*What the F**k?!*

Video in the Age of Sublime Uncertainty

Guest Mentors:
Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick

screenings

DECEMBER 1, 2018

Just Leave Me Alone
Curated by Almudena Escobar López

Medi(t)ating the Temporality of the Untimely
Curated by Masaki Kondo

DECEMBER 8, 2018

Remote Preparation
Curated by Mel Day

Artificial Tears
Curated by
Isabelle Lynch and Sophie Lynch

contents

*On the unknown unknowns...**

Admiring as I do, the curatorial and editorial rigour of Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher, it was exciting to invite them to collaborate with us at Vtape as guest mentors for the 2018 Curatorial Incubator. Their organizing idea was not so much a theme as it was – and still is – a diagnosis of how truly strange our world is becoming. The precise language of their call for proposals identified a "crisis in democracy"; it clearly struck a nerve. *What the F**k?! Video in the Age of Sublime Uncertainty* received dozens of applications. The four awarded curatorial proposals from Almudena Escobar López, Masaki Kondo, Mel Day and the duo of Isabelle Lynch and Sophie Lynch – were invited to participate in workshops at Vtape in the spring. Here participants learned how to conduct research into Vtape's extensive holdings. Drobnick and Fisher shared readings, showed works to provoke discussion and advised on the form of the finished curatorial essays. As the programs emerged late in the summer, Vtape staff played key roles in assuring that works not in distribution with Vtape were available, and that budgets were set and technical requirements met.

The final – and equally important aspect of the Curatorial Incubator – then begins: the editing of the essays. This year, Drobnick and Fisher assumed the role of editors for all four of the essays. Editing is an intimate process; one that requires both an overview and an eye to detail: how to preserve the ideas of the writer while finding the right word or sorting out difficult syntax. This has been beautifully accomplished with this year's catalogue. Many thanks to **Jim Drobnick** and **Jennifer Fisher** for bringing their hyper-relevant concept to us at Vtape and for applying their significant skills as editors to the writing in this year's essays.

The Curatorial Incubator provides invaluable guidance in how to actually program and curate media artworks. Participants receive "real world" information about prices, rights, file types and all the details that must be decided upon as a program of media artworks is being put together. As we say, curating is not shopping (in spite of what the popular press says). It is a research-based process that produces knowledge through the combination of works into a coherent thesis, all aided by familiarity with the technical requirements of the medium.

Thanks to the **Vtape staff**: Wanda Vanderstoop for her guidance in navigating distribution; to Dustin Lawrence and Kim Tomczak for their technical expertise in assembling the works into compilations; to Deirdre Logue and Chris Gehman for making sure that we have the crucial support for all our programs at Vtape.

Thanks to the **Incubatees** for their hard work in producing such engaging programs, each developed around a specific idea and approach.

And, finally, to **the artists** whose beautiful and unique works have been produced apart from each other but are united now under a theme. Brought together to speak to and through each other, turning to each side to greet the other, united in the single time-signature of the now.

Lisa Steele
Creative Director, Vtape

(*****Donald Rumsfeld's comment seems relevant today as each day brings new revelations that induce us to invoke WTF?!)

What the F**k?! Video in the Age of Sublime Uncertainty

Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher

Timing is everything in the formation of a curatorial concept. The daily barrage of previously unthinkable assaults on democracy, the media, the rule of law, intelligent discourse and the notion of a common good breed many reactions in the followers of political affairs: exasperation, annoyance, frustration, fear, horror, anger and disbelief. The proliferation of uncivil or outrageous behavior threatens to dismantle civil society as collective incredulity envelops an increasingly destabilized and fractured public sphere. In this affective commotion, the utterance "What the f**k?!" gives voice to an embodied gut reaction. Such an exclamation intervenes like a jolt coursing through the body followed by an emphatic pause, posing an interrogative moment. What can art do? As the current era aligns the sublimity of awe and danger with the mood of urgency and activism, uncertainty reigns. The affects of indignation, despair and alienation arise and are simultaneously anaesthetized by the promise of pleasure and beauty. Speaking truth-to-power is enacted by the supposed "fools" of culture – late-night comedians, artists and other marginalized agents – who carry the burden of making sense in a world where far right populism has normalized "hate."

*What the F**k?! Video in the Age of Sublime Uncertainty* responds to the affects of psychic and cultural shock unleashed by the current crisis in democracy. In developing a thematic framework for Curatorial Incubator v. 15, we sought to "make space" amid the current fracturing of public discourse, hyper-partisan gambits and moral scandals.[1] Instead, the video programs stemming from this residency reflect upon video's affective power to focus attention, forge relations and configure ways of collective feeling that might reimagine aspiration, consolation, longing and freedom. Participants attended two workshops with us that explored the dynamics of affect in video art: how affect operates to activate the senses and non-verbal cues, energize perception and bodily cognition, imbue works with mood and atmosphere, and create connections between individuals, the social, the temporal and the liminal.[2] Video art of all genres – whether narrative, conceptual, performative, documentary or experimental – conveys affect in addition to the elements of narrative or representation. Atmospheric registers are communicated through camerawork, soundtrack, scale, framing, and pace of editing.[3] We also discussed how curating video art involves considered mediations of context, juxtaposition and placement.[4] Affect comprises that energetic capacity that connects the sensory to the political and comes into play in a broader historical sense through what Raymond Williams calls the "structure of feeling" – a shared sensibility that endows works of a particular era with a distinctive style, expression and meaning.[5]

The incubatees – Almudena Escobar López, Masaki Kondo, Mel Day, and the duo Isabelle Lynch and Sophie Lynch – developed four distinctive and compelling video programs. Given carte blanche access to an archive of 5000+ titles by over 1000 artists, they selected a range of works from the past 30 years that showcased the depth and diversity of Vtape's holdings. While the videos chosen for the programs were all completed prior to the contemporary crisis in democracy, they nevertheless speak to and explore affects that are resonant today. Some of the works prefigure affects that are prominent now, others offer antidotes to the stressed emotional states currently being experienced, and others compel viewers to transcend present circumstances by imagining a broader perspective. In the programs described below, artists engage with affective states as they contend with the world's upheavals and conflicts, and seek ways to critique, understand and perhaps ameliorate the damage to psyches and communities.

Almudena Escobar López's *Just Leave Me Alone* presents videos that magnify the intensities and contradictions of fear. The eight videos consider how fear proliferates across diverse media platforms, such as popular film, television, video games, news, soundtracks, nature documentaries, folklore and dreamscapes. In the media, fear is compounded with anxiety and other affects to justify or enhance xenophobia, the threat of terrorism, the scapegoating of marginalized populations, and the retrenchment of disempowering gender stereotypes. While critiquing the use of fear as a tool of manipulation, the artists in this program also seek to work through fear's problematics to arrive at the opposite: empathy, understanding and connectivity.

