections, talking to one another and sharing, drinking together, worshipping and organizing funerals begins to take place solely across the interface of screens, it is time to acknowledge that, on all sides, we are surrounded by rings of fire. To a great extent, the digital is the new gaping hole exploding Earth. Simultaneously a trench, a tunnel, a moonscape, it is the bunker where men and women are all invited to hide away, in isolation.

They say that through the digital, the body of flesh and bones, the physical and mortal body, will be freed of its weight and inertia. At the end of this transfiguration, it will eventually be able to move through the looking glass, cut away from biological corruption and restituted to a synthetic universe of flux. But this is an illusion, for just as there is no humanity without bodies, likewise, humanity will never know freedom alone, outside of society and community, and never can freedom come at the expense of the biosphere.

3.

We must start afresh. To survive, we must return to all living things—including the biosphere—the space and energy they need. In its dank underbelly, modernity has been an interminable war on life. And it is far from over. One of the primary modes of this war, leading straight to the impoverishment of the world and to the desiccation of entire swathes of the planet, is the subjection to the digital.

In the aftermath of this calamity there is a danger that rather than offering sanctuary to all living species, sadly the world will enter a new period of tension and brutality.[2] In terms of geopolitics, the logic of power and might will continue to dominate. For lack of a common infrastructure, a vicious partitioning of the globe will intensify, and the dividing lines will become even more entrenched. Many states will seek to fortify their borders in the hope of protecting themselves from the outside. They will also seek to conceal the constitutive violence that they continue to habitually direct at the most vulnerable. Life behind screens and in gated communities will become the norm.

In Africa especially, but in many places in the Global South, energy-intensive extraction, agricultural expansion, predatory sales of land, and destruction of forests will continue unabated. The powering and cooling of computer chips and supercomputers depends on it. The purveying and supplying of the resources and energy necessary for the global computing infrastructure will require further restrictions on human mobility. Keeping the world at a distance will become the norm so as to keep risks of all kinds on the outside. But because it does not address our ecological precariousness, this catabolic vision of the world, inspired by theories of immunization and contagion, does little to break out of the planetary impasse in which we find ourselves.

4.

All these wars on life begin by taking away breath. Likewise, as it impedes breathing and blocks the resuscitation of human bodies and tissues, COVID-19 shares this same tendency. After all, what is the purpose of breathing if not the absorption of oxygen and release of carbon dioxide in a dynamic exchange between blood and tissues? But at the rate that life on Earth is going, and given what remains of the wealth of the planet, how far away are we really from the time when there will be more carbon dioxide than oxygen to breathe?

Before this virus, humanity was already threatened with suffocation. If war there must be, it cannot so much be against a

specific virus as against everything that condemns the majority of humankind to a premature cessation of breathing, everything that fundamentally attacks the respiratory tract, everything that, in the long reign of capitalism, has constrained entire segments of the world population, entire races, to a difficult, panting breath and life of oppression. To come through this constriction would mean that we conceive of breathing beyond its purely biological aspect, and instead as that which we hold in common, that which, by definition, eludes all calculation. By which I mean the universal right to breathe.

As that which is both ungrounded and our common ground, the universal right to breath is unquantifiable and cannot be appropriated. From a universal perspective, not only is it the right of every member of humankind, but of all life. It must therefore be understood as a fundamental right to existence. Consequently, it cannot be confiscated and thereby eludes all sovereignty, symbolizing the sovereign principle par excellence. Moreover, it is an originary right to living on Earth, a right that belongs to the universal community of earthly inhabitants, human and other.[3]

CODA

The case has been pressed already a thousand times. We recite the charges eyes shut. Whether it is the destruction of the biosphere, the takeover of minds by technoscience, the criminalizing of resistance, repeated attacks on reason, generalized cretinization, or the rise of determinisms (genetic, neuronal, biological, environmental), the dangers faced by humanity are increasingly existential.

Of all these dangers, the greatest is that all forms of life will be rendered impossible. Between those who dream of uploading our conscience to machines and those who are sure that the next mutation of our species lies in freeing ourselves from our biological husk, there's little difference. The eugenicist temptation has not dissipated. Far from it, in fact, since it is at the root of recent advances in science and technology. At this juncture, this sudden arrest arrives, an interruption not of history but of something that still eludes our grasp. Since it was imposed upon us, this cessation derives not from our will. In many respects, it is simultaneously unforeseen and unpredictable. Yet what we need is a voluntary cessation, a conscious and fully consensual interruption. Without which there will be no tomorrow. Without which nothing will exist but an endless series of unforeseen events.

A.M.

If, indeed, COVID-19 is the spectacular expression of the planetary impasse in which humanity finds itself today, then it is a matter of no less than reconstructing a habitable earth to give all of us the breath of life. We must reclaim the lungs of our world with a view to forging new ground. Humankind and biosphere are one. Alone, humanity has no future. Are we capable of rediscovering that each of us belongs to the same species, that we have an indivisible bond with all life? Perhaps that is the question—the very last—before we draw our last dying breath.

Translated by Carolyn Shread.

Originally published in "Posts from the Pandemic," *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 2, edited by Hank Scotch (Winter 2021), 58–62.

Is translation still permissible in COVID-19? We know that its reach is across borders, that it comingles in a way that is rapidly disappearing into a seemingly distant past, that it transfers and transforms. Now, under the regime of social distancing, where I show my care for you by stepping away, what is it to translate? For there's no reading more intimate than a translation—a bodily intimacy that adopts the rhythm of the lungs, the pulse of the heart, the coursing of the blood through the text to the point that we ask, whose breath is it anyway?

I know that this text kept me alive—merci, Achille Mbembe. That it came out of the blue, bringing a breath of fresh air—thank you, Hank Scotch. And that I'll pass it on to you, readers of *Critical Inquiry*, hoping that it frees up the atmosphere. Because we need to breathe together. And there is no solitary breath. —Trans.

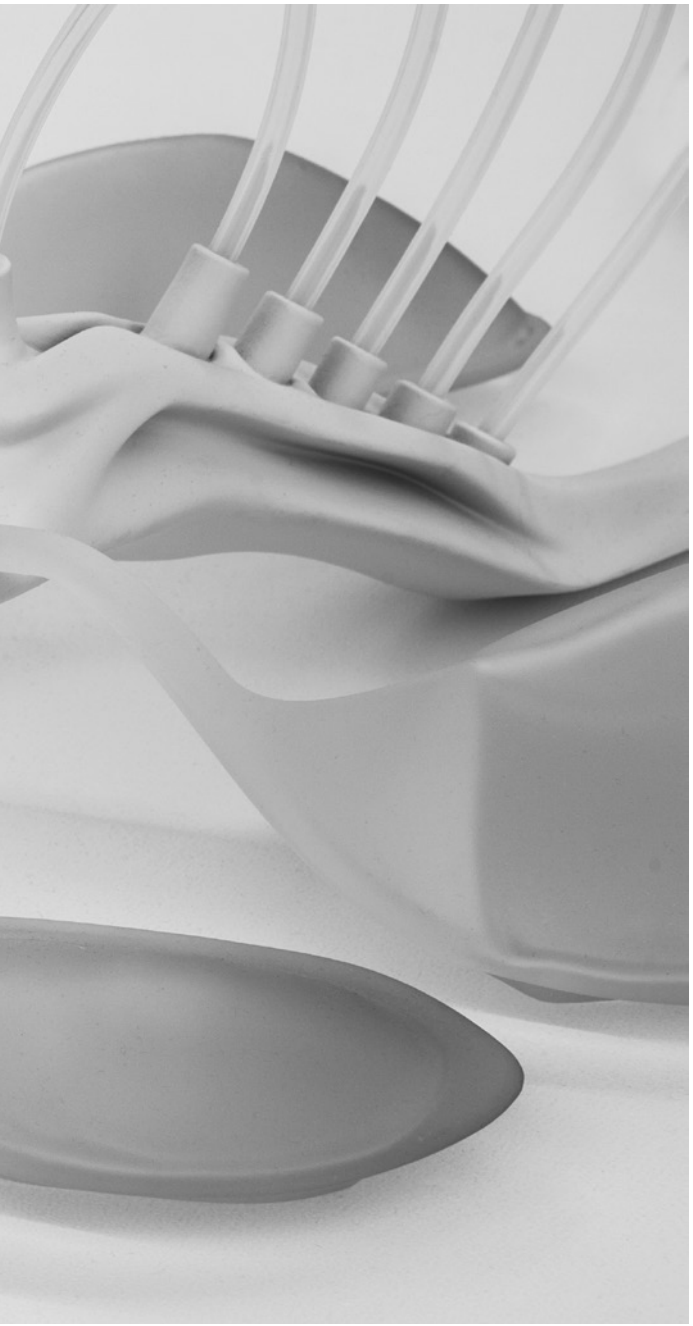
ENDNOTES

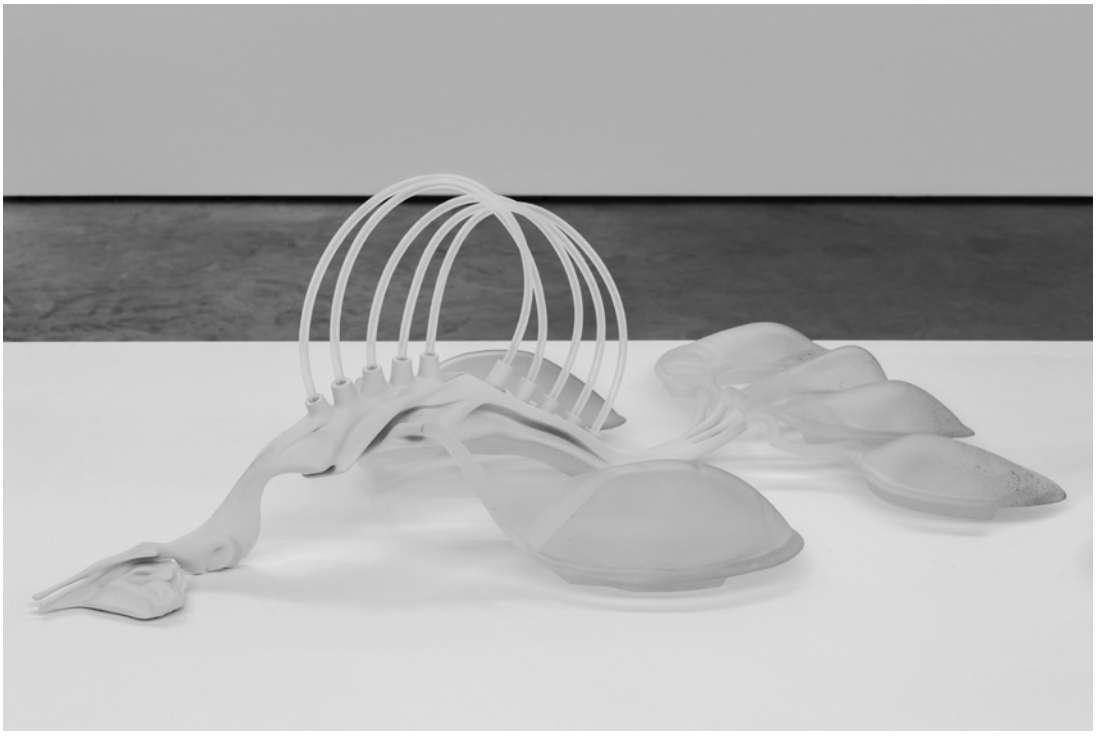
1 A version of this post appears in French; see Achille Mbembe, "Le droit universel à la respiration," AOC, 4 June 2020, aoc.media/opinion/2020/04/05/le-droit-universel-a-la-respiration/

2 Building on the terms origins as a mid-twentieth century architectural movement, I have defined brutalism as a contemporary process whereby "power is henceforth constituted, expressed, reconfigured, acts and reproduces itself as a geomorphic force." How so? Through processes that include "fracturing and fissuring," "emptying vessels," "drilling," and "expelling organic matter," in a word, by what I term "depletion" (Mbembe, Brutalisme [Paris, 2020], pp. 9, 10, 11).

3 See Sarah Vanuxem, "La propriete de la Terre," in *Le monde qui vient*, (Paris, 2018), and Marin Schaffner, "Un sol commun: Lutter, habiter, penser," in *Le monde qui vient*, (Paris: Editions Wildproject, 2019).

MARGUERITE HUMEAU





Marguerite Humeau, *Waste I - 1 (a respiratory tract mutating into industrial waste),* 2019
Installation views & reproductions.
Photos by Eden Krsmanovic;
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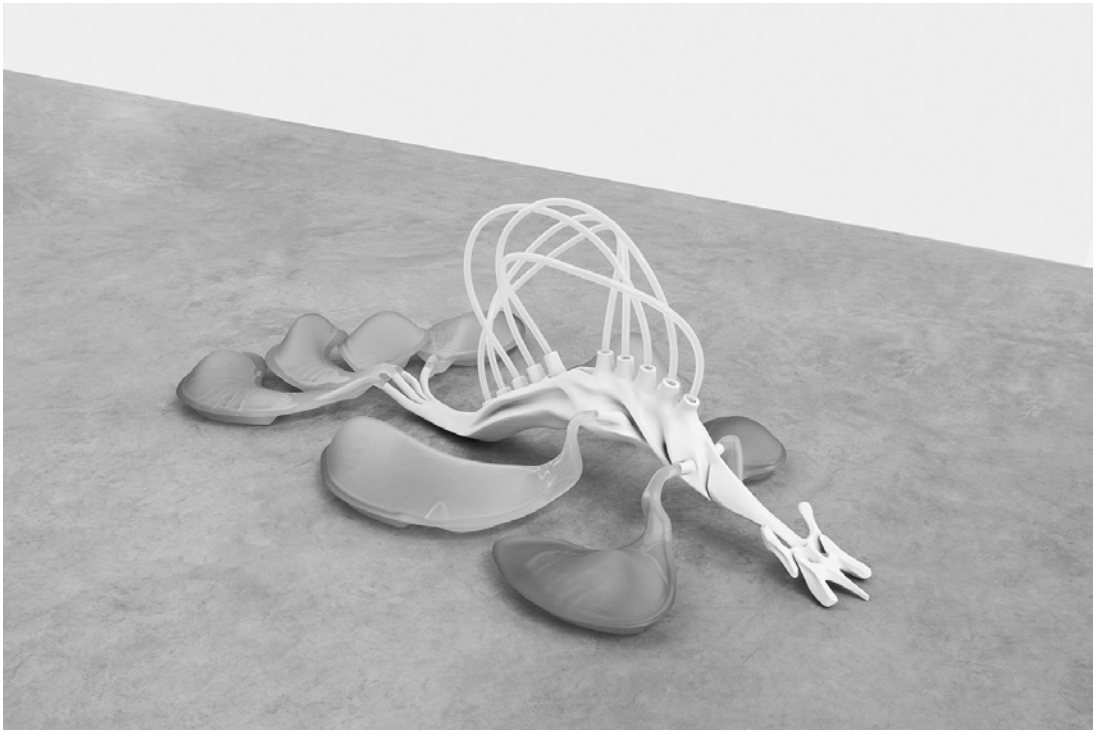