Masaki Kondo's *Medi(t)ating the Temporality of the Untimely* responds to the increasing pressure, strain, pace and reactive compulsions of the digital age. Counterbalancing the ceaseless flow and overwhelming plenitude of information that generates instability and unease, this video program draws from the Nietzschean idea of "the untimely" to pose video as a meditation of time-out-of-time. Through configuring restorative moments that harness the calmness of nature, water, forests, and everyday moments, or impel the breathing of beholders to slow down and create an appreciation for simplicity and stillness, video bears the capacity for contemplation necessary for well-being in an ever-accelerating culture.

Mel Day's *Remote Preparation* explores how artists employ unpredictability as a creative methodology. Building upon Thomas Merton's idea of "remote preparation" – a mindfulness practice that accentuates the present moment and embraces the unknown – these seven performance and process-based works depict aleatory encounters, miscommunications, and uncertain immersions. While Merton's practice was directed toward revolution on a society-wide level, the works in this program enact transformation occurring on individual and interpersonal levels. What starts out with an individual can extend out to serve as a model for a collective reimagining of the possibilities for hope, trust and empathy.

Isabelle Lynch and Sophie Lynch's *Artificial Tears* assembles five videos that emphasize the stagecraft of emotionality. Crying serves as the case study for an examination of the contemporary fascination with sincerity, authenticity, and the performativity of affect. Whether caught on camera, preparing backstage, or watching a screen, the individuals witnessed crying in this program enact melodramatic "suffering" in strategic ways. The shedding of tears exemplifies a type of emotional excess that can manufacture outcomes such as tragic farce and phony documentary. Here the act of crying subverts gendered and racialized notions of hyperbole, as well as demonstrates an agency to signify defiance and invite sympathetic engagement.

In the current era, the malleability of affect has been instrumentalized destructively to weaponize fear, manipulate votes, provoke hate, justify partisanship politics, fuel alarm and divide the populace. In such a context of deceptive and cynical uses, the programs of this Curatorial Incubator employ affect in alert, imaginative, reflexive, critical and even optimistic ways.

It was a pleasure to be invited as curators in residence to conduct the 2018 Curatorial Incubator. We remain inspired by the creative spirit that pervades Vtape and the relationships among everyone involved. We enjoyed thinking through the curatorial premise with Lisa Steele, and thank all of the artists for allowing their trenchant and prescient work to be included in the programs. *What the F**k?!* benefitted from the resourcefulness and dedication of Vtape's team: Kim Tomczak for expertise in streaming the programs, Wanda VanderStoop for managing the archive and artists' fees, Deirdre Logue and Chris Gehman for their effective grant writing, and Dustin Lawrence for providing technical support during the workshops. Finally, we thank the Incubator curators for developing an original and captivating series of programs that shine light on the simultaneity of beauty and danger amid the unfolding crises of this unprecedented era.

Notes

[1] On "making space" see Gregory Seigworth, "Capaciousness," *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* (2017), 1(1): i-v.

[2] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Texture and Affect," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003 and Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004.

[3] See Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Only Entertainment*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 18-44.

[4] See Jennifer Fisher, "Exhibitionary Affect," *n.Paradoxa*, volume 18 (2006): 27-33.

[5] See Lawrence Grossberg, "Mapping Popular Culture," in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 69-88, and Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 31.

Just Leave Me Alone

Almudena Escobar López

Since 9/11, truth has become outdated, fear is used as a tool for social order, and activism is just a T-shirt with a slogan in a fashion magazine. What is the meaning of being a feminist when everyone is a feminist? What can a protest accomplish when protesting has become a social trend? The arts have been increasingly cornered by what Frankfurt school theorist Herbert Marcuse called "technical rationality," the use of science as a tool for dominating society and nature.[1] Concomitant with this rationalization is the relegation of art to leisure and the world of illusion, a distant dream dissociated from the sphere of the everyday. The current neoliberal context exacerbates this trend by positioning art as just an opportunity for the branding and manufacturing of commodities. The videos in *Just Leave Me Alone*, however, function differently. Instead of depicting illusions or creating a brand, they explore being in the world and how fear and anxiety serve not only as tools of control but also as liminal states of critical potential. What is at stake in these works is the affective dimension of fear and its capacity to open a reparative space instead of imposing a structure of paranoia and despair.

Just Leave Me Alone places a magnifying glass over the connective tissue and contradictions of collective fear. The videos foreground a juxtaposition between what is visible, tangible and audible with what is not seen, touched or heard but equally present. This to-and-fro, oscillatory nature of video enables a position from which it is possible to critically reassemble the affective coordinates that place each individual in a particular social space. Video art becomes what Emily Vey Duke, one of the artists in this program, calls "the best form of communication [...] for actually explaining things" because of its interrelational capacity, and its ability to focus on the emergent.[2]

Larissa Sansour's *Sbara* – "arabs" spelled backwards – connects the fear created in the 1980 film *The Shining* with the fear propagated against Arabs in popular news and media. Audiences of the film experience fear through the emotions of the characters Danny and Wendy Torrance; in Sansour's video, fear is directed towards the Other, and materializes through Western Islamophobia. Using Kubrick's theme music and a grating, spooky soundtrack, the video creates the feeling of unease through continuous long shots punctuated by scary jump cuts. For the nightmarish climax, a woman in a burqa menacingly emerges from the bathtub (an "arab" version of the figure from the "Room 237" scene). Sansour unveils how fear is a constructed affect that is stoked by trumped-up anxiety and artificial dualism: one is either scared or the one who is scary. *Sbara* confronts this polarity by repurposing

the conventions of horror with humor to directly speak to the audience without scolding them.

The scary Other serves as a prominent target in video games too. The affect of such games is influenced by images of warfare, particularly those broadcast since the 1991 Gulf War, when camera-equipped missiles unleashed horrifying consequences upon Iraqi soldiers and buildings. Transplanting this trope to Canadian soil, Marnie Parrell's camera becomes a smart bomb looking for a target in Toronto's iconic shopping mall, the Eaton Centre. Using a Pixelvision camera, a lo-fi children's toy produced by Fisher-Price, *Smart Bomb* reflects on the technology of image-making, particularly how media alters the sense of being in the world. The handheld, documentary aesthetic of the video transports the audience into the space of the real and the post-9/11 media context where the history of war imagery, ubiquitous surveillance and lethal weaponry invest an ordinary walk through a shopping mall with fear and anxiety.

Cheryl Rondeau's trilogy *Les Documents* also reflects on media culture, questioning gender as a preconceived social construction. The three works in this series are an accumulation of found footage segments from popular film and television, which compose a mosaic of women expressing responses of horror, ecstasy, and surprise. These affects and their preconceived physical responses incessantly replicate to the point of exhaustion. The reiteration provokes a sense of claustrophobia that refers back to the repetitive quality of social gestures associated with normative gender roles. Anxiety in Rondeau's videos operates as a political strategy to intercede between the personal and the social constructions of gender.

The impossibility to escape media's portrayal of fear and the anxiety it generates is the central question of belit sağ's *disruption (aksama)*. The artist composes a mosaic with found footage from Turkish news on the coup attempt of 2016, combined with popular films and television clips. This puzzle of images is superimposed with first-person footage of the filmmaker's feet as she walks in the street. The conglomeration of pacing, images, and sounds is simultaneously comical,

Smart Bomb (1991)

Les Documents (2007)

8

terrifying and overwhelming; it evokes the sublimity of a Baroque canvas yet exhibits the nervousness and restlessness that media generates.

The pieces by Serena Lee and Nahed Mansour examine the social construction of affect in relation to language. In Lee's *Stretto*, reading is an embodied political exercise that can stimulate distress. A letter to a mouse, read aloud, outlines the terms of cohabitational interspecies conflict.[3] Several languages overlap in the soundtrack and subtitles. The interlacing speaks of the impossibility of a universal discourse and the overwhelming feeling of multiple voices. For Lee, language operates as a relational medium that is able to circulate fear independently from the content of the discourse. Tone and attitude are as important – if not more important – than what is said. Viewers of *Stretto*, however, struggle to find evidence of the mouse (is it real or just a fiction?) but are able to feel the anxiety that its presence triggers. In this sense the focus on the mouse signals the representation of domestic fear and anxiety, and Lee holds it responsible for the uncertainties it generates.
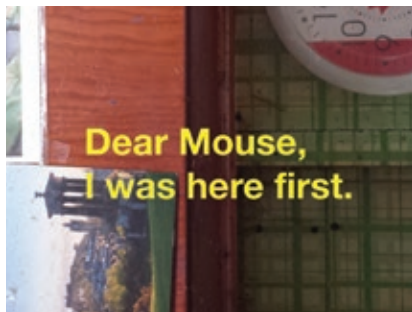
For Mansour, speaking is a social exercise that reflects the political conditions of its community. *Kh* shows a close-up of Mansour's mouth and her tongue repeatedly struggling to pronounce خ (transliterated as kh). The repetition discloses the collateral political charge of this particular Arabic sound. The pronunciation of this letter, which has no English equivalent, has been stereotypically used to represent male Arabic speech in Western media. Since 9/11, kh registers as a threatening sound and is associated with terrorism. The recurrence of the sound provokes a sensation of unease that challenges viewers/listeners to question where their discomfort arises.

Aqtuqsi (My Nightmare) is Mary Kunuk's personal account of *aqtuqsi*, a terrifying nightmare that paralyzes the body. In Inuit culture, *aqtuqsi* is considered a supernatural attack by a spirit that preys on the mind when one's body is at its most helpless. The video shows several girls playing in the frozen tundra until they enter a small tent and fall asleep. Even though this section is supposed to evoke the "real" world, it carries an uncanny artificiality because of being filmed

Stretto *(2016)*

Aqtuqsi (My Nightmare) *(1996)*

in stop-action, black-and-white video with non-diegetic music. The imagery shifts to colour when one of the girls begins to experience *aqtuqsi*. Her naked body is carried by disembodied hands towards a pond, perhaps in an attempt to drown her. The nightmare is accentuated by a monotonous and disturbing jaw's harp beat that shrouds the *aqtuqsi* in an unsettling mystery. Kunuk's video blurs the threshold between nightmares and reality as the intense fear of *aqtuqsi* bleeds into the viewer's waking world.

Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby's *Here is Everything* opens with an animation of a cat and a rabbit delivering a message from the future. They intend to assuage all the things that generate fear and anxiety in humans: addiction, suffering, and death. While the two oracles explain how to process these important matters, a series of extreme close-ups of insects alternate with images of a miniature town populated with plastic figures. The slow and serene movement of insects contrasts with the uncanny stasis of the diorama. The life of a tapeworm is praised as sublime and lovable, side by side with immeasurable landscapes, and dead animals. The energy of these images is enhanced by childlike

singing of made-up songs that favor a spontaneous and direct engagement with the world. In this video, fear and anxiety open the possibility of a direct relationship between viewer and image as a "mutual embodiment," in Laura Marks' term, that lets the subject be transformed by its encounter with the world.[4]

The videos in *Leave Me Alone* disrupt and question the representational codification of fear and its implications across language, media and social performance. Together they form an array of affectively mediated textures and raw experiences. Techniques of embodiment and direct experience function to defuse the powerful nature of fear and anxiety by transforming their energy into intensities of emergence. Making political films nowadays involves a move away from the Brechtian idea of distance to an intimate, personal reality that draws the viewer close. Although the division between who is scared and who is scary is still present, these works incorporate the experience of the body and demonstrate its liberatory potential. Fear becomes a reparative space where individuals encounter their fears and anxieties while at the same time encouraging empathy and reflection.

Notes

[1] Marcuse, Herbert, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, p. 158.

[2] Emily Vey Duke, speaking in *Here is Everything* (2013).

[3] A stretto is a musical passage within a fugue where the central voice is imitated by one or more voices that enter before the subject has finished, superimposing upon each other.

[4] Marks, Laura, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, pp. xix-xx.

Just Leave Me Alone

Curated by Almudena Escobar López

1. Larissa Sansour,
Sbara, **2008, 8:30**
Sbara references Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film *The Shining*. A child wanders the grounds and rooms of a creepy mansion, and experiences terrifying visions. Visual quotes from the film are combined with historical and contemporary audio about the Middle East.

2. Cheryl Rondeau,
Les Documents, **2007, including**
Les Petites Morts, **2:15,** *Eclipse,*
1:50, *and Blanc,* **2:25**
This trilogy of videos uses found footage to explore how women are gendered in popular media. Each of the three works focuses on a specific cinematic gesture: screams of horror, moments of ecstasy, and women turning towards the camera.

3. Serena Lee, *Stretto,* **2016, 6:48**
This video comprises a letter to a mouse that discusses inter-species cohabitation and the political implications of living with others. The footage shows the construction of a Rube Goldberg-like mouse trap amongst images of domestic and public lives.

4. Marnie Parrell,
Smart Bomb, **1991, 2:00**
Handheld footage shot with a Pixelvision camera shows the filmmaker frantically walking around the Toronto Eaton Centre while pretending to be a smart bomb looking for its target.

5. Emily Vey Duke
and Cooper Battersby,
Here is Everything, **2013, 13:55**
Using found footage, animation, and images from a miniature diorama, a cat and a rabbit deliver a message from the future. They answer transcendental questions about death, God and grace, as well as offering advice about what really matters in life.

6. Mary Kunuk, *Aqtuqsi*
(My Nightmare), **1996, 5:00**
The film visualizes a nightmare that the artist experiences. Two girls play in the tundra until they lay down to sleep in a tent. One dreams of running through a beautiful landscape until being flown toward a lake by disembodied hands.

7. Nahed Mansour,
Kh, **2008, 10:15**
The artist struggles over and over again to pronounce خ (transliterated in English as kh), one of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. This reiterative performance opens up the political and social dimension of the letter's sound.