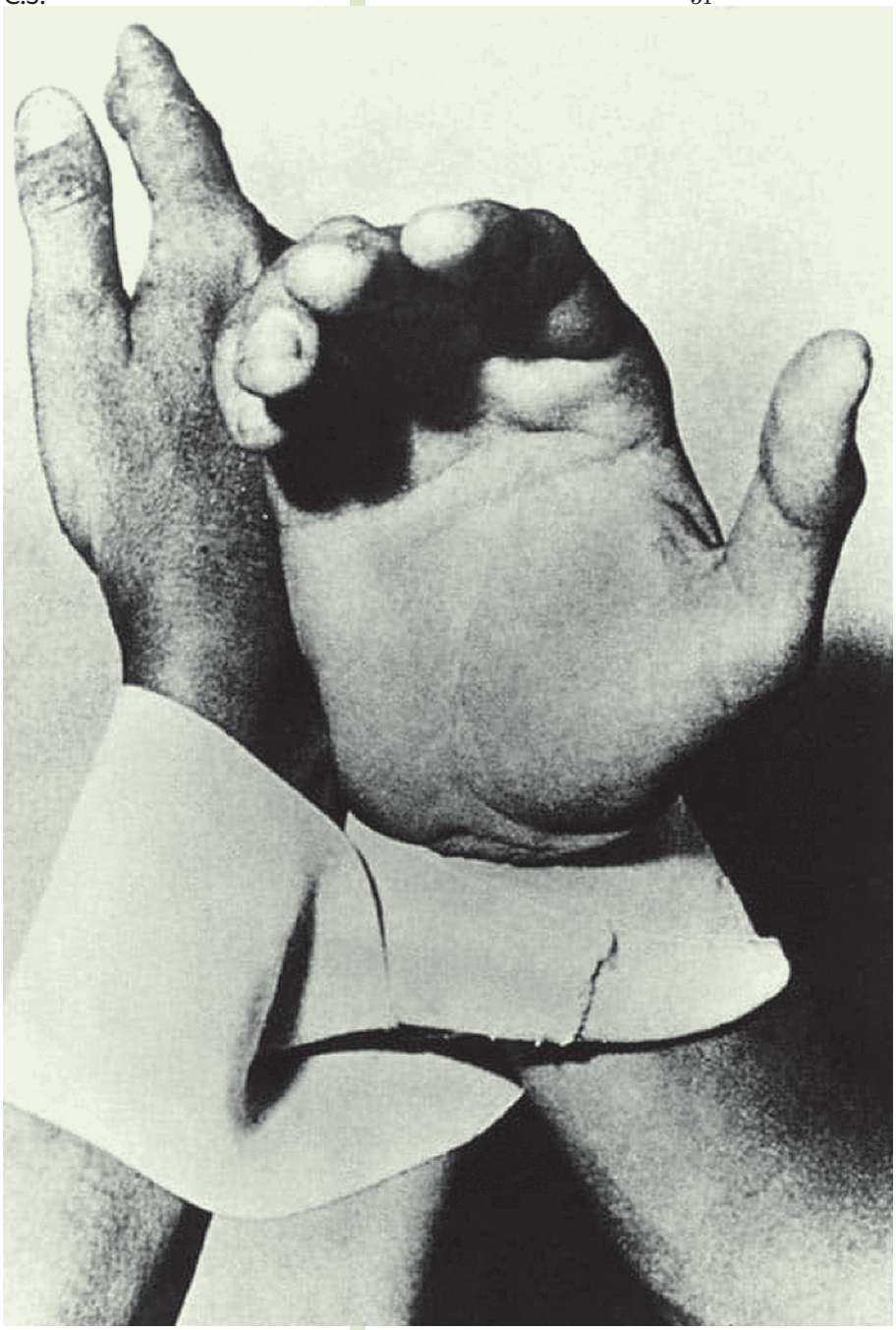
BREATHE WITH ME, A BREATH OF LIFE: CLARICE LISPECTOR & LYGIA CLARK

Charles Stankievech

Both born in 1920, writer Clarice Lispector and artist Lygia Clark produced some of the most radical work of the twentieth century: two bodies of work never touching but entwined like a Möbius loop, their worlds shaped unto themselves yet breathing the same air. Surprisingly very little, almost nothing, has been written focusing on a comparison between Lygia Clark and Clarice Lispector, including a record that sadly lacks a direct engagement or conversation that would have been intensely compelling between the two key feminist figures in Brazilian culture during the middle of the 20th century.[2] Perhaps it was their alternating international sojourns that made them ships passing in the night, but more likely I imagine the intense energy each possessed prohibited them from meeting and spontaneously combusting. Their shared context of course created a common foundational, historical backdrop—growing up, marrying and having children in colonialist Brazil, the trauma of an optimistic nation in the early 1950s sliding into a dictatorship in the following decade, an international zeitgeist of psychedelic counter-culture in the 1960s, and a rise in feminist discourse in the late 60s and early 70s—but a shared exceptional force emanates from their *oeuvres*: a material mysticism as expressed in the recurrent themes of the rapture of the instant, ritualistic celebration of the body, and a strong desire for the participation of the addressee in their work. While they both crafted numinous themes uniquely in their own fields, the result is a *sympathetic resonance*, a resonance best experienced by meditating on the rhythm of *breathing*.[3]

Both forging a voice in their male dominated disciplines—Lispector's texts defining an *écriture féminine* as promoted by Hélène Cixous, Clark inspiring the practice of participatory art (from Relational Aesthetics to Art Therapy)—one could connect these two Brazilians to a longer history of spiritual women writers. Most importantly, we can go back to the earliest writings attributed to women, who were themselves, like Lispector and Clark, practicing a visionary rhetoric as priestesses, poets and mystics. Enheduanna, a priestess from ancient Mesopotamia (who wrote in the cuneiform language that enchanted Lispector) is considered history's first known author, positioned right at the birth of the written word.[4] After the exceptional celebration of Sappho's fragmented collection, Western culture muted its acknowledgment of female voices only to be marginally resurrected by 13th century Christian mystics. Within this lineage we would include (far from exhaustively) Mary Oigenes, Marguerite Porete, Marguerite d'Oingt, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Ávila.[5] The socio-economic dynamics of the upper class in the 13th century created a surplus of unmarried women that bolstered religious orders such as the *beguines*. Existing in a unique scenario of communal living with sustenance through nursing and the textile industry, some of the *beguines* offered the most important somatic versions of mysticism expressed through a combination of newly appreciated courtly love metaphors, the primacy of participation in the ritual of the Eucharist (the literal eating of Christ's Body) and erotic ecstasy.[6] One does not desire to entrap Lispector nor Clark within a Western Christian tradition in order to appreciate their work, but rather to acknowledge both women were tapping into a continually flowing underground stream running throughout history—from pagan through monotheistic—of mystical experience grounded in desire, the body and ritual.[7] Such a powerful practice that redeemed the body and the senses from a uniquely celebratory, and feminine, position was of course a challenge to orthodoxy. Marguerite Porete (the most well-known *beguine*) was famously burned at the stake in 1310 for heresy.[8] The persecution also transcended any religious sect. As Silvia Federici points out in *Caliban and the Witch*, the Inquisition trials for heresy "provided the metaphysical and ideological scaffold of the witch-hunt."[9] Heretic or witch: labels used to suppress women historically, and roles Lispector and Clark inversely embraced. Lispector, who was often called a witch by those who knew her, was personally invited to speak at the *First World Congress of Sorcery* in 1975; Clark was never officially accepted into the professional community of psychoanalysis. Tellingly, both women resisted the reliance on myth for the power in their art, crafting instead a new language, a new experience. Lispector used as the epigraph to *Água Viva* a quote from the artist Michel Seuphor: "There must be a kind of painting totally free of the dependence on the figure—or object—which, like music, illustrates nothing, tells no story, and launches no *myth*"; Clark, in a documentary on her later work titled *O Mundo de Lygia Clark*, states: "There is no more *myth*. This is an art of participation".[10] Unifying the religious, poetic, and philosophical—all while resisting myth—Lispector and Clark establish a new language of the mystical through their meditation on the everyday.

The scope of literary styles in Lispector's *oeuvre* ranges from newspaper



Lygia Clark, *Hand Dialogue*, 1966.
Photo by unknown.
Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

writing (*crônica*) to short stories, experimental novels to children's stories. Within this diverse body of work, one could collect three major works as a mystical trinity of novels that progressively, and fittingly, deconstructs: *The Passion According to G.H* (1964), *Água Viva* (1973), and *A Breathe of Life* (1977, posthumous).[11] All three could be seen as streams of consciousness (either in monologue or dialogue form), and the three novels are perhaps the most personal of Lispector's as they purposefully blur the boundary between confessional and fiction. They were in a sense less a genre of literature and more a chimera of philosophical feminism, something akin to the new genre celebrated today of ficto-criticism or autotheory—a genre less interested in citing the Western philosophical canon (often of men) and more interested in pulling together a web of embedded lived experiences with a methodology arising out of process.[12] Furthermore, three artistic vocations of the protagonists tie the three novels together, establishing a conscious working through a methodology of creation. In *Passion* the narrator is a sculptress who is triggered into a mystical encounter by a painting left by her maid. In *Água* the narrator becomes the painter (after an earlier manuscript composes her as a writer). In the final post-humous work *Breath* the method cannot resist becoming recursive: Clarice the writer creates the character of an author who in turn creates a character who is a painter, who claims: "My ideal would be to paint a picture of a picture."[13] A Möbius loop is formed: "a snake swallowing its own tail."[14]

As for the "narratives" themselves, the first, *Passion*, embodied an experimental form of a single meditation, recounting the casual entering of a maid's room and spontaneously experiencing a mystical revelation. While the narrative follows a realistic description, the literary strategy of each chapter's last sentence being repeated as the first sentence of the following chapter strings together a continuous movement across the entire novel. An incessant stream of consciousness pulls the reader further and further into the void of a swirling vortex. The later novel, *Água*, explodes any linear (or any Euclidian geometric) representation of an experience, into a formless novel: "Let me tell you: I am trying to seize the fourth dimension".[15] Instead, tentacles out of the depths of darkness grip the reader, pulling them apart:

> As if ripping from the depths of the earth the knotted roots of a rare tree, that's how I write to you, and those roots as if they were powerful tentacles like voluminous naked bodies of strong women entwined by serpents and by carnal desires for fulfilment, and all this is the prayer of a black mass, and a creeping plea for amen: because the bad is unprotected and needs the approval of God: that is creation.[16]

The single long build toward the climax of *The Passion*, as expressed in the traditional arc of the novel, morphs into the continuous rapture of *Água Viva*'s ebb and flow.

Without a singular character anchoring the drama, *Água* shifts from third person narrative into an intimate dialogue between the self and an unorthodox addressing of the second person. But is this "you" the reader or another identity within the writer's consciousness? The didactic devotional style of the text recalls Porete's unique *Mirror of Simple Souls*. The full title dramatically clarifying Souls "Who Are Annihilated," and it is such dissolving of the identity of the writer that matches the "formlessness" of *Água*: "I am a little scared: scared of surrendering completely because the next instant is the unknown. The next instant, do I make it? Or does it make itself? We make it together with our breath."[17] The final novel in the trinity, *A Breath of Life* propels this dialogue into a recursive relationship.[18] One cannot be certain that a final draft of the novel would not have recomposed the character's roles (as was the case in the final form of *Água*), but it seems the content was too developed for *Breath* to deviate from this strategy. One can also not under appreciate that Lispector knew this was her last work. Conflating identities further this time between fiction and life, the only posthumous editorial excision from the manuscript—out of respect to the family—was one sentence the "Author" asks God to give her character cancer—the pathology that concurrently took Clarice's own life in 1977.[19] The prologue to *Breath* ends with the conventionalized retraction established with medieval mystical texts.[20] Recognizing the limits of knowing, Lispector humbly resigns: "May peace be upon us, upon you, and upon me. Am I falling into discourse? may the temple's faithful forgive me: I write and that way rid myself of me and then at last I can rest."[21] Her fall from silence into the profane act of speech articulates the limits of our bodies, and

her failure is our falling in love. We dive into *The Passion*, float in *Agua Viva* and drown in *A Breath of Life*.

EXHALE

Propelled by constant crises, Lygia Clark continually pushed the boundaries of her work, always questioning what role art plays psychologically, politically and spiritually.[22] One consistent strategy throughout her life was her lucid and powerful writing: starting with the co-authorship of the "Neo-Concrete Manifesto" in 1959, through her dizzying prolific mid-career publications, and finally as essential collected elements to her posthumous retrospective catalogues.[23] One cannot think about her work without thinking through her own thinking on the work.[24] As deeply perceptual and somatic work, the participant can immediately engage her sensorial objects, but this is not to discount her carefully considered cosmology and theories of subjectivity powerfully articulated in her letters, essays, interviews and even a children's story.[25] With such a heterogenous field, rather than focus on a historical stage, one way to immerse oneself into Lygia Clark's work is following the continual rise and fall of the *breath*—a rhythm in the shape of a Möbius loop.[26] The interior of our lungs inhales the exterior of the atmosphere into the depths of our body only to exhale this same air transformed by the alchemy of our interior: inside and outside continually connected, constantly cycling with our breathing. We need only look at one of Clark's early work using the form of a Möbius loop to see this connection: "What strikes me in the *"inside and outside"* sculpture is that it transforms my perception of myself, of my body. It changes me. I am elastic, formless, without definite physiognomy. Its lungs are mine. It's the introjection of the cosmos… Its internal space is an affective space."[27]

Clark was from the beginning connecting the act of breathing with non-Euclidian space that turned itself inside out.