8. belit sağ,
disruption (aksama), **2016, 5:00**
A first-person footage of belit sağ's feet as she walks from one building to another with a superimposed mosaic of images from Turkish news combined with popular films and clips that gradually interact with each other.

Medi(t)ating the Temporality of the Untimely

Masaki Kondo

In urban areas replete with screen-based media and devices, inhabitants seem to be slowly losing their grip on actions, events, and situations. Sociologist Judy Wajcman, for example, emphasizes a disappearing sense of time in such conditions of contemporary society, as "space and time are radically compressed to the point where, at least with regard to the latter, it ceases to exist."[1] City residents continually experience the pressure and the stress of acceleration and instantaneity because of the ever-increasing dominance of digital communication and information technologies. A prominent cause of this experience lies in the reliance on screen-based media and electronics, such as smartphones, wearable devices, tablets, computers, digital kiosks, and other screens: these digital media have become "integral to our experience of space, time, communication, and consciousness," according to Wajcman, and so "crystalliz[e] new ways of being, knowing, and doing."[2] While these screens expose citizens to the ceaseless flow of audio-visual and textual information, notifications on personal devices – messages, emails, alerts, likes, matches, and follows – beg to be paid attention to and compel action. Even if one's personal devices are put away, a constant flow is still evoked through the latest news streaming across public screens and signs as well as by fellow urbanites reading and playing with their devices. These conditions encourage the consumption of new information at an accelerating rate and work against meaningful cognition and understanding. A growing abundance of constantly emerging information overwhelms the capacity for engaging with it substantively, often through what information scientists David Bawden and Lyn Robinson call "a loss of control over the situation."[3] As a result, people have no time to assess their situation because of a plenitude of incoming bits of actions, events, stories, and images, which has made instability a part of the norm of daily life. Unpredictability has become a certainty.

If social interactions and connections still matter and the desire to find meaning extends beyond the flat surface of screens, how can individuals respond to the incessantly accelerating passage of time? One way of reacting to the current situation is to stop the digital flow. Taking a pause, even a momentary one, can create the mental space to consider the (un)certainty and (un)predictability of contemporary society as mindful meditation often helps to, according to psychiatrists Alberto Chiesa and Alessandro Serretti, "develop a more reflexive awareness of inner and outer experiences" and represent "an efficacious tool for the reduction of stress."[4] By medi(t)ating the temporal flow of

media, stressed urbanites can take the first step toward regaining and restoring a more meaningful and fulfilling sense of time. Doing so on a more collective level could also catalyze and challenge the growing acceptance and insensitivity to socio-political capriciousness and instability. This counter-engagement with the interminable flow exposes what I call the temporality of the untimely. The Nietzschean concept of "the untimely" indicates a meditative process of "acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time" so that it can foster what the philosopher designates as hope "for the benefit of a time to come."[5] By taking a pause against the constant flow of information, people confront the present so that they can look for actions to invent a better future. This gesture toward the untimely can provide a space, mental or physical, to consider the relationship with time per se as well. Even slightly reconnecting with the profound sense of time can create resilience and remediation against socio-cultural pressures generated by acceleration and instantaneity.

This screening programme, *Medi(t)ating the Temporality of the Untimely*, foregrounds the potential of the untimely. It offers viewers an opportunity to take a pause against the temporality of hurried and hectic everyday life by venturing into the calmer rhythms of nature, particularly watery and forested environments. According to research on the correlation of nature experience with affect and cognition, such environments can "provide a 'restorative' affective experience, perhaps through some process of 'negative affect repair.'"[6] The first three titles predominantly depict water and trigger in viewers a sense of uncanny tranquillity through the combination of imagery and soundtracks. In *Push / Pull / Recover* Terra Jean Long explores the nature of tension between movement and stillness through the acts of swimming and breathing in water. The soundtrack accentuates the overall mutability of the imagery, but the concluding sounds of breathing and waves bring viewers back the peacefulness of water and air – two life essentials often taken for granted.

Push / Pull / Recover (2013)

This title helps to heighten the sense of simple actions, such as stroking and breathing, and to explore their significance through taking a pause.

Isabelle Hayeur brings viewers' attention to the consequences of an anthropogenic impact on the environment by exploring the water around a marine scrapyard. *Castaway* depicts shipwrecks' stillness and contrasts it with gentle swells in a passage of water. The sombre soundtrack amplifies the tense but gloomy atmosphere, evoking an eerie feeling. The montage of a factory emitting smoke and thick, dark clouds alludes to the adverse effects of industrial development to which these boats and ships once contributed. *Castaway* hints at some hope for the future by ending with the sun reflecting on the surface of the water, with soothing ambient sounds. The murkiness of the water, however, seems to reflect the ambiguity of the moment. The relative stillness of the imagery forces contemplation of uncertainty that daily encounters with the relentless flow of information would typically override.

The ambiguity felt in *Castaway* turns into uneasiness in *A Time to Dwell (Part #1)* by Katherine Jerkovic. Here, passing moments of mundaneness alternate with stagnant periods of restlessness. Ambient sounds foreground a prosaic passage of the day witnessed in scenes of swings, laundry on clotheslines, and people hanging out at a harbour along the coast. The shots, with their out-of-focus foregrounds, cut into these restful scenes, and the accompanying cacophonous soundtrack raises tensions. While the scenes do not overly emphasize Jerkovic's thematic focus on migration, the restless segments imply some ongoing events out of sight, out of focus. The combination of mundane and restless scenes in *A Time to Dwell* nudges

viewers to become more aware of the potential to abide in relative stillness and slowness.

The next two titles follow the same path from anxiety to tranquillity but in the space of a forest. Lisa Birke's *Fragonard's Swing (Miss La La; Hung out to Dry)* portrays a bizarre scene where a woman in a white dress, white underwear, and black rubber boots sways upside down from a trapeze in the relative quietude of the woods. The white dress covers her head, so viewers cannot see any facial expression to understand her predicament. An eerie soundtrack with ambient sounds turns this unknowingness into something suspenseful, which effectively corresponds to the artist's aim to problematize the sexualized images of female bodies. The languid motion of her body may also indicate nature's attempt to alleviate trauma through the forest's slow rhythm and tolerance. It is as if the swaying movement seeks to synchronize viewers' breathing with that of the forest. In so doing, *Fragonard's Swing* leads viewers to meditatively contemplate what they see and hear. After being sensitized to the potential

of stillness and slowness, viewers further venture into a forest through *Falling Among Cedars* by Carolyn Doucette. Slow motion footage of a raven-disguised female figure weaving through a forest accentuates the stillness of the cedar trees with environmental sounds of winds, insects, and creaking. Tracking shots of her and the sound of a deep, growling murmur, however, imply the existence of the forest's agency or volition, which ultimately destroys her. Through the foregrounded stability and autonomy of this standing forest, *Falling Among Cedars* indicates to viewers the importance of engagement with one's own internal vital force to strengthen resistance and resilience to external forces and temporal flows.

The last title, Isabell Spengler and Daniel Adams's *Lantouy,* immerses viewers into an evolving passage of nature's rhythms and tremors. Like the other videos, Lantouy's soundtrack corresponds to and enhances the mythical view of nature, but various sounds resonate as if the earth is thriving and breathing. The combination of morphing nature's fantastic imagery
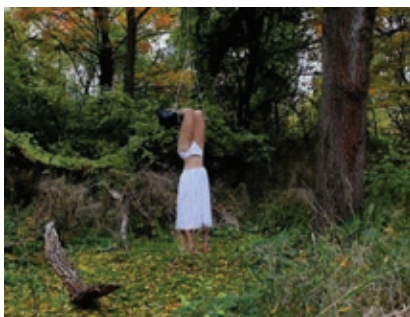
Fragonard's Swing (Miss La La; Hung out to Dry) *(2012)*
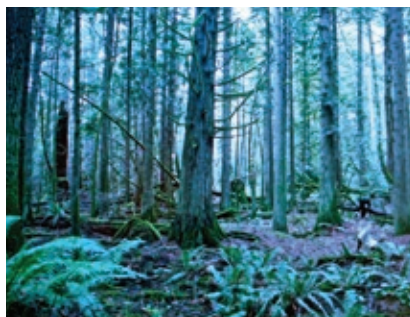
Falling Among Cedars *(2012)*

and its sonorous sounds reinforces the earth's vibrancy and magnificence. By underlining the fundamental, multiple temporal flow of nature, *Lantouy* urges urbanites to re-connect with the disappearing sense of ruminative moments that counteract the frenzied rhythm of the city.

Medi(t)ating the Temporality of the Untimely, as a whole, attempts to show viewers the existence of something subtle but essential to humankind beyond the ceaseless flow of information that bombards them in daily, urban life.

Exposure to these video works offers viewers a restorative counterpoint of equilibrium and mental composure, but they are merely and temporarily stepping back to assess contemporary society's unpredictable and anxious situations. The preservation or restoration of nature may solve some but not all of an urbanite's quotidian issues. Viewers still need the courage to pause and the willingness to become visionary catalysts in order to nurture a humanity that can withstand and even thrive in socio-cultural acceleration.

Notes

[1] Wajcman, Judy, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 19. For a general discussion of social acceleration, see Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015; Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014; and John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy*, London: Sage Publications, 2007.

[2] Wajcman, p. 184.

[3] Bawden, David and Lyn Robinson, "The Dark Side of Information: Overload, Anxiety and Other Paradoxes and Pathologies," *Journal of Information Science*, 35: 2 (2009): 183.

[4] Chiesa, Alberto and Alessandro Serretti, "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Stress Management in Healthy People: A Review and Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 15: 5 (2009): 594.

[5] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 60.

[6] Bratman, Gregory N., Gretchen C. Daily, Benjamin J. Levy, and James J. Gross, "The Benefits of Nature Experience: Improved Affect and Cognition," *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 138 (2015): 47.

Medi(t)ating the Temporality of the Untimely

Curated by Masaki Kondo

1. Terra Jean Long,
Push / Pull / Recover, **2013, 3:30**
This short presents an animated meditation on motion through stillness with breath. Originally shot in single frames on 16 mm with a Bolex, the artist hand-processed, hand-painted, and digitally manipulated about thirty seconds of material created during a residency for Canadian filmmaker Philip Hoffman's process cinema workshop in Cuba.

2. Isabelle Hayeur,
Castaway, **2012, 14:00**
Filmed in the murky waters of the largest boat cemetery on the Eastern Seaboard, this title reveals the hidden side of industrial development by offering a glimpse of an unsustainable capitalist economy's eventual shipwreck through the uncanny, desolate landscape of the Witte Marine Scrap Yard on the northern shore of Staten Island.

3. Katherine Jerkovic, *A Time to Dwell (Part 1),* **2006, 10:00**
The first of an audio-visual series that reflects on migration and the coastal landscape. Shot on the northern side of the Saint Lawrence River in Québec, the artist examines the location's formal elements – the horizon, scale, and the frame's borders – in relation to the subtlety of the passing time and movement.

4. Lisa Birke, *Fragonard's Swing (Miss La La; Hung Out to Dry),* **2012, 5:31**
Satirically referring to well-known eighteenth-century paintings that sexualized women for the male gaze, this title depicts a lifeless female figure hanging upside-down off a trapeze in the forest. It is part of the six-channel installation, Pictures in an Exhibition, which negotiates femininity and enacts cultural and art historical tropes with a twist.

5. Carolyn Doucette,
Falling Among Cedars, **2012, 14:31**
Exploring the interaction between humans and nature in relation to contemporary fear, the title focuses on a raven-disguised woman exploring what at first appears to be a serene forest. The forest, however, follows along and gradually becomes agitated, eventually seeming to eradicate the lone figure.

6. Isabell Spengler and Daniel Adams, *Lantouy,* **2006, 6:47**
Shot at the Gouffre de Lantouy in the Department of Lot in southern France, the title unwinds a series of nature's mythical and tranquil imagery with a soundtrack that suggests the earth's vibrations. The imagery evokes a dreamy unconscious spirit, as if the natural environment has supplanted and taken over from human beings.

Remote Preparation

Mel Day

During the Vietnam War, the Trappist monk, poet, and social activist Thomas Merton wrote about how deep contemplative practice lays the groundwork for the seeds of change. He called this inner work remote preparation, "a kind of arduous and un-thanked pioneering," which can open the mind to new thinking in the midst of uncertainty and, over the long term, guide meaningful individual and collective actions.[1]

Merton's contemplative practice entailed solitude, manual labour, immersion in prayer-meditation-nature, ritualized call and response, and poetry. Over time, he began to experience 'radical dread' – a state of deep questioning, doubt and melancholia.[2] To withstand radical dread, Merton describes a practice of going beyond oneself into the unknown, unnamed potential of the present moment.[3] Such experiences reveal new ways of being-in-action that are ultimately more compassionate, open to self-correction, and intimately bonded with others. They also defuse confining political and spiritual classifications.[4] Merton himself became increasingly engaged in civil rights and anti-war efforts with Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, and peace activist Thích

Nhất Hạnh during this time when Buddhist nuns and monks burned themselves to protest the war in acts of self-sacrifice. Ultimately, Merton's contemplation-fueled social activism led some to believe his early death was an assassination, allegedly at hands of the CIA.[5]

Given the current dark age of unfolding horror and uncertainty, Merton's practice of remote preparation is needed now more than ever. A menacing atmosphere lurks globally, along with a seemingly endless spectacle of borderline, narcissistic actors wielding the reins of power. Within this context, how might experimental video spark remote preparation to foster a deepening of impulse in Merton's sense of revolutionary exchange and visionary flow?