If forced to make a paradigmatic cut (and most do, including Clark), it happened when she cut a Möbius strip.[28] In 1963, Clark constructed *Walking*, a proposition that requested the reader to take a Möbius loop and start cutting it in half along the grain of the surface as it turns upon itself. In doing so, the now reader-turned-participant proceeds to iteratively cycle through the looping form never reaching an edge of the paper and suggesting an infinite procedure. Composed by a deceivingly simple gesture, *Walking* continued the *avant-garde*'s spiritual obsession

with the fourth dimension and non-Euclidian geometry.[29] *Walking* enacts diagrammatic thinking *par excellence* as a response to Clark's own proclaimed "Death of the Plane" (1960):

> To demolish the picture plane as a medium of expression is to become aware of unity as an living whole… We plunge into the totality of the cosmos; we are a part of this cosmos, vulnerable on all sides—but one that has even ceased having sides-high and low, left and right, front and back, and ultimately, good and bad—so radical concepts been transformed. Contemporary humanity escapes the spiritual laws of gravity. It learns to float in cosmic reality.[30]

The move from geometry to topology (as it did in physics) created a new understanding of the cosmos for Clark. Particularly, the Möbius loop opened a portal to the phantastic interdimensional: "more than a surface less than a volume."[31] Paradoxically, such a new space provided an escape plan ("line of flight") from the traditional forms of painting and sculpture, while also importantly adding the fourth dimension of temporality. "I am trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant—now so fleeting that it's already done because it's already become a new instant-now that's also already gone" writes Lispector in a line that easily could have escaped from Clark's text "Concerning the Instant" (1965).[32]

Crucially, the mathematical Möbius loop morphs into a more existential and embodied work as a direct result of Clark's own body undergoing crisis and repair. After an accident that fractured her wrist and resulted in the application of a poultice, a frustrated Clark ripped off the plastic encapsulating the limb and exhaled into the bag to fill it like a pillow. On this she balanced a small stone.[33] The simple gesture of holding the bag necessitates squeezing the inflatable, resulting in the stone's magical rising and falling. *Stone and Air* was created in 1966 but was still used even at the end of her life as she transitioned to conducting therapeutic engagements.[34] In an important pairing created the same year, *Breathe with Me* externalizes the lung to create a rhythmic apparatus of the breath. Using again ready-made objects, Clark took an underwater diving tube and inserted one end it into its

Lygia Clark, *Abyss Mask*, 1968.
Photo by unknown.
Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

other end, creating a hermetically sealed organ. By stretching the accordion ribbed tube, a small amount of air seeps in and out at the joint, the mouth of the tube, producing a wheezing sound like breathing. One could use it as a mediative device breathing together with the apparatus or psychologically associate one's own lung as exteriorized. Clark herself said of the work, "The first time I did it… the consciousness of my breathing obsessed me for several stifling hours, at the same time as an unknown energy seemed born in me..."[35]

The powerful paradox in both of these works exudes from the ephemeral breathing action in contrast to both the objects' industrial plastic materiality. Thinkers such as Roland Barthes mythologized plastic in the 1950s as a novel material full of possibilities, and Clark celebrated such ready-made objects as "valueless"—meaning accessible. [36] However, the extreme difference between its quotidian reality and its psychic phantasy cannot be understated. Clark imaginatively transubstantiated "colorless transparent plastic," into "an ectoplasm that immaterially binds bodies together."[37] Ectoplasm becomes the medium for the medium, and with a characteristic *coup* by Clark, she sublates the term's dual biological and magical meaning. This paradoxical pairing is inherent within the problematics of breath for a visual and somatic artist. Clark is not interested in air, she is interested in breath, and thus vessels and containment are necessary to shape such immateriality. The breath naturally connects people and the subject both to the surroundings when inhaled in lungs and as a therapeutic act when exhaled in plastic envelopes—be they a relational object, a sensory mask or organic achitecture. After making *Breathe with Me*, Clark started making masks that participants wore to engage their own bodies, the world around them and other people.[38] Moving from objects to play with, to second skins to explore with, plastic mediates the "psychic plasticity"[39] for participants, providing an *infra-sensory* experience:

> The moment the spectator wears the infra-sensory mask, they isolate themselves from the world (after being already situated in it) and in that introversion they lose contact with reality and find within themselves a whole range of fantastic experiences. It would be a way to find the breath of life. Everything that is revealed through sensory sensations brings them to a state equivalent to a drugged state. Would this state be the immanence of the absolute? Would this loss of apparent reality be the capture of another kind of reality?[40]

The "breath of life"—once an ancient mystical source of the soul—manifests in the everyday as breathing into (or with) plastic.[41] Both Lygia Clark and Clarice Lispector translate the abstract language of religion and mathematics, ignoring a traditional desire for the Platonic "realm of forms" or the afterlife of paradise, instead transmuting their reality into a material mysticism manifested through the breath in the here and now. In a rare moment in her writing, Lispector creates the neologism "*imanesença*" [immanescence] as a portmanteau fusing immanence and transcendence. She does so in her last novel *The Breath of Life* and paradoxically uses it twice. The first time: "I'd rather have stayed in the immanescence of the sacred Nothing." The second: "I'd rather have stayed in the immanescence of nature."[42] Clark "stayed in the immanescence" through the simplicity of a stone floating on plastic bag of breath, and Lispector with an egg lying on a kitchen table:

> In the morning in the kitchen on the table I see the egg… The egg is a suspended thing. It has never landed. When it lands, it is not what has landed. It was a thing under the egg. I look at the egg in the kitchen with superficial attention so as not to break it. I take the utmost care not to understand it. Since it is impossible to understand, I know that if I understand it this is because I am making an error. Understanding is the proof of making an error. Understanding it is not the way to see it.[43]

So much has been written about Clarice and Lygia, but each time I return to an immersion in their actual words, their dark lucidity and *punctum* negates the need for any exegetical glossing. Their works already speaks for themselves and my only desire is that they enter into dialogue with each other. I resign to silence with two last passages destined to resonate with each other—and I hope with *you* the reader:

C.S.

L.C.: Every time I breath, the rhythm comes out right, but it's almost an internal rhythm, totalized within the act. I have become aware of my cosmic affective "lung." I'm entering into the topological rhythm of the world… I feel the rockets passed over my body without hurting me. My breath is the cosmos, my lung is the cosmos.

C.L.: These instants passing through the air I breathe: in fireworks they explode silently in space.[44]

ENDNOTES

1 The title is a phrase composed out of two titles by Clark (*Breathe With Me*, 1966) and Lispector (*A Breath of Life*, 1977). An early version of this essay was commissioned by *Afterall Journal* for publication in 2015, which I thank them for immensely for the first version, and humbly admit my failure to deliver a final version.

2 The very rare passing mention, footnote or association with larger movements, like Neo-Concretism exist, but no direct comparison of the two biographies and bodies of work exists to my knowledge—at least in English.

3 Sympathetic resonance is a phenomenon in physics when two bodies not touching vibrate to the same frequency—one body's vibration picked up by the other due to a careful attunement, providing a feedback loop. Both Clark and Lispector, while most known for their poetic vocabulary, were very much interested in mathematical and scientific language, such as the fourth dimension, the topology of Möbius loops, and wireless communication.

4 *Água Viva* (here in referred to simply as *Água*): "I am enchanted, seduced, transfixed by furtive voices. The almost unintelligible cuneiform inscriptions speak of how to conceive and give formulae about how to feed from the force of darkness. They speak of naked and crawling females. And the solar eclipse causes secret terror that nonetheless announces a splendor of heart." (35); Clark wanted to return to a pre-Modern anonymous art, where perhaps patriarchy didn't reign so exclusively under the "Name-of-the-Father" (see video *O Mundo*). For the original proposition of Enheduanna as the first author in history see the 1968 text by William Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk: *The Exaltation of Inanna*.

5 See Caroline Bynum's book *Fragmentation and Redemption* (1991) for an account of 13th century mystics Mary Oigenes and Marguerite d'Oingt's somatic theology. Marguerite Porete's *Le Mirouer des simples âmes* is one of Old French's spiritual classics from c.1300. Catherine of Siena, a saint from the 14th century, left us not a *Summa Theologica* but a *Dialogue* between lover and Beloved. Teresa of Ávila, who lived in the 16th century and is most popularly known, was officially beatified and later memorialised in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Baroque sculpture capturing the moment of her penetrating ecstasy (and who Lispector was directly compared to when alive).

6 When speaking of d'Oingt, Bynum observes "the experiencing of Christ is to 'turn on,' so to speak, the bodily sense of the receiving mystic." (1991, 192). And to quote at length the beguine Hadewijch circa 1220: "After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him, and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported. And then, for a short while, I had the strength to bear this; but soon, after a short time, I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to nought and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside me, and I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference" (Bynum, 1984, 180). And of course, the much later and famous passage from St. Teresa: "In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love

for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness cause me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, now will one's soul be content with anything less than God?" (quoted in both Bataille, 224, and de Beauvior, 635). It is important to note that while sketching out a hagiography of women mystics that Bynum resists any simple essentializing of gender for a more fluid understanding, there still remains an importance in the facticity of the body, noting devotion and projection across boundaries: nuns associating with the body of Christ, men feminized by their love for Christ (see Bynum, 1991, ch.VI).

7 A recent biography by Benjamin Moser frames Lispector's life, perhaps a little too eagerly and reductively, within a Jewish mystical tradition from her prebirth to her burial—though strictly in a male defined discourse from *zaddikim* to Spinoza. Amy Hollywood, in *Sensible Ecstasy* (2002), provides an interesting critique of 20th century philosophers engagement with 13th century women mystics and the limits of Christianity, but the intention of this essay is to provide an alternative thread of philosophical thinking and writing as continued in Lispector and Clark. Including Islamic mysticism such as the Sufi Rabia Al Basri would provide an interesting extension of this research but is beyond the scope of this essay. See also Sharon Faye Koren's *Forsaken: the Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (2011).

8 Porete crossed over from religious scholarship to more mainstream literature with engagements such as by contemporary Canadian poet and Classics scholar, Anne Carson. See *Decreation*—originally an experimental opera (2001), then as an academic meditation (2002), together collected into a book (2006). See the author's own text, "Desire: The Moment and Movement in Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*" (2000).

9 Federici quote from 168. While Federici acknowledges the Marxist interpretations of the witch hunts by Carlos Ginzburg and Michael Taussig, Simone de Beauvoir earlier proposed a Marxist, feminist critique of witch-burning as an early modern subjugation of women to usurp their medicinal knowledge and power in her last television interview ("Pourquoi je suis une féministe," 1975). De Beauvoir was also well-schooled in the female mystics in her adolescent Catholic schooling, recounting how she eroticized their experiences. While maintaining a connection throughout her life between the erotic and the mystical, in the classic text *The Second Sex*, she articulates how "The Mystic" can enact a bad faith if performing her otherness for a patriarchal audience—be it clergy or God, 633-40.

10 My emphasis in both.

11 In creating a mystical canon—apart from the major novels—I must add the early short text "The Egg and the Chicken" (1964), which sets out an early rendering of the experience of the mystical in the everyday, which is so uniquely crafted by Lispector. In the only interview for television she ever gave (and was released posthumously), Lispector claims this story as her favorite piece of writing that remained until the end of her life a mystery even to herself (it was also the text she had read at the Sorcery conference in 1975). I would also add a little-known short story "Waters of the World" (1971) as a minor epistle, and finally, it is important to mention as a part of the apocrypha (in a John Donne inversion of the "sacred" and the "profane"), the anti-mystical novel *A via crucis de corpo* from 1974, which includes (among a cornucopia of sexual encounters), a mystical consummation between a typist and a being from Saturn named "Ixtlan" (10). Unlike the painstaking composition and revising of *Água Viva*, which took over three years, *Via crucis* was ecstatically written over a weekend a year later (see Moser, p.346). There are of course early stories such as "Obsession" (1941) and "Imitation of a Rose" (1959-60) (to name two) that directly engage religious and occult ideas as content, but they are not mystical text in themselves. From here on *The Passion According to G.H.* is referred to simply as *Passion* and *A Breathe of Life as Breath*.

12 "There is much I cannot tell you. I am not going to be autobiographical. I want to be 'bio.' " *Água*, 29.

13 43.

14 Ibid. 12.

15 *Água*. 3. She explains the structure using the metaphor of a photographic flash—the instant (*Água*, 12). As Susan Best observed about Lygia Clark, who followed Bachelard's concept of time versus Bergson (see 55), one could equally engage Lispector's concept of the instant from this notion. While the perceived intention is to conflate at times the narrator and Lispector, one at times must also separate the narrator's existential struggle and attempts to communicate with the final editorial decisions of Lispector. See Hélène Cixous' "Foreword" to *Água* for a reflection on the organic structure and performance of the text.

16 *Água*, 13. Also, *Água Viva* is slang in Portuguese for jelly fish.

17 Ibid. 3. For "formless" see Bataille "Critical Dictionary," 51-52. Lispector

also quotes the Vedas in the epigraph to *Apple in the Dark* (1961): "By entering into all things, he became what has form and what is formless." x.

18 *Água Viva* was first translated as *The Stream of Life* making the continuation into *The Breath of Life* more obvious.

19 See Olga Borelli's comments in the notes at the end of the novel, *Breath*, 165.

20 For a contemporary example see also Bataille's conclusion to *Erotism*: "But at this point I should like to counsel my hearers the most extreme caution. I am really speaking a dead language. This language, I believe, is the language of philosophy. I will go so far as to say that in my opinion philosophy is also the death of language. It is also sacrifice. …I have cautioned you about language. I must therefore caution you at the same time against my own words. Not that I want to end upon a note of farce, but I have been trying to talk a language that equals zero, a language equivalent to nothing at all, a language that returns to silence," 263-4.

21 *Breath*, 12.

22 It's interesting to note—in a manner similar to the apophatic strategy of defining through negation—there are as many attempts to define Clark's work through negating as much as through naming; i.e., it's not art, not performance, not a Happening, not dematerialized, not an object, not-psychoanalysis, etc.). Even Clark herself—always looking for a breakthrough after crisis—expressed there were regressive phases in her work, and she continually re-evaluated her production to move foward and yet constantly re-appropriated her own work; e.g., the same works once "Sensorial Objects" becoming "Relational Objects" in a new context.

23 For the purpose of creating a dialogue between C.L. and L.C., I am primarily restricting the discussion to works from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. Respecting the primacy of Clark's work as "plastic" art, leading up to this period her writing begins with an early imaginary letter to Mondrian calling him a "mystic," followed by several years of an intense investigation into the purpose of art with a rhetoric usually reserved for theological writing, as can be observed easily by the titles, and even more so within the prose that at times verges on poetry: "On Ritual" (1960), "The Death of the Plane" (1960), "The Empty-Full" (1960), and "Poetics in Art, Religion, and Space-time" (1963/5), "Concerning the Magic of the Object" (1965), to name a few of the more commonly published texts.

24 Her collaborator and main interlocutor, Suely Rolnik: "Actually, it was the artist herself who best found words to conceptualize her work," 98.

25 Singularly, the one genre of work both Lispector and Clark crossed over was the "children's story." In 1975, Clark wrote the little discussed and untranslated story entitled *Mue Doce Rio* [*My Sweet River*] —a flowing, surrealist fairy-tale with morphing animals, virgins and ogres roaming an anthropomorphized landscape, where if the children "joined hands unifying all their bodies, the sensations multiplied," 11. Perhaps less intended for children and more a transgressive product of her psychanalytic sessions, the fiction articulated using literary tropes the research exercises she was doing with her students at the Sorbonne creating custom-made rituals such as saliva drooled collectively over a body (*Anthropophagic Drool*, 1973) or a group cannibalistically feasting on another student's body (*Cannibalism*, 1973).

26 A Möbius loop is a two-dimensional form that is twisted in three-dimensional space creating a single surface. A Klein bottle is the analog with a three-dimensional volume twisted in fourth-dimensional space, but poses difficulties illustrating visually. One could argue Clark's *Stone and Air* work attempts such an impossibility.

27 "1965: About the Act" in "Nostalgia," 104.

28 It is unclear whether *Inside is the Outside*, or *Walking*, was created first as they both have the dates 1963. I would posit the two works were born not at the same moment but intertwined; *Walking* a result of cutting out the paper templates for works in the series of *Beasts* (which included *The Inside is the Outside*). Temporality folds in on itself and we are left with the classic paradox of which came first as expressed in the title of one of Lispector's key stories: "The Egg and [or] the Chicken."

29 See Linda Henderson's exhaustive *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (1983), for various *avant-garde* movements concerned with such scientific-mathematic theories. It is important to note that the fourth dimension as understood by artists could be interpreted as *time* in the relativistic space-time continuum or as a higher non-visible spatial dimension. See Iris Murdoch's "Existentialists and Mystics" treatise on the rise of mystical artwork not as an outmoded pre-modern inclination but as a reaction to 20th century science. See Lispector: "I studied mathematics, which is the madness of reason—but now I want the plasma—I want to eat straight from the placenta." *Água*, p.3.

30 "Nostalgia," 96-97.

31 Phrase is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whom we know

from letters to Mário Pedrosa, Clark read at least *Anti-Oedipus*.

32 *Água*, 3. One thinks here of Marcel Duchamp and his passion for the fourth dimension and the exploration of the undescribed as collected under the term the "*infra-mince*" (infra-thin)—something one cannot define but can only give examples of, such as: "When the tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth which exhales it the two odors are married by infra-thin," 194 (translation slightly modified). cf. Clark describing how she existentially appropriated the interdimensional work *Walking*: "while watching the smoke from my cigarette: it was as though time itself were ceaselessly forging a path, annihilating itself, remaking itself continuously …I already experienced that in love, in my gestures." In "Nostalgia," 100. Lispector described her process as "trying to photograph perfume." *Água*, 47.

33 For a description of the genesis of the work (and other early pieces) see the exceptional essay by one of Clark's earliest supporters, curator Guy Brett, 79. I encourage readers to make the work themselves to experience the richness within its elegant simplicity.

34 Clark not only still used the same apparatus but affectionally tells the viewer, "I consider it the purest and best." Quoted in the documentary *Memória do Corpo*.

35 Quoted in Brett, ibid.

36 See Barthes' exhibition review "Plastic" in *Mythologies*. Barthes' writing on the "Death of the Author" (1967) and his radical injection of pleasure (*joussiance*) into theoretical writing and the academy has been noted as other significant influences in the 1960s that have been extended to Lispector and Clark. Clark's descriptor "valueless" mentioned in Brett, 79.

37 Letter from Clark to Hélio Oiticica, "26.10.1968." See *Cartas*, translation by the author.

38 A few titles: *Sensorial*, 1967; *The I and the You*, 1967; *Abyssal Mask*, 1968. It is important to note that while Clark's masks created fantastical experiences, they were made out of the same context and material as the political revolts and the gasmasks used in the dictatorship of Brazil and the student protests in Paris. Just as in the past, when Clark's poetics resonated with the political, today's pandemic politics surrounding respiratory masks can be read through the same Sensory Masks, mediating our personal interiors with the exterior of the world.

39 I am borrowing the term "plasticité psychique" from Georges Didi-Huberman's book *Gestes d'air et de pierre* in a chapter discussing Clark's psychoanalysts, Daniel Lagache and Pierre Fédida, on the topic of "Breath and Hallucinations," 27.

40 Clark. (*Lygia Clark*, 1997). 219. Thank you to Filipa Ramos for helping translate this passage from Portuguese.

41 Nephesh [נֶפֶשׁ] is the Hebrew world that describes man as God breathed life into him, Genesis 2:7: "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (KJV). In Vedic writing "breath of life" or Prāna is not only in animals but in inanimate objects as well, see Ewing, "Hindu Conception of the Functions of Breath-A Study in Early Hindu Psycho-Physics" (1901).

42 18 & 130.

43 Lispector, "The Egg and the Chicken", 276-77.

44 Clark, "November 1, 1963," 163; Lispector, *Água*, 3.

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TWILIGHT OF THE SIGH
Alireza Taheri

1. There is a spectral point of madness from which alone, paradoxically, a modicum of sanity may arise.

1.1 Where Hegel christened it as the *absolute*, Freud spoke of the *symptom*.

1.11 The common misunderstanding of Hegel holds that the absolute is the locus of *total knowledge*.

1.12 The usual misreading of Freud holds that the symptom is the abode of *an embodied ignorance*.

2. The speculative paradox of the absolute/symptom is that it is at once ignorance and highest wisdom, at once health and despair, and at once *via dolorosa* and *gaya scienza*.

3. The symptom is not an irrational oddity, marring an otherwise perfect rationality.

3.1 The symptom is hyper-rational.

3.11 Quipping Hegel, we may say *what is hyper-rational is the symptom and, conversely, that which is a symptom is hyper-rational*.

3.12 The symptomatic torsion on the Möbius strip is not the insignia of unreason but, rather, the sign of reason's hyper-presence.

3.2 As "voice of the intellect", the symptom "does not rest until it has gained a hearing" (Freud).

3.3 The symptom/absolute refers to that sickness to which we owe the advent of spirit.

3.31 "The sickness of the animal is the birth of spirit" (Hegel).

4. When the voice of the symptom dies, when the absolute wanes into oblivion, there arises the *sigh*, the anxious longing for the lost symptom and the lament for the forlorn absolute.

4.1 The sigh is melancholy yearning for the symptom, for the madness that makes me sane, the ignorance that makes me wise and the pain that gives me joy.

4.2 Without the symptom, I am the orphan of the absolute, akin to a mere thing.

4.3 The sigh is the last cry of an I who hopes not to reify and wishes not to die.

5. Pre-modern love demands the twilight of the symptom.

5.1 There thus arises the sigh.

5.11 Pre-modern love is sui-sighed.

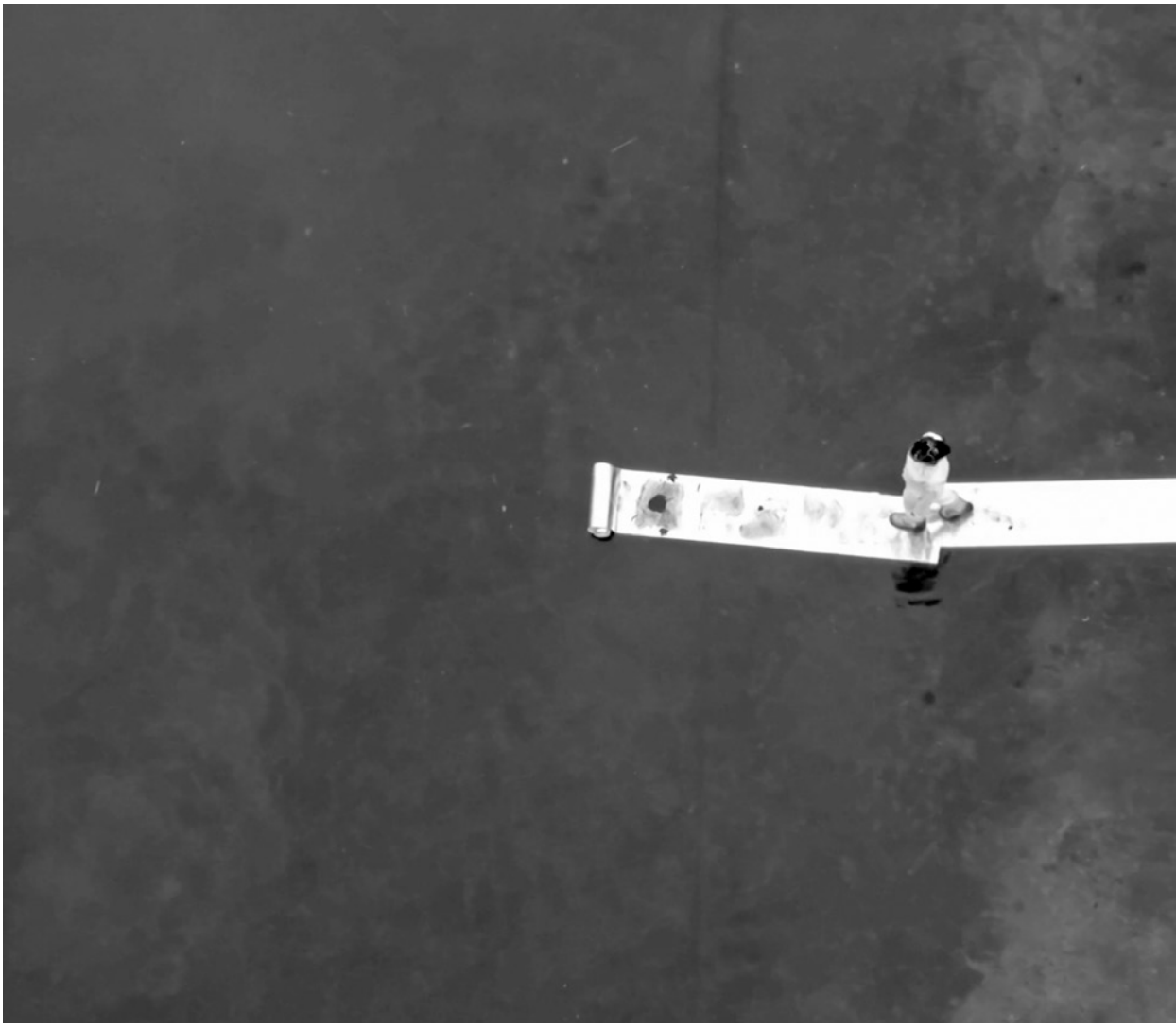
6. Modern love is the symptom regained and the twilight of the sigh.

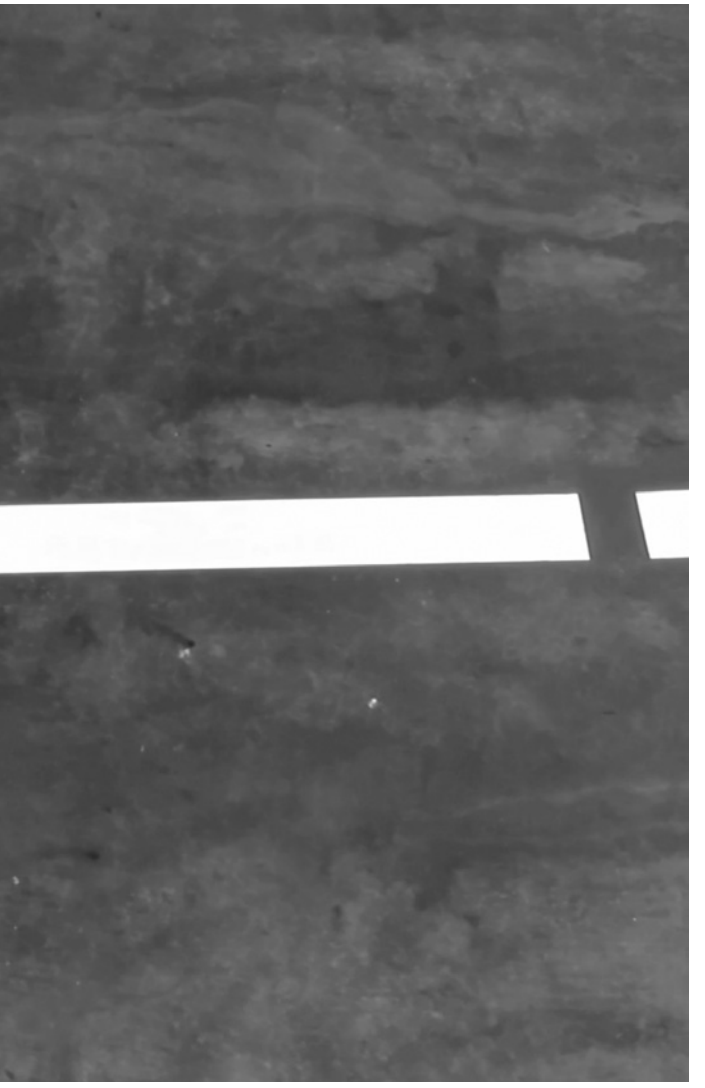
6.1 In modern love, the symptom thrives and the Other dies.

6.11 The symptom breathes and the gods are stifled to a sigh.

6.12 Dei-sighed.

DONNA KUKAMA





Donna Kukama, *Chapter Q: Dem Short-Short-Falls*, 2017/2018, video-stills.
Courtesy the artist and Black Projects, Cape town, South Africa.

BREATHLESS

AIR OF OUR
CLOSED WORLD
Ala Roushan

As we hesitate to breath the *contaminated* air of the outside world, limited to breaths filtered by our fashioned masques, the domestic interior forms a sanctuary to inhale for those with access. As enclaves of protection, the domestic enclosure provides its select inhabitants uncontaminated air, fortified by architectural boundaries that permit us to freely breathe.[1] With today's rampant viral threat and enforced social distancing, the domestic container becomes a vessel for the privileged life; a closed environment nested within a closed world. This closed condition arrives at an impossible tension between our awareness that each breath is an act of sharing and allowing the outside deep within, while yearning for clean, unbreathed air.

Permeating the shared atmosphere of the closed world, in addition to vital oxygen and lethal viral particulates, flows the planetary cyberspace. Instigated by the global infrastructure of the internet, signals transmit and receive data as waves moving through the air. This fluidity in transmission enables information coming from the privacy of our dwellings to seamlessly register onto the planetary cloud, creating an ambiguity between private and public space. Ironically, while the domestic realm aims to secure privacy and protect its atmosphere, it is also part of a new public domain shaped by the digital network. In 2020, the domestic space regained our attention; physical boundaries that were previously celebrated as fluid rushed to become secure in a way unprecedented in contemporary Western life. Regardless, what continues to impose perforation on these material boundaries is a strong tether to the digital realm, a connection that increases virtual proximity in an inverse proportion to the immediate demand for physical distance.