Video is a medium that resonates with Merton's premise for remote preparation: it can offer a performative prompt where "the 'now' [...] cuts time like a blade."[6] The viewer and maker are drawn together into contemplation of the unfolding present moment where one's internal uncertainties encounter the world's uncertainties, potentially discovering a new field of responses.[7] In Vtape's holdings lie seven diverse works that share a common thread of showing embodied process and ambiguous interpretations.[8] They knead the boundaries between art and life, and invite their makers and viewers to descend into the numinous unknown and participate in acts of remote preparation.

The premise of *The End* by Steven Eastwood involves the asking of questions. The film presents a French woman wandering around London asking passers-by for directions to "the end." She receives earnest, bemused, philosophical, cynical, even sleazy responses. One believes her query relates to a nearby nightclub. A minister asks for more specificity: "The end of what? The end of time? Or the end of the road?" The woman ultimately arrives at a banal dead-end and stares intensely at a pair of battered dustbins. *The End* delightfully provokes a contrast between the earnestness of seeking and a dwelling in not-knowing.[9] *The End*'s deadpan collision between internal and external searching invites the viewer to step into an open state that foregrounds ambiguity over resolution.

Love and awkwardness elicit tension in *Romance in China* by Susanne Caines. The video shows the artist approaching strangers and delivering well-known love lines from Hollywood movies in an overly dramatic, seductive tone. The screen juxtaposes two scenes, splitting the video horizontally into exaggerated rectangles. At times the sounds overlap, entangling the narratives. The splitting also applies linguistically: Caines only speaks English, and her listeners only understand Mandarin. This leads to startled encounters with would-be paramours. Despite the lack of a shared language, *Romance in China* concludes with a stranger who responds delightedly to Caines' proclamation of love. By seeking out encounters fraught with miscommunication, the artist demonstrates the remote preparation practice of accepting the challenge of discomfort and ineptness.

San Francisco-based artist Jeremiah Barber gathers footage of himself across a range of immense and sublime settings. In the on-going durational work, *The Advocate*, he mimics the sounds of foghorns in lonely seascapes. Barber's vocalizations signal through literal fogs of uncertainty in a seemingly ritualized call and response. One scene shows Barber swimming fully dressed through treacherous waves near the Golden Gate Bridge to a large outcropping, where he stands in an existential encounter with a

The End (2002)

Romance in China (2009)

hazy vastness much like Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818). Another scene witnesses a swarm of school children interrupting the shot to unexpectedly vocalize their own chorus of foghorn sounds. Barber's exercise in remote preparation embodies the acceptance of sublimity with a combination of gravitas and lightness, deadpan absurdity and sincerity.[10]

Another video staged in the San Francisco Bay is Angela Willetts' *Escape Raft*. For this split-screen work, the artist builds a raft with scavenged materials and old clothes, then sails it on waters off Fort Mason. On the left, Willetts negotiates the DIY mechanics of constructing a raft – in her house. At one point, the parts fail to fit through the door. She familiarizes herself with the craft by wrapping her body around the structure in an unpredictable choreography. The right screen shows Willetts' voyage on the raft. Balancing precariously, she inexpertly gestures

maritime flag and distress signals, while the voice-over matter-of-factly recites instructions from army survival manuals. *Escape Raft* depicts the timely significance of preparing for uncharted waters. Yet the artist's planning connotes something more personal – early preparation for yet unknown upheavals in her personal life.[11]

Star Wars Trash Compactor Scene goofily re-enacts a dramatic scene in *Star Wars IV* (1977) where the film's characters are trapped aboard the Death Star. The version by Zoe Leigh Hopkins and students affiliated with the Mohawk language immersion program at Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa, in Six Nations, Ontario, reimagines the compactor as a garage, using tarps, garbage bags and stuffed animals. With exaggerated movements and slapstick irreverence, 'Luke Skywalker' battles a plush snake-beast, 'Princess Leia' looks around in mock-terror, and 'Chewbacca' bangs his fists while roaring in Wooky-Mohawk.

The farcical appropriation at once levels a critique of dominant, white, movie culture, while also identifying with a narrative about an evil empire threatening Indigenous survival. Hopkins' approach engages and challenges the viewer, and lays the groundwork for an expanded field of Indigenous speech and cultural production.

Ariella Pahlke's *Women Down Prospect: Final Report* follows a group of women from Lower Prospect, Nova Scotia as they grapple with preparing the concluding account for a health project. Eventually, to hoots of laughter, they decide to create a video instead; in their minds the best way to present the uncertainty of their lives and to release stress would be to throw a karaoke party. Amongst groovy Motown songs and ballads about heartbreak, Pahlke shows the women learning how to use a camera and interviewing one another. At one point, the filmmaker unexpectedly encounters another woman's camera shooting back at her. The power of such a chance confrontation illustrates how the welcoming of an open-ended, risky process can cultivate women's agency and well-being.

The dialogic context in *Cold Night in February* by Yudi Sewraj revolves around a worn couch, covered in brown floral velour. At first, an actor sits on the right side and is prompted by the filmmaker to cry. In the next scene, the actor disappears, but others enter and sit on the left side of the couch. Weeping sounds suggest that the onlookers are watching footage of the actor crying. A series of captions outline the sofa's nefarious history: a letter hidden in the cushions reveals disturbing clues about a previous owner. A song replaces the sounds of crying – the crying-inducing song, presumably – as the ghosts of people sit on the sofa together. Sewraj invites contemplation of the "truth" of

Cold Night in February (2006)

the situation, which lies somewhere between the real and the manufactured. Such ambiguity interrupts cinematic illusion and encourages viewers to engage more attentively with the humanity of others.[12]

This program of videos was conceptualized as an embrace of uncertainty in the shock of the current moment as an antidote to the habits of certainty – such as religious egoism, formulaic truths, absence of self-reflection and self-correction, insincerity, inhumanity to others. Through a flexible process, the videographer-witness demonstrates the kind of contemplative invocation and response continuous with the innovative insights afforded by Merton's remote preparation. Each of the seven works cultivates states of apprehension and invites trust in the unpredictable encounter to, ultimately, reveal a sense of hope.

Notes

[1] Merton, Thomas and Kathleen Deignan, *A Book of Hours*, Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2007, p. 122.

[2] Merton, Thomas, "Chapter XV1," *Where Prayer Flourishes*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1969 [2018].

[3] Merton, Thomas, "Foreword," in William Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1967 [2000], pp. xi-xvi. Merton uses the term "apophatic," which means to describe something (typically spiritual experience) by what it is not – by its unknowable or ineffable qualities.

[4] Merton, pp. 122-23.

[5] See Hugh Turley and David Martin, *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton: An Investigation*, Hyattsville, MD: McCabe Publishing, 2018, pp. 209–19.

[6] Merton, p. 140.

[7] My understanding of the value of contemplative work is influenced by conversations with Episcopalian priest Reverend Matthew Dutton Gillet, Menlo Park.

[8] In regard to such ambiguity, these videos function like "open works" in Umberto Eco's terminology. See *The Open Work*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 44.