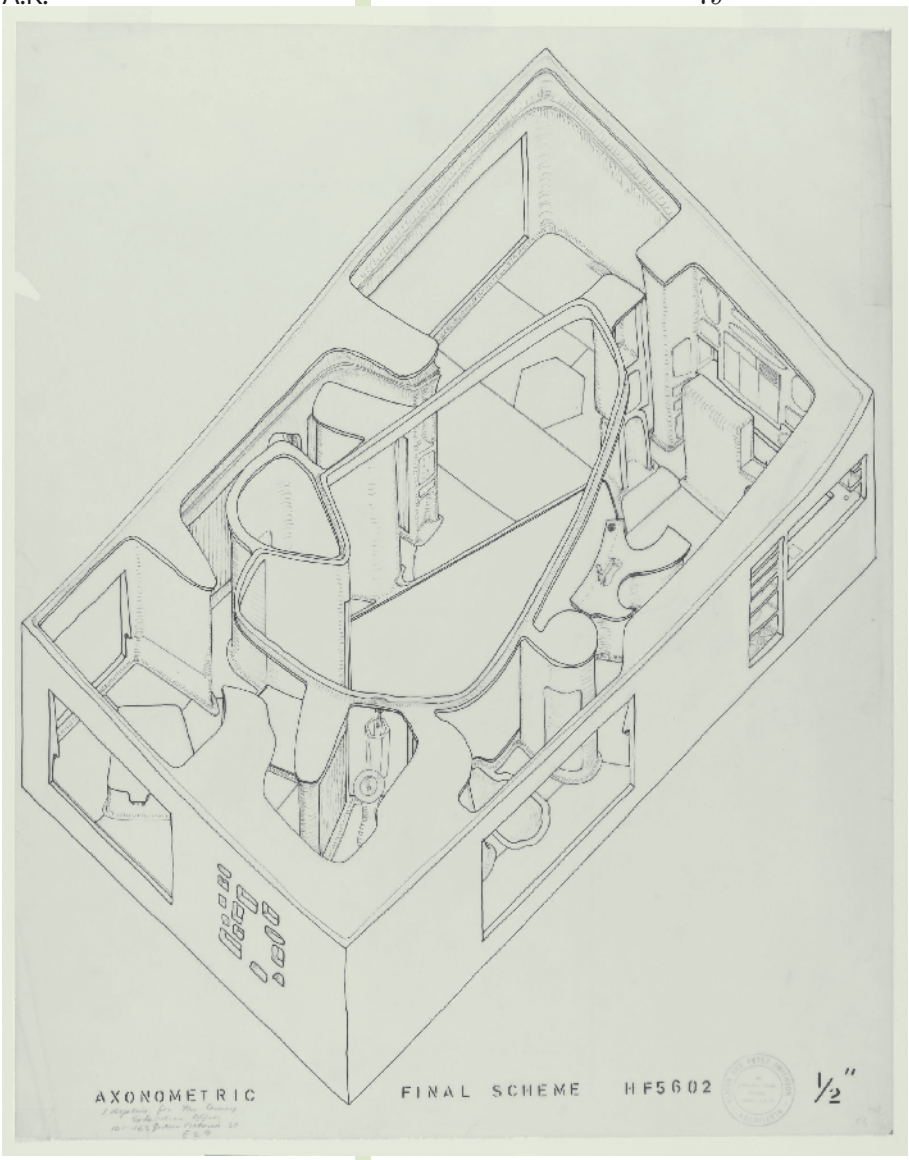
Connectivity is ever more desired while in the closed envelope of our private space far from the other—and most importantly from the viral other. The imaginary notion of the home as a safe space is once again of critical relevance, much like it was in the postwar era of the 1950s, saturated with Cold War fear with Americans building bunkers as part of their home. In the context of the Cold War, domestic bunkers not only sheltered from projectile bombs but were hermetically sealed to protect from contaminated air of a potential nuclear fallout. The role of the domestic space was expanded to include the bunker—a closed atmosphere capable of preserving the interior air for its occupants and in doing so protect them from the outside air. This was of course only granted to those with access to protected air—and so commodifying air as an architectural product and means to breathe safely. Comparable to our current time, architectural discourse of the 1950s was preoccupied with the future of architecture in light of an extreme vulnerability to the air we breathe.

In 1956, Alison and Peter Smithson imagined a future home set in 1981. The *House of the Future*, as they called it, was a speculative prototype defining domesticity as a closed world sealed off from the contaminants of the polluted urban air outside, compounded by fears of air warfare. Much like a bunker, a house that was only interior shaped the Smithson's vision, as the simultaneous seduction and functionality of a closed system.

The *House of the Future* was a prototype, constructed within the grounds of an exhibition hall for the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. An inward facing architecture framed the cave-like void that was the house. Its exterior walls had no windows and only one threshold served as an electronically operated doorway. The interior was acoustically-tethered to the outside via microphone. The house pointed towards an interior courtyard, mitigating the natural world, through a contained column of exterior air. Detached from the outside world, the house was technologically equipped to support the needs and concerns of domestic life.

Curved surfaces and smooth details enforced the need for the future home to be easily cleaned; the highly sanitized space protected its inhabitants from the unknown. Reinforcing the smooth space was an integrated air conditioning system, a new technological possibility at the time for the modern home. The conditioned air, while it optimized the interior temperature, most importantly also ensured a cleansed atmosphere—filtering any excess particulates that moved invisibly through the space. Seen in this light, the Smithsons envisioned the house as a hygiene machine.

Four inhabitants "lived" within the house. Two female and two male models performed the curated domestic life of the future—fashioned in clothes that set the stage for another time. Only the visitor's voyeuristic gaze penetrating through select portals had access, while restricted from any physical entry. Visitors examined the future of domestic life at a distance as the inhabitants performed optimized scenarios of daily life—one that was lubricated by technology. Idealized bodies of white upper middle-class adults were the ones with access to this breathable air. Everyone else remained outside, only participating through



Alison and Peter Smithson, architects, *Axonometric for House of the Future*, Daily Mail Ideal Homes Exhibition, London, England, 1955-1956. Courtesy of the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

their projected desire for the same quality of life, and most importantly, quality of air in this imagined future.

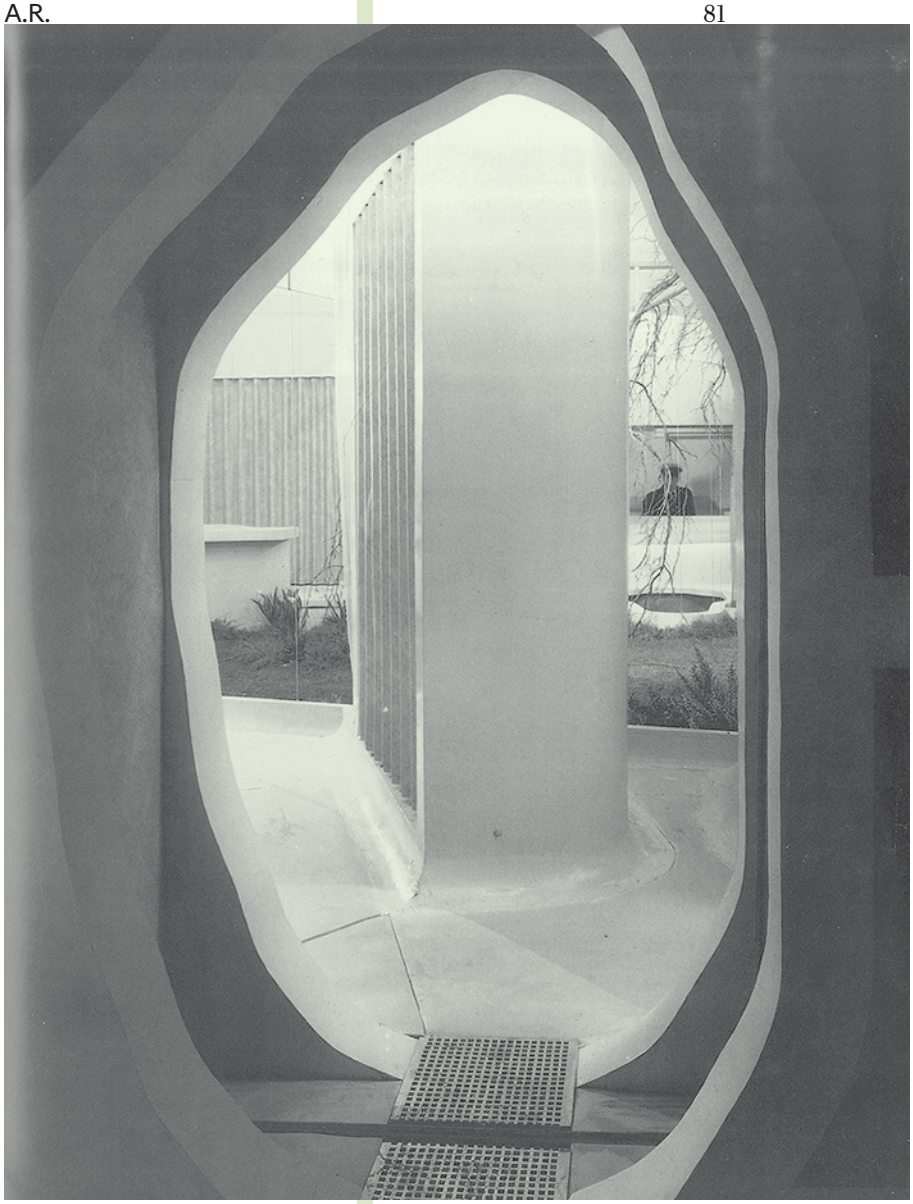
Drawing our attention to the air in the *House of the Future* is Beatriz Colomina's essay *Unbreathed Air 1956*. Colomina positions the domestic space as a closed capsule where even air is controlled and where "unbreathed air is the ultimate measure of privacy".[2] Privacy of the domestic sphere is here outlined as a system for controlling particulates. The interior air was reserved for the inhabitants of the *House of the Future* that performed their intimacy by breathing within the same space. Looking back at a future that has already passed, the *House of the Future* loops forward to concerns of today within the context of a pandemic—one that relies on the same protective illusions of home. Enforced by mandated regulations to stay in—and specifically, stay in our homes—we are faced with a circumstance that requires the domestic interior to become an enclosed system, a bunker of sorts. The scenography of the *House of the Future* is played out in real life by the limitations of who enters and who we commune with when breathing the same air.

The *House of the Future* addressed our current entanglement with fear, optimized to eliminate traces of intruders from the air. The heightened awareness of our vulnerability to air in a design proposal from the postwar era, when the early part of the century marked a new paradigm for warfare from the air. Paul Virilio already observed in his study *Bunker Archeology* (1967) that the world's atmosphere changed in the 20th century: first from the rain of artillery, then the clouds of chemical warfare, the advent of nuclear fallout, and finally the electromagnetic storms of networked warfare. As "Total War" left the front to encompass the entire planet, "The art of warfare aims at the constitution of an unhealthy, improper place for man just where he used to dwell."[3] Further theorized by Peter Sloterdijk in *Terror from The Air* (2002), gas warfare and the threat of a nuclear fallout put our most vital need to breath at risk, where "the fact of the living organism's immersion in a breathable milieu arrives at the level of formal representation, bringing the climatic and atmospheric conditions pertaining to human life to a new level of explication."[4] The 20th century fear of air terrorism is once again triggered by today's viral pandemic—aware of the lurking viral particulates that attack through the air we breathe, disabling the respiratory system that sustains our life.

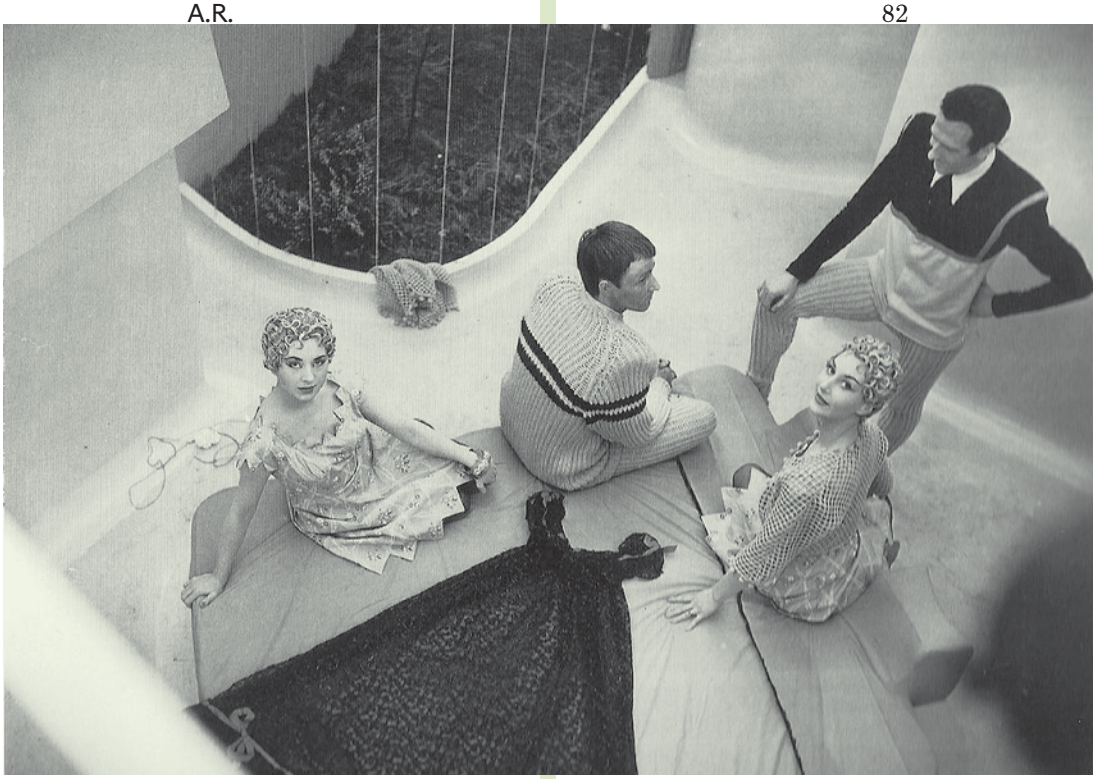
Furthermore, the militarization of air in the 1950s led to technological advancements that projected a new domain of control. The SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) computer system was developed and fully operable as a joint venture between the US military and private corporations as a continental air defense network. Paul N. Edwards, in his book *The Closed World* (1997), defines SAGE as part of technological system that shaped the closed-world reality whereby computerized military surveillance was put into place to contain and control global conflict.[5] As a result, SAGE introduced a real time cybernetic system that tracked and monitored the air as far north as the Arctic. The simultaneous emergence of the concrete brutalist bunkers of domestic architecture and the militarization of the air is not a coincidence, both were a response to a threat from the air.

And this predicament seems to find new dimensions as we today, much like in the postwar era, return to the cocoon of our domestic space for refuge. When augmented by networked systems that connect us and grant us access to information, powers of surveillance and control emerge at an unimaginable scale. In today's world, it's not only the military that weaves its cybernetic surveillance over the world, every individual participates in platforms that risk sovereignty and privacy. The commodification and corporatization of information has given rise to a planetary system of control that is manifested through the air, which, much like viral particulates, is contaminating our collective wellbeing.

In our performed domesticity today, placed in the context of the viral crisis, the voyeuristic gaze is once again permitted entry into the interiority of our home through the digital portals of technology while the bodies of others are kept out. The *House of the Future*'s microphoned mediation of outside/inside resonates. The ability to peek inside is even more intensely activated as we find ourselves needing to offset the forced measures to "shelter-in-place." But rather than cut-outs and vantage points, the portals are the deliberately placed lenses of our phones and laptops that pierce through the boundaries that enclose, capturing the secrets of our domestic life. The limited views inside are framed deliberately to idealize our private lives, further emphasizing separation and exclusivity. Under the guise of protecting the other, and mottos such as "together apart," we also keep the other out of our domestic air, only allowing fragments of our lives to be shared without sharing our breath.



The House of the Future
Alison and Peter Smithson, at the 1956 Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, London.
Photo by Daily Mail/Rex Features.



The House of the Future
Alison and Peter Smithson, at the 1956 Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, London.
Photo by Daily Mail/Rex Features.

Sheltering and social distancing has further empowered digital networks to drill deeper into the realm of planetary data mining—collecting every aspect of our daily life with little regulation. Our participation in this economy is motivated by our drive to connect and sustain real-time information updates—simulating an illusion of togetherness. The anxiety caused by social distancing gives rise to an ever-increasing activation of cameras, platforms and networks, bestowing us with super powers to expand beyond the containment of our physical space, but at the cost of being exploited for the extraction of information. We urgently install new software and reconfigure fragments of ourselves to be projected at any moment into virtual space, so that we can join the conglomerate of the planetary virtual body. Concurrently with the Smithson's project, media theorist Marshall Mcluhan wrote of the ambivalence prompted by a newly networked world based on studies he read of the British colonial control of Kenyan villages. The hip term "Global Village" that he coined was often used as a buzz word for the new high of connectivity, but he also observed a dark side: "instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, exactly as an infantile piece of science fiction. And as our senses have gone outside us, Big Brother goes inside."[6] Bolstered by a domestic enclosure, we become inclined to move deeper into the virtual swarm. Eagerly merging into the amorphous body of the swarm produces a quasi-collectivity that expresses the need to escape the claustrophobic isolation of our current domestic capsule. Instead of building a collective, we are all lost within it, producing noise as information rather than projecting a coherent voice.

Marking the condition of our current time, a swarm has emerged aggregating self-centric individuals in isolation, exaggerating the reality already constructed by contemporary digital life. Byung-Chul Han defines the digital swarm as lacking soul, which a collective has the potential to possess: "The digital swarm does not constitute a mass because no soul–no spirit–dwells within it… the digital swarm comprises isolated individuals… Unlike the crowd, the swarm demonstrates no internal coherence. It does not speak with a voice..."[7] Regardless of digital connectivity, we remain in our protective domestic bubbles in a state of isolation, which was also embraced in the image produced by the *House of the Future*. The project imagined the domestic space as a container for preserving individual wellbeing and in so doing suggested the need to sever from the outside world. The *House of the Future* both in its design and the images it produced through its performing inhabitants, portrayed "a secular individualism enabled by technology, claiming that modern media have endowed the individual with routines and methods of inadvertently returning to the self."[8] This return to the self is recreated as our attempt to digitally connect folds back into a kind of self-centered individualism. The four inhabitants of the *House of the Future*, content with their perfectly lubricated life, periodically gazed back at the visitors, registering their own existence in the eye of the other while maintaining the thresholds of their interior space, and their uncontaminated air. Sixty-four years after the *House of the Future*, our own homes function much like the theatrical space of Smithson's machine—replacing the physical gaze with informatic exchanges as a register of our existence. We no longer breath together, and the shared breath is now replaced with exchanges of digital information. The bubble becomes an echo chamber.

What one cannot dismiss is the exponential growth of the computational network infrastructure that supports this exchange, one that Benjamin Bratton has denoted as the planetary megastructure he has coined as "The Stack".[9] In its ubiquitous domain, The Stack's technological evolution encapsulates the planet into an ever tighter web of conflicts—geopolitical, economical and physiological tensions—giving rise to a closed condition as the effect of its expansiveness. Such a planetary infrastructure, as a direct lineage of military infrastructure, should be seen as a new *"conflict scene"* as framed by Paul N. Edward's definition of a "Closed World".[10] Yet this time, the conflict scene is produced not through national conflict but a highly charged entanglement with a computational network that defines our era.

As information becomes unavoidably contagious, the digital swarm enters, infecting us with all its symptoms. Byung-Chul Han further elaborates on the cybernetic loop of our self-contained information exchange as a contagious specter: "Information is what feeds ghosts now… digital communication is not just assuming spectral form; it is also becoming viral."[11] The material layers of our domestic envelope, while separating us from bio-viral particles of the outside air, continues to transmit info-packets registered as code enabled by the phantom fluidity of the digital network. Intriguing is the commonly accepted metaphor of "the cloud,"

which enforces the relation to the sky—the manifestation of an atmosphere that is a carrier. The material world returns to haunt its own metaphors.

The *House of the Future* was designed with a small central courtyard, a bubble of open air, that was only visually accessible whilst allowing the framed sky to be an essential part of the interior experience. Implied in the interiority of the future was the presence of clouds, passing through as information, as media and also mediator of the two worlds inside and out.[12] The courtyard further emphasized the notion of separation, functioning like a vitrine for air that framed the outside atmosphere, reinforcing the interior closure as the only safe space to breathe. The opportunity to step out for a *breath of fresh air* was erased from the domestic routine, propagating fear by containing the outside in a well-sealed glass bubble—the unreachable courtyard. Subverting an entire architectural history of enclosures (from domestic courtyard to the religious cloister), the *House of the Future* becomes a self-prison that only looks into the central void as a reminder of the fear and threat from the air outside.

Today, a crucial inversion has emerged that requires our reflection and one that is unique to the current pandemic: rather than the domestic space exclusively protecting its inhabitants from the outside, the state mandated quarantine at home transforms the domestic bubble as a sanitary container to protect the outside from the potentially infected inhabitant—an opportunity to enclose the contaminant air. The demand today for domestic space is not only to contain the infected, or the potentially infected, citizen in their own home in keeping with centuries of quarantine practice, but to also restrain the non-infected and healthy population to prevent them coming into contact with either an ignorant or malicious carrier. In so doing and with the state of emergency enforcing this decision in much of the world, the home becomes the "camp," confining the subject in order to protect "others" in the public sphere.[13] On the other hand, ironically, we feel safe within our homes because of the absence of the "other". On both sides of this reality, exclusion is mechanized as the measure for safety—a political concern which mimics the same colonial logic of nation states fortifying borders under the auspices of the safety of their citizens. As it has been for centuries, it remains difficult to disentangle xenophobia and hygiene. And as it unfolds with the same colonial disposition of power, some

states are literally taking action to close up and close their world in the hope to contain the virtual threat from the outside—an outside that is ultimately in the air of the same closed world.

Air is feared, and breath is vulnerable. A sense of breathlessness occurs when being squeezed from both directions—outside in and inside out. As we attempt to breath and sustain the vitals of our very existence, we wonder what else each inhale invites into our bodies. Closing our domestic space within the reality of a closed world, we alleviate our fear of the viral other as our efforts to keep contaminants outside proves somewhat effective. But, regardless of the enclosure, our anxious breath inhales other particulates that are transmitted through other layers of the contemporary sky—and these need our critical attention if we wish to continue breathing.

ENDNOTES

1 Domesticated interior here functions on a sliding scale cognizant of privilege, providing refuge parallel to an access of privacy.

2 Beatriz Colomina, "Unbreathed Air, 1956," *Grey Room* 15 (Cambridge: MIT Press. 2004) 54.

3 Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archeology* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994) 3.

4 Peter Sloterdijk, T*error from the Air*. Trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009) 23.

5 Paul E. Edwards, "Chapter 3, SAGE," *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997) 75-111.

6 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962) 37.

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12 John Durham Peters writes: "Of things that paint the sky, clouds are preeminent and also deserve a full media history… They are the ultimate test of the idea that there could be natural media. But first, clearly clouds are full of meaning." John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015) 254.

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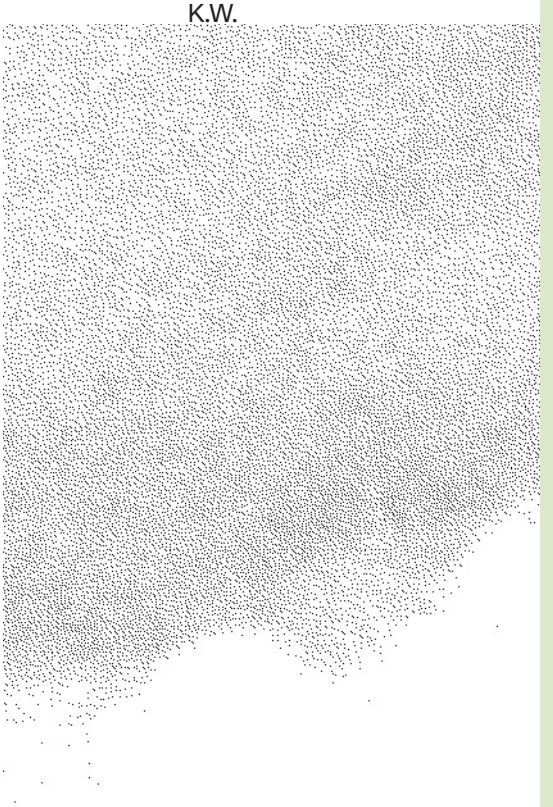


THE AIR WITHOUT
Kate Whiteway

Susan Sontag wrote "Illness as Metaphor" in 1978 while receiving treatment for breast cancer. The text details literature's extensive use of metaphor to grasp the nefarious characters of disease, cancer and tuberculosis, in particular. We dwell, she writes, on sentimental or punitive fantasies in order to comprehend illness in ways that are imperfect, incomplete and obfuscating. Already dealing in metaphor, the opening sentence reads: "Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship."[1]

The story of breathing the night air has been long in the making. For centuries, people believed that once the sun sank, air turned its coat and took on the covert operation of spreading disease. Windows needed to be shut tight in order to insulate sleeping inhabitants. The fear of breathing at night was an expression of the miasmatic theory of contagion. Miasma, also known as "bad" and "night" air, were believed to be noxious currents emanating from the rotting matter of swamps and urban ghettos.[2] Corrupt air was blamed for causing epidemics, the likes of chlamydia, cholera, and the Black Death. True to Sontag's metaphorical diagnostic, popular visuals from the 19th century depict disease as anthropomorphic clouds. An 1831 lithograph by Robert Seymour pictures cholera as a robed creature emerging from a deadly fog, crushing armies with its massive skeletal body.

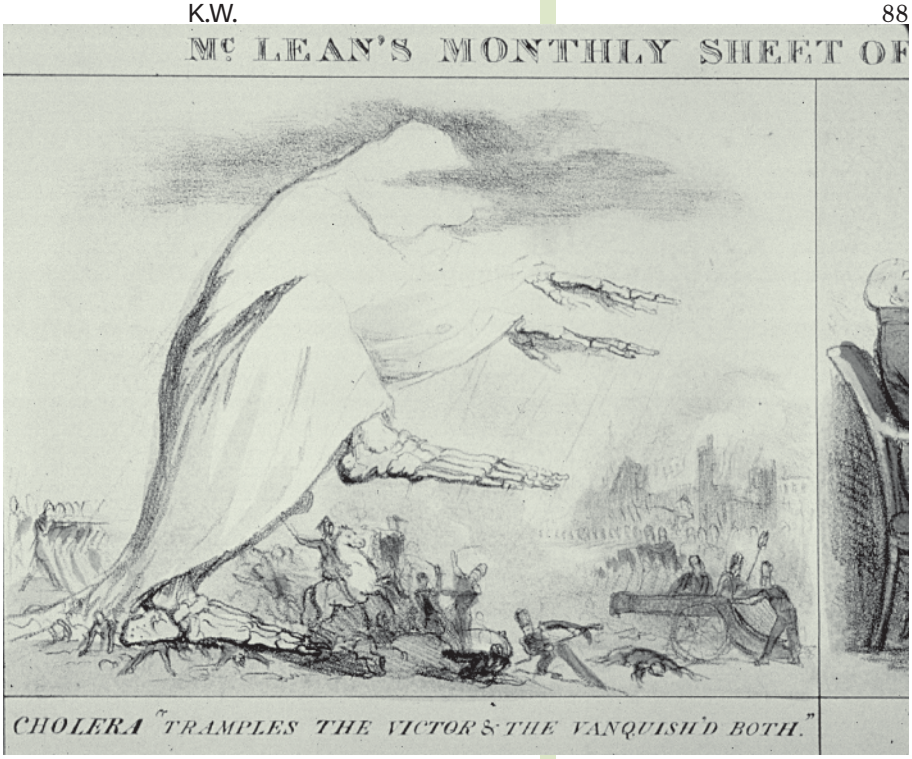
Miasma is a modification of various concepts stemming from Ancient Greek mythology, including spiritual pollution, stain or defilement, a contagious power, and a God-sent disease caused by human sin and guilt.[3] Air itself was seen as the enemy, its tactics shapeshifting, chaotic, and untraceable. In *De architectura* (30-15 BC), the only surviving treatise on architecture from antiquity, Vitruvius wrote, "For when the morning breezes blow toward the town at sunrise… the poisonous breath of creatures of the marshes to be wafted into the bodies of the inhabitants, they will make the site unhealthy." *Suspicions about the Hidden Realities of the Air* (1674), the alchemical book by Robert Boyle, tried to break down the superstition of miasma by explaining a theory about the agency of air in chemical reactions. The text contradicted the ambient belief that air was empty and inactive, and therefore susceptible to becoming a lethal medium on its own accord. Florence Nightingale, the skilled statistician and figurehead of modern nursing argued that ventilation, whether by day or night, was the most essential element to administering care and cure. In *Notes on Nursing* (1860) she wrote, "First rule of nursing, to keep the air within as pure as the air without." In an attempt to appease widespread fear of miasma, she countered: "What air can we breathe at night but night air?"