[9] The form of the video provides a visual correspondence to Gregory Seigworth's and Melissa Gregg's idea of the incorporation of the body in affective time as a kind of "not yet doing […] the hopeful (though also fearful) cusp of an emergent futurity." "An Inventory of Shimmers," in Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 4.

[10] Vandenabeele, Bart, "The Existential and Metaphysical Value of the Sublime," *The Sublime in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 163–78.

[11] After finishing *Escape Raft*, the artist realized that she had been preparing for the break-up of a long-term relationship. Interview with the author, July 29, 2018, Sausalito, CA.

[12] Dorsky, Nathaniel, *Devotional Cinema*, Berkeley: Tuumba Press, 2005, pp. 20-22.

Remote Preparation

Curated by Mel Day

1. Steven Eastwood,
The End, 2002, 9:00

A young woman asks random strangers for directions to "the end." The ambiguity of this question and the diversity of the responses guide the film to an unpredictable conclusion.

2. Suzanne Caines,
Romance in China, 2009, 3:38

The artist instigates conversations with strangers on park benches in China using canned love lines from famous Hollywood movies. Her inability to speak or understand Mandarin leads to a series of awkward and failed connections with confused would-be suitors.

3. Jeremiah Barber,
Advocate, 2013-2018, 4:25

Since 2013, the artist has been gathering footage of his attempts to mimic and return the sounds of foghorns around the Golden Gate Bridge in the San Francisco Bay. He conducts this durational work in solitude in a variety of sublime settings and weather conditions.

4. Angela Willetts,
Escape Raft, 2017, 2:56

For this split-screen work, the artist constructs a raft and then sails it on the waters off San Francisco. The left screen depicts Willetts building the craft out of scavenged materials in her house. The right screen shows the voyage as the artist practices maritime flag and distress signals.

5. Zoe Leigh Hopkins,
Star Wars Trash Compactor Scene, 2014, 3:13

Students from the Mohawk language immersion for adults at Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa, in Six Nations, Ontario, re-enact the famous 'Trash Compactor' scene from *Star Wars IV: The New Hope* (1977) using everyday materials, lowbrow techniques and deadpan delivery.

6. Ariella Pahlke, *Women Down Prospect, Final Report,* 1996, 9:00

In this nested film-within-a-film, a group of women from Lower Prospect, Nova Scotia, grapple with how to write a final report for a project on women's health. They decide to perform their findings as a video-cum-karaoke party as a way to bear witness to their experiences and work through their stress.

7. Yudi Sewraj, *A Cold Night in February,* 2006, 13:00

In response to a newspaper ad, an actor sits on a couch and prepares to cry for twenty minutes by listening to songs from his past. Intersecting relationships emerge between the actor, couch, spectators, and objects that have slipped between the cushions. (Originally conceived as single-channel video installation with couch.)

Artificial Tears

Isabelle Lynch and Sophie Lynch

Artificial tears are specially formulated to lubricate dry and irritated eyes with the same hydrating qualities as natural tears. Refreshing and long-lasting, they can be used to cry on cue, weep at will, or sob spontaneously. If crying for the camera is often conceived as an actor's greatest achievement and if video is a site for both the transfer of affect and the commodification of emotional life, how do audience members allow themselves to be moved by the secretions that are shed on screen? Bringing together works by Oliver Husain, Nao Bustamante, Kent Monkman, Isabell Spengler and Tova Mozard, this program presents scenarios, expressions, and emotions that muddy the waters between felt feelings and artificial tears. The salty bodily fluids that fill the history of video art cloud visions and distinctions as they seep through the surfaces of moving images, affectively addressing audiences and softening the line between performance and non-performance. Often conceived as bodily drops of water that bring a subject's intimate emotional depths to the surface or that mark a relation between the mind and the body, the tears spilled in this program leak through attempts to separate inner emotions and outer expressions, or the events that take place onstage from what is experienced offstage.

Writing during a period when audiences shed tears of joy or pity while watching tragic or comedic theater, eighteenth-century philosopher Denis Diderot proposed a new theatrical genre – the *genre sérieux* – that strived to bring audiences to new emotional heights. An advocate for indulging in the pleasures of weeping and a proponent of the social function of shedding tears together, Diderot brought the emotional responses of spectators to centre stage by suggesting that tears had the capacity to flood the boundaries separating actors and audience members by allowing spectators to sympathetically take part in a scene.[1]

Today, a secretion of tears permeates contemporary culture, trickling down from the cheeks of reality TV stars into the palms of hands, where crying faces and teardrop emojis share sentiments across networks. The media theorist Anna McCarthy describes the reality genre as "a realm of excess, not simply a set of techniques and procedure but also, very correctly, a neoliberal theatre of suffering."[2] In an era when the camera often invades private moments of suffering, which can be read as familiar celebrations of distress, how do beliefs and assumptions of sincerity and authenticity reframe crying for the camera?[3] The works included in this program stage performances of excessive emotion and fantastical fictions, foregrounding how notions of artifice, sincerity, and theatricality are often themselves gendered and racialized, and proposing exaggerations and fabulations as possible means of resistance.

Two minutes before the curtain rises, the actress in Oliver Husain's *Item Number*, played by Kirtana Kumar, waits for a performance to begin. Reflecting on pasts forgotten and the parts or blanks in between narratives, she makes melodramatic proclamations in front of a bulb-lined vanity mirror. Contemplating her genuine embodiment and often followed by other versions of herself wearing identical mint-green dresses, the performance walks the thin line between what is scripted and what is improvised. "My body is not involved in this situation. This tear in my eye does not represent an investment," she recites, her eyelids heavy with eye shadow and anticipation. The performance will begin in two minutes. Is the signal stuck? The actress's multiplicities mirror a seemingly rehearsed Bollywood-inspired dance choreography. When the curtain rises only to reveal a backstage exit, Kumar leaves the theatre, walking in a straight line between parked cars and palm trees as the multitude of lookalikes follow. As what lies behind the scenes becomes the stage, reversing expectations and chronologies, Husain's film ends with an opened curtain and a rehearsal of forgetting.

In *Neapolitan*, Nao Bustamante's tear-stained eyes are fixated on a screen as she watches, rewinds, and re-watches the last scene of *Fresa y Chocolate* ("Strawberries and Chocolate"), a 1993 love story set in revolutionary Cuba. Describing the film's final scene as "an emotional vibrator of sorts," Bustamante sits in front of a television and wallows with pleasure in her tears, an emotional response seemingly produced spontaneously by the film's final scene.[4] As feminist theorist Amber Jamilla Musser suggests, the automaticity of Bustamante's emotional state creates a cleavage between authenticity and acting, and between emotionality and theatricality.[5]

By looping her emotional state in a way that evokes the sensational loop of the melodrama as a genre, Bustamante indulges in an evening of melodramatic spectatorship and participates in the manufacture and trafficking of her own feelings. When the credits roll, she dries her eyes, reaches for the remote, rewinds the film, and tears up once again. Putting her feelings on display, Bustamante plays a part in the romantic drama unfolding on screen as the glow of the television casts shadows and illuminates the glistening tears that stream down her face, shedding light on the affective power of the on-screen drama and illuminating tears asking to be witnessed.