During the Second Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America (1870-1914),[4] fear of miasma was projected onto places where air quality was measurably poorer—slums, factories, tenant buildings. As a result, disease was understood as a fundamentally *spatial* phenomenon.[5] The ability to control the air in one's surroundings became a measure of status and autonomy. The "proper" home was seen as a refuge from pollution, and by extension from the working poor. Preferred middle class neighbourhoods were at a distance from tenement districts, so that air could be ventilated easily, day or night.[6] To hear from Sontag again: "Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious." Since disease was thought to be inherent to the air of particular places, xenophobia and social stratification were close allies of miasmatic thinking. Air and its supposed contagious power were mired within a tangle of urban pathologies.[7] Miasma was visualized as a cloud hovering over working enclaves, a shifting pollutant, leaky and omnipresent.[8]

By the 1880s, the miasmatic theory of contagion began to cede to another invisible metric—germs—as the primary cause of infectious disease. John Snow's seminal epidemiological study *On the Mode of Communication of Cholera* (1855), identified a polluted public water well as the source of a cholera outbreak in 1854 in London. Identifying germs, not miasma, as vectors of disease, he wrote: "The belief in the communication of cholera is a much less dreary one than the reverse; for what is so dismal as the idea of some invisible agent pervading the atmosphere, and spreading over the world?"

In lock step with this epidemiological shift, populations in cities increased manyfold toward the end of the 19th century. Workers were expected to keep pace with rapid technological development that exponentialized the rhythm and requirements of their labour. Meanwhile, infrastructure for sanitation reform was only just beginning to be implemented. Working and dwelling conditions worsened, and disease bloomed.

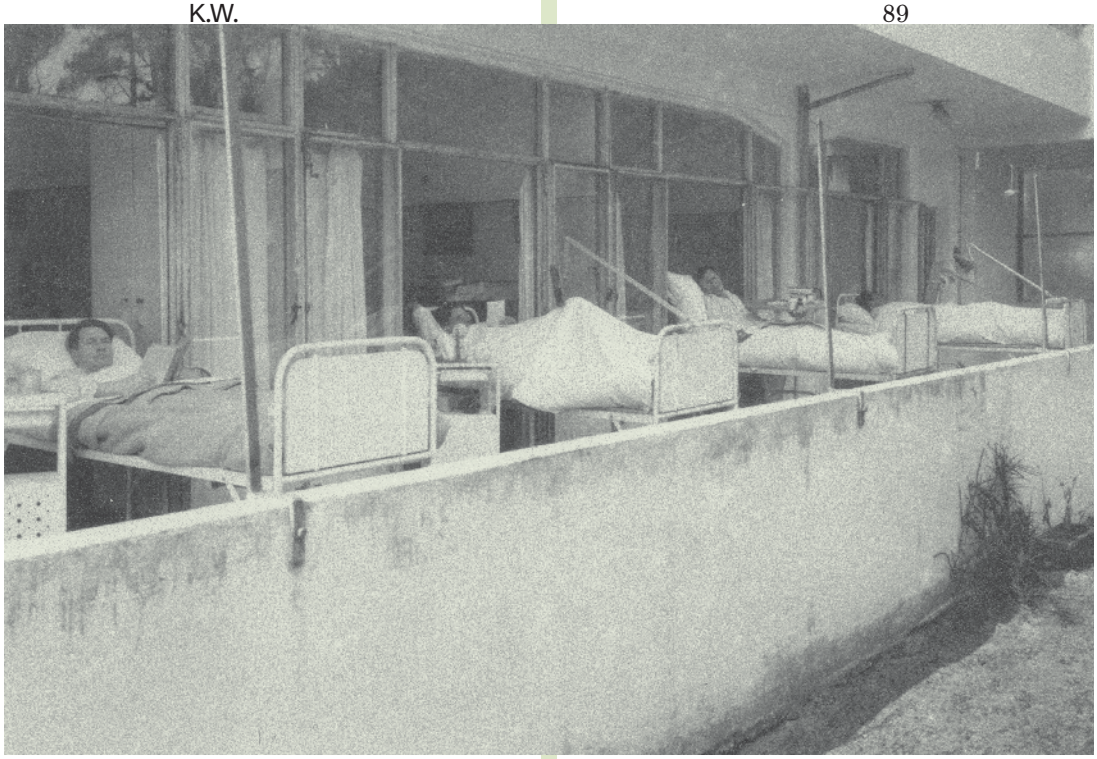
If miasmatic thinking produced an omniscient anxiety concerning the breath, then germ theory cleared the air. By developing methodology to accurately identify the origin and transmission of disease, one could, by extension, protect oneself from it. The miasmatic



Robert Seymour, *Cholera "Tramples the victors & the vanquished both."* 1831, colour lithograph. Courtesy of U.S. National Library of Medicine.

theory meant that contamination could be everywhere and nowhere, as untraceable as air. Germ theory clarified the scale and scope of contagion by delivering knowledge about how disease moves. In Sontag's view, metaphor is the language of substitution that obfuscates the diagnosis and infantilizes the patient. But metaphor can also be a way of translating knowledge from one system to another, aiding and abetting self-determination and agency in the process. The epidemiological shift of understanding how germs operate offers a view into how, during this complex historical moment of industrialization, working people materialized the tools to organize and protect themselves against contagion. At least, this appears to be the case for one group of diamond workers in Amsterdam…

Amsterdam, the city of tulips and canals, was the centre of the global diamond industry by the early 1900s. The transatlantic diamond trade accelerated after 1869, when rough stones were pillaged en masse from mines in South Africa and shipped via London to Amsterdam.[9] Cleaving, cutting, and polishing were central occupations for the working class in the Netherlands.[10] Without heating or ventilation, cramped factories were lit only by the shimmer of gas lamps, and acrid air bloomed from the spinning instruments. Many diamond workers contracted lung illnesses, with little chance of care or cure. One skilled, young diamond polisher and trade unionist, Jan van Zutphen, had already lost both his parents, wife, and seven siblings to tuberculosis. As Secretary of the General Diamond Workers Union of the Netherlands, the largest labour organization in the Netherlands at the time, he fought for solidarity between the previously segregated Jewish and Christian diamond



Top: Patients on the terrace of Zonnestraal sanatorium, 1931. Courtesy of *X-Ray Architecture* by Beatriz Colomina, Lars Müller Publishers, 2019.

workers and helped to shape the contemporary standard for trade unionism, including winning the nine-hour workday in 1905.[11]

Registering as a perfect ten on the Mohs scale of mineral hardness, only diamond can scratch diamond.[12] Van Zutphen knew that "diamond dust," created by crushing up small, low-quality stones, was used to polish diamonds in the factories. Because diamond is the solid elemental form of carbon, it seemed that the dust burnt up completely in the polishing process. With an air of incisive scepticism, van Zutphen persuaded his union to use its funds to research if diamond matter could be re-extracted from grease thrown off by the polishing wheels. The first experiments were failures, and the union members grew angry at what they perceived as a gross waste of their money. In time, Henri ter Meulen, a chemist at a nearby university extracted 27 percent of the diamond dust, along with chips of rock, oil, cigar ash, fish bones, lead dust, and chunks of chocolate.[13] Eventually, after much risk and failure, Meulen extracted pure diamond dust from the blackened grease. The factory owners agreed to buy the diamond dust back from the workers, yielding in the first year alone more than £25,000 in proceeds for the Workers' Tuberculosis Fund that van Zutphen had set up to protect fellow workers from the airborne disease that was, at the time, responsible for the death of one out of seven people on the planet.[14]

The union used the money to buy a plot of land in the forest of Hilversum, outside of Amsterdam. On it, they built a sanatorium to treat their members who were suffering from tuberculosis. Zonnestraal, meaning "ray of sunshine," opened in 1928. With Van Zutphen serving as Founder and Chair, several other trade unions became partners in Zonnestraal,

Zonnestraal sanatorium, 2001.
Courtesy of Martijn de Vries.

securing a place for their members to rest, and for the lucky ones, to recover. At the time, the union raised more money to treat its own workers than the government had allotted to treat tuberculosis in the entire region.[15] Throughout the 1930s, Zonnestraal continued to expand, paid for by proceeds from the diamond dust and support from multiple unions. Across the grounds, patients used workshops to retrain their skills. Some convalescent workers created the tools for the factories they had taken leave from. Diamond dust, the forgotten by-product, was both transformed and transformative. Playing turncoat, it acted as a sort of "pharmakon," originating from the arid atmosphere of the factory, causing illness, and in turn providing the capital for rest and treatment.

Sanatoria sit right at the fault line between the miasmatic and germ theories of contagion. Pre-antibiotic era institutions operated on the principle that a regimen of rest, fresh air, natural light and good nutrition would allow the immune system to isolate pockets of pulmonary infection.[16] They were most commonly established in rural areas, high up in mountain ranges, away from the polluted, crowded, and miasmatic environments of cities.

Zonnestraal was built in the curative, modernist style designed by architects Duiker, Bijvoet and Wiebenga. The complex was constructed heliotherapeutically, meaning mostly of glass allowing as much light as possible to enter patients' rooms.[17] The architectural historian Beatriz Colomina has written extensively about sanatoria, and more broadly about the effect of illness and metaphor on architectural space. Zonnestraal is one many examples of "x-ray architecture,' her thesis that rereads the canon of modernist architecture

as shaped by the dominant medical obsession of the time—tuberculosis—and the diagnostic technology associated with it— x-rays'.[18] In Colomina's view, x-ray architecture captures the correlation between two forms of transparency, the x-rays' diagnostic ability and the building's prognostic power.

When the antibiotic streptomycin was discovered in 1943, tuberculosis began to dissipate as a major public health threat in Europe and North America. By the 1950s, most treatment based on miasmatic theory had evaporated and sanatoria were demolished, converted into general hospitals, or in Zonnestraal's case, left to decay. Through continual epidemiological shifts, illness and contagion continue to be narrated through the use of metaphor. Though proven unsound, miasmatic thinking still populates the contemporary, public imaginary to an extent. Contagion continues to be experienced, in part, through a spatial lens. If illness and its attenuating stigma are powerfully expressed through metaphor, empowerment too can come when metaphors loosen or crack and get filled with new associations.

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11 Snyder, 2017.

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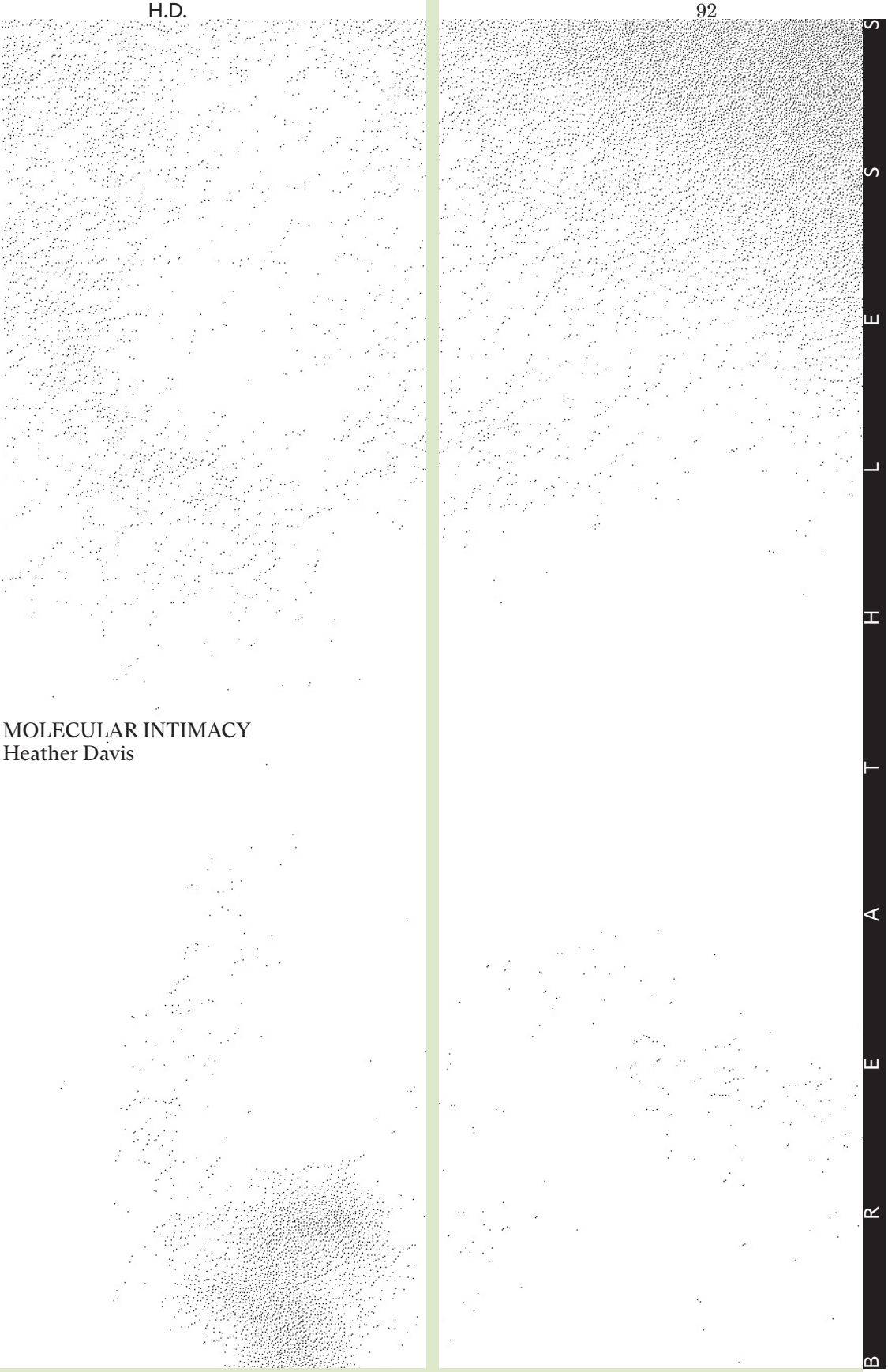

MOLECULAR INTIMACY
Heather Davis

Carbon is arguably the most important molecule in an age that has been increasingly framed through the molecular. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, molecules have increasingly come to define our bodies and the world around us. The molecule is the primary scientific figure visualizing the inner workings of the world. We understand our sense of self, history, and ethnicity through the fetishization of DNA, just as we alter our bodies through other molecules such as oxytocin, serotonin, estrogen, and testosterone. In other words, we manufacture our subjectivities, especially our gendered identities, on the molecular scale.[1] Similarly, we are asked to think about climate change through molecular composition, including atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, methane, etc. We increasingly understand ourselves, our identities, and our political realities through the frame of the molecule—so what are the affordances and foreclosures of this framing, especially in relation to contemporary environmental crises and climate justice?

For even as the effects of climate change are being felt and observed in so many communities around the world, scientific data remains abstract for many people. And the carbon molecule is at the heart of this abstraction. The molecular is a historically contingent product of scientific knowledge, with precursors in Ancient Greece—such as Leucippus and Empedocles—through to the thought of the Roman Lucretius, to more sustained considerations beginning in the seventeenth century in Northern Europe. In a paper published in Nature in 1873, Scottish scientist James Maxwell Clerk claimed that a molecule was "the smallest possible portion of a particular substance. No one has ever seen or handled a single molecule. Molecular science, therefore, is one of those branches of study which deal with things invisible and imperceptible by our senses, and which cannot be subjected to direct experiment."[2] The molecule is the making-abstract of the observable world. The molecular institutes a world beyond our senses, which pushes at the limits of the human sensorium and seems to invite the kind of technological prosthesis that today we take for granted. It wasn't until 2009 that IBM captured the first image of a molecule, which corresponds remarkably well to the diagrams that have been in use since the early twentieth century.[3]

The molecule, as the basis of materiality, as rendering matter knowable and manipulable to the wills and whims of the chemical industry, is ultimately also pure information, pure capital. As the Critical Art Ensemble wrote more than a decade ago, "any form of molecular capital can now be appropriated—it is an open frontier. As with all named and controlled objects, now, genomes, enzymes, biochemical processes, etc., will all be privatized. What was once communal and controlled by traditional authority and common understanding is now usurped by separating its molecular or chemical value from its holistic phenotypic value."[4] This is, in part, what is happening in the current climate debates: the structures of commonality are broken down by the market, by private interests, by national negotiations. The air, the air that we breathe and are so vulnerable to, is rendered molecular, read, contested, and written into legislation through the knowledge of scientific expertise.

The molecule, or molecular, is also a significant figure in contemporary philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari together, and Guattari in his own writings, take the figure of the molecule as central to an anti-capitalist movement. Molecules oppose the category of the molar. "Molar subjects, objects, or form," write Deleuze and Guattari, "we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit."[5] Molecules, on the other hand, articulate the processes of movement—of being in-between, of the interstitial that escapes the confines of the definition of a subject or object—the movement that they call becoming. Deleuze and Guattari write that "all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities."[6] This description of the molecular offers what is radical and urgent in our engagement with ecological crisis—that there is no possibility of barricading, containing, or sealing ourselves off. We are radically open, inherently constituted by the molecular outside. We breathe in each other's air, and despite air conditioning and all the attenuating accoutrements of the wealthy, there is no way to shield against our collective molecular becoming.[7] This radical openness to the outside is both what links us to the world and what threatens us. Writer Elias Cannetti, on the occasion of Hermann Broch's fiftieth birthday wrote, in relation to his friend's literature: "It is the defenselessness of breathing, which I would like to talk about in conclusion. One can hardly form too great a notion of it. To nothing is a man so open as to air… Air is the last common property. It belongs to all people collectively… And this last thing, which has belonged to all of us collectively, shall poison all of us collectively…"[8] Molecular-becoming, the carbon cycle, and breath render the body vulnerable

while providing the basis of the argument for the necessity of an atmospheric commons. This is at once a political and affective project, a project constituted in and through the filling and emptying of the lungs, again and again. It is a project that ties us to our fellow creatures, as well as to the organic and inorganic.

[…] The molecule is a figure of contradiction. While it affords the privatization of life itself, it also defies that hubris. Its endless movements, its constant becomings call attention to the ways in which none of us are just us, but rather are composed of everyone else, of everything else, and in this it offers the possibility of an ethics of commonality and of the commons that resists enclosure by both national interests and private enterprise. It makes apparent the ways that we are vulnerable to each other, how we are indebted to each other, and how we are doomed, together.

The molecular offers a framework to re-attune our entangled relations with the world around us, through its perpetual movement and its disregard of the molar categories of the human, animal, leaf, soil, or atmosphere. If we understand our bodies as the temporary stability of a particular form of carbon that inevitably circulates, passing through other bodies, the earth, and the atmosphere, how might this shift our relation to climate change? How might we understand this particular moment as one not just of crisis, but as a point of connection, as a necessary call for a commonality of carbon? And how might we do this without being naïve about the deaths that the chemical revolution has left in its wake, deaths that have happened and those that are foretold?

As Juliana Spahr writes,

> How connected we are with everyone.
> This space that has just been inside of everyone mixing inside of everyone with nitrogen and oxygen and water vapor and argon and carbon dioxide and suspended dust spores and bacteria mixing inside of everyone with sulfur and sulfuric acid and titanium and nickel and minute silicon particles from pulverized glass and concrete.

How lovely and how doomed this connection of everyone with lungs.[9]

An extended version originally published in *Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary,* edited by James Graham. New York and Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers and Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016, 205-211.

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7 Peter Sloterdijk has written extensively on the vulnerability to the air, and this vulnerability being exploited by state terrorism in the twentieth century in *Terror from the Air* (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2009). He writes, "The progressive explication of the atmosphere forces a sustained mindfulness of the air's breathability—above all in the physical sense, and then, more and more, in the metaphoric dimensions of respiration in cultural spaces of motivation and concern… We begin to understand that man [sic] is not only what he eats, but what he breathes and that in which he is immersed," Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, 84.

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JULIUS VON BISMARK

Julius von Bismark, *Fire with Fire (Video Test)*, 2020 (Stills)
LED screen, video, stereo sound, 67 min
Courtesy the artist; alexander levy, Berlin and Sies+Höke, Düsseldorf

DEHLIA HANNAH, Ph.D., is a curator and philosopher of nature. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, where her Ny Carlsberg funded project "Rewilding the Museum" (2021-2025) examines the art museum's status within the fragile ecologies of the Anthropocene. She received her PhD in Philosophy and Certificate in Feminist Inquiry from Columbia University, with specializations in aesthetics, philosophy of science and philosophy of nature. Her recent book *A Year Without a Winter* (Columbia University Press, 2018) reframes contemporary imaginaries of climate change by revisiting the environmental conditions under which Frankenstein was written and the global aftermath of the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora. As a curator, her exhibitions and artistic collaborations explore how emerging science and technology inform the aesthetic contestation of ideas of nature.

FLAKA HALITI
(born 1982 in Prishtina, Kosovo, lives in Munich) represented her home country Kosovo at the Venice Biennale in 2015. She was a scholarship holder of the Villa Romana in Florence in 2017, and is the recipient of the Ars Viva Prize and Henkel Award. She completed her studies at the College of Fine Arts, Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main and presented her artistic work in individual exhibitions at the mumok – Museum Moderne Kunst in Vienna, S.A.L.T.S. Kunstverein Birsfelden, Kunsthalle Lingen and the Kunsthaus Hamburg, and in group exhibitions at Museum Ludwig Cologne, Kunsthalle Vienna, Museum Lenbachhaus Munich, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, amongst others. Also, in 2021 Haliti participated in Baltic Triennial 14, and 2018 in Busan Biennale and Public Art Munich. In 2019, she was a participant in the Fellbach Triennial for sculpture, where she received the Ludwig Gies Prize from the Letter Stiftung. She was nominated for the Preis der Nationalgalerie in 2019 and was exhibited at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.

ACHILLE MBEMBE
(b. 1957, Cameroon) is a philosopher, political scientist, and public intellectual. Mbembe is a Research Professor of History and Politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg, South Africa and a Visiting Professor in the Department of Romance Studies at the Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University. He has also held appointments at Columbia University, Berkeley, Yale University, Harvard University, University of California and The European Graduate School. Achille Mbembe's research interests lie in the social sciences and African history and politics. More precisely, Mbembe investigates the "postcolony" that comes after decolonization. A major figure in the emergence of a new wave of French critical theory, he has written extensively on contemporary politics and philosophy, including *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2016), *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019) and *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

MARGUERITE HUMEAU
(b. 1986, FR) lives and works in London, UK. Humeau's work stages the crossing of great distances in time and space, transitions between animal and mineral, and encounters between personal desires and natural forces. She received her MA from the Royal College of Art, London, in 2011. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held at New Museum, New York, US; Tate Britain, London, UK; Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich, CH; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR; Kunstverein in Hamburg, DE; Museion, Bolzano, IT; and C L E A R I N G, New York/ Brussels. Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including the High Line, New York, USA; Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; MAMVP, Paris, FR; Serpentine Galleries, London, UK; Istanbul Biennial, TR; and FRAC Midi- Pyrénées, Toulouse, FR. Marguerite Humeau's work is part of the collections of MoMA, New York, USA; Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; Tate Britain, London, UK; Aishti Foundation, Beirut, LB; Zabludowicz Collection, London, UK; Modern Forms, London, UK.

CHARLES STANKIEVECH
is an artist, writer and curator. His award-winning body of work explores the notion of "fieldwork" in the embedded landscape, the military industrial complex, and geopolitics. Stankievech has been shown internationally at institutions including the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; HKW and KW, Berlin; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; CCA, Montreal. He's shown in biennials from Venice to Santa Fe and participated in programming for dOCUMENTA (13) and the Berlin Biennale. He curated "The Drowned World," the sound and video program, for the inaugural Toronto Biennial. He is currently an editor of Afterall Journal (University of Chicago Press).

In 2007, he was a founding faculty member of the Yukon School of Visual Arts in Dawson City, Canada (under joint governance by the indigenous sovereign nation of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in) and then was Director of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto, where is currently an Associate Professor.

ALIREZA TAHERI

provides psychoanalytic psychotherapy in private practice in Toronto where he is also actively involved in teaching Lacanian theory at the Toronto Psychoanalytic Institute and Society. Alireza is a permanent faculty member of HamAva Psychoanalytic Institute in Tehran (Iran) where he teaches psychoanalytic theory and practice. He is also engaged in writing articles on philosophy and psychoanalysis and is presently the editor-in-chief of Psychoanalytic Discourse (an independent international journal for the clinical, theoretical and cultural discussion of psychoanalysis). Most recently, Taheri has published the seminal book *Hegelian-Lacanian Variations on Late Modernity: Spectre of Madness* (Routledge 2021) where he argues that our rejection of psychoanalytic reason and German idealist philosophy has relegated us to vicious contradictions that define central aspects of our contemporary predicament.

DONNA KUKAMA

is an interdisciplinary artist whose work is informed by performance-based research processes. Through performance, video, sound, texts, and non-monuments, her work questions the way in which histories are narrated, as well as how value systems are constructed, often resisting established "ways of doing". Kukama has exhibited and presented performances at several notable institutions and museums, including the Tate Modern in London; Nottingham Contemporary in Nottingham; Padiglione de'Arte Contemporanea Milano in Milan; South African National Gallery in Cape Town; Museum of Modern Art in Antwerp; nGbK in Berlin; and the New Museum in New York. She has participated in, among others, the 10th Berlin Biennale; the 57th Belgrade Biennale; 12th Lyon Biennale; the 6th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art; 32nd Bienal de São Paulo and 8th Berlin Biennale and the 55th Venice Biennale as part of the South African Pavilion. She lives and works between Johannesburg and Berlin, where she is currently teaching at the Braunschweig University of Art.

KATE WHITEWAY

is an independent curator living in Toronto. Her most recent exhibition, *In the Rough* (the plumb, Toronto, 2021), looked at the healing crystal and diamond mining industries through a historical materialist lens. She holds a Master of Curatorial Studies from the University of Toronto and is the recipient of the 2018 Reesa Greenberg Curatorial Studies Award, the 2020 C Magazine New Critics Award, and participated in the 2020 Momus Emerging Critics Residency. She has been published in The Journal of Curatorial Studies and C Magazine and has worked collaboratively with Atelier Céladon in Montreal on many projects. She is currently researching the global floral industry and is a member of L'Union des Refusés (Arts of the Working Class) and a volunteer with the Toronto Workers' History Project.

HEATHER DAVIS

is an assistant professor of Culture and Media at Eugene Lang College, The New School. Her current book project, *Plastic Matter*, argues that plastic has transformed the material world due to its incredible longevity and range, as it has also transformed our understandings and expectations of matter and materiality. She is a member of the Synthetic Collective, an interdisciplinary team of scientists, humanities scholars, and artists, who investigate and make visible plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. She was the co-curator of *Plastic Entanglements: Ecology, Aesthetics, Materials* (on view at the Palmer Museum of Art, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Smith College, and the Chazen Museum of Art, 2018-2020). Davis has written widely for art and academic publications on questions of contemporary art, politics and ecology, and has lectured internationally. She is the co-editor of *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (Open Humanities Press, 2015) and editor of *Desire Change: Contemporary Feminist Art in Canada* (MAWA and McGill Queen's UP, 2017).

JULIUS von BISMARCK

was born in 1983 in Breisach am Rhein (Germany) and grew up in Riad (Saudi Arabia). He currently lives in Berlin. He is a graduate of the Berlin University of the Arts (UDK) and the Institute for Spatial Experiments funded by Olafur Eliasson. Associating visual arts to other fields of research and experimentation, von Bismarck's artistic practice is defined by an in-depth and complex exploration of the phenomena of perception, or the representation

and reconstruction of reality. The artist has had numerous of solo shows, including the Palais de Tokyo Paris (2019), Kunstpalais Erlangen (2018), the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg (2017), the Kunstverein Göttingen (2015). He has also taken part in international group exhibitions, among which "Power to the People" (Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt/Main, 2018), and the 1st Antarctic Biennale (2017). He was the winner of the Ars Electronica award in 2008 for his project "Image Fulgurator," while in 2012 he was the first artist in residency at the CERN, and the "European Organization for Nuclear Research".

ALA ROUSHAN

(b. 1983) is a Persian/Canadian curator, researcher and architect based in Toronto. Most recently she was the co-curator/director of SUGAR, a curatorial platform exploring new trajectories for public art informed by site. At SUGAR, Ala curated projects such as a solo exhibition and lecture marathon with artist collective Slavs & Tatars and published the book *ShapeShift: Sugar, Oil, Gold* (2019). Previously she was active as a founder and co-curator of Flip Project Space in Napoli, Italy. Ala's research on digital culture began during her master's degree in Advance Architectural design at the Städelschule, Germany. She continues developing her research interests as an Associate Professor at OCAD University in the department of Environmental Design and Digital Futures.

RAF RENNIE

(b. 1988) is a graphic designer born in Toronto, ON. He holds a BDes in Design from OCADU, and an MFA in Graphic Design from Yale University School of Art. Since 2015, he has been the designer of Toronto-based arts criticism magazine, *C Magazine*. Notably he has worked on exhibition and publication design for *Extinction Marathon*, Serpentine Gallery (2015), *Rare Earth*, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (2016), *Sarah Meyohas: Cloud of Petals*, Redbull Arts New York (2018), and more. He writes about technology, politics and design, and has had his writings published by Walker Art Center: *The Gradient* (2016), *Wax Magazine* (2017), *NXS Magazine* (2017), *Talk Magazine* (2018), as well as self-publishing through his publishing imprint exo Publications.

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