Kent Monkman's *Mary* alludes to the story of Mary Magdalene who washed Christ's feet with her tears and dried them with her undone locks. Performed by Monkman's alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, Mary emerges in slow-motion, her abound-ing wind-machine blown hair flutter-ing as she kneels down in thigh-high red stiletto boots. With satin-gloved hands, Mary gracefully removes the Prince of Wale's socks and polished shoes to caress his feet to the climatic crescendos of the final scene of Richard Wagner's 1859 opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The mascara-tinted tears that stream down her face stain as they drip on the Prince's foot, blurring visions that uphold rigid power rela-tions. Monkman's sequin-clad perfor-mance unsettles complicated pasts and relationalities of betrayal, such as the stealing of land from Indigenous peoples – forcing surrender without compromise. Rather than privileging a private interior realm in contrast to a knowable exterior, Mary *s*heds dark tears of resilience and loss.

When confronted with the dark depths of the ocean or the murky waters of a lake, one might be lured into hearing the enchanting voices of mystical

Mary *(2011)*

sea creatures. Seducing viewers into believing in mermaids, The Holiday Movie Initiative's *The Natural Life of Mermaids* opens with the kitschy glare of a lit-up moving waterfall picture and the calming sounds of trickling water, positioning the work as an assertively artificial fabulation. A choir of mermaids chant "The river turns red in their tears will swim" as the camera explores Arizona's desert landscape and a narrator describes recent mermaid sightings along the banks of Lake Havasu. The wildlife documentary morphs into an other-worldly fantasy as the filmmakers cast themselves as the mermaids who languish along the shore, partaking in quiet frivolities and whispering malev-olently. The river turns red and one of the mermaids dramatically dies, the gravity of the scene puncturing and disrupting the film's dreamy world. No longer immune to the reality of death by virtue of her fictional existence,

death becomes part of the mermaid's natural life.

The curtains of Tova Mozard's *The Big Scene* open backstage, in the dressing room of the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, as three generations of women robed in undergarments in various shades of pink and beige apply thick layers of makeup and converse with their reflections in front of a mirror. Applying waterproof mascara, good for "when you cry," to her mother's eyelashes, the artist contemplates blushed-cheeked famil-iar faces. "But you haven't cried in ten years," the mother remarks to her own mother. "Twenty," she replies. Covered in pancake makeup, face powder, and rose-coloured lipstick and blush, they gather on the stage of the empty theatre, arranged like a group therapy session. A counselor facilitates their interactions, and buried stories and memories emerge from pasty

masked faces, revealing layers of sorrow beneath shared and haunting pasts. Stories, memories, and emotions are revealed and mediated by the transformative encounter that occurs between the camera, the counselor, and the three women as rambling improvised exchanges become revealing waterproofed acts of disclosure.

The moving-image works included in *Artificial Tears* reveal the effects and affects of collective uncertainty or disbelief, where the inconceivable is dampened with credibility and where the lines separating fictions and actualities are blurred like glasses foggy with tears. Rather than pointing to a privileged depth or interior, the excesses that transpire through this program puncture and leak through moments of sincere sentimentality and overt theatricality. Excessive displays of personal pain can be contagious, moving between bodies and intensities and transforming spectators and their capacities to be more or less affected. Holding back tears at the movie theater, or wiping them away as credits roll on screen, the spectatorial tears one sheds while watching a video or a film can potentially re-configure relationships between the bodies that share affective intensities, forging new modes of sympathetic engagement. Please, hand me a tissue.

Notes

[1] Diderot, Denis, *Oeuvres Esthétiques*, Paris: Garnier, 1965, pp. 93-94.

[2] McCarthy, Anna, "Reality Television: A Neoliberal Theater of Suffering," *Social Text* 25: 4 (2007): 93.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Bustamante, Nao, "*Neapolitan*," naobustamante.com, http://www.naobustamante.com/art_neapolitan.html (accessed July 1, 2018).

[5] Musser, Amber Jamilla, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance*, New York: NYU Press, 2018, pp. 119-43.

Artificial Tears

Curated by Isabelle Lynch and Sophie Lynch

1. Oliver Husain,
Item Number, **2012, 16:00**
Opening backstage in a dressing room, the video's lead, played by Kirtana Kumar, prepares for an imminent performance and repeatedly reminds her viewers that the performance they are about to witness will begin in two minutes. Reality and fiction intermingle as monologues, dance numbers, and personal confessions unfold onstage and offstage.

2. Nao Bustamante,
Neapolitan, **(excerpt, without installation), 2003, 3:19**
In an endless loop of melodramatic spectatorship, the artist sits on a couch and sobs while watching and re-watching the final scene of the 1993 Cuban film *Fresca y Chocolate*. The glow of the television screen illuminates the tears streaming down her cheeks as she weeps, blows her nose, and reaches for the remote to replay the tearful finale.

3. Kent Monkman,
Mary, **2011, 3:18**
The artist's alter ego, the dazzling Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, revisits the Prince of Wales's 1860 trip to Montreal. Referencing the biblical allegory of Mary Magdalene's washing of Christ's feet, Miss Chief seductively bathes the Prince's feet with mascara-tinted tears and dries them with her glossy locks, challenging the meaning of "surrendering" within Aboriginal treaties.

4. The Holiday Movie Initiative,
The Natural Life of Mermaids, **2004, 10:26**
A voice-over adopting the convention of the wildlife documentary narrates the life and habits of sirens swimming in Arizona's Lake Havasu. A park ranger describes recent sightings as the filmmakers cast themselves as mermaids who playfully swim, whisper maliciously, and paint each other's nails along the banks of the lake.

5. Tova Mozard,
The Big Scene, **2011, 32:00**
In the dressing room of Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theatre, three generations of women – artist, mother and grandmother – apply makeup in front of a mirror. Once onstage, they sit with their backs turned to the empty theatre hall. Draped in layers of silk and lace, they share dreams, family traumas and anxieties in front of a therapist.

The **Artists**

Daniel Adams is a Berlin-based artist. His large-format oil paintings, drawings and sculptures have been exhibited in Berlin, Los Angeles and San Francisco. He is also engaged in music and creates improvised music compositions. In collaboration with Isabell Spengler and various groups, he took part in numerous short film and video productions as a performer, speaker, and musician.

Jeremiah Barber is a visual and performance artist based in San Francisco. A former member of Marina Abramovic's Independent Performance Group, his work explores transcendence, absurdity and humor. Barber has exhibited in the US and internationally, including the Cue Foundation (New York), Cité Internationale des Arts (Paris), and Recology Gallery (San Francisco). Group exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), and Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito, CA). Barber has been a resident at the Cité Internationale de Arts (Paris) and the Djerassi Artists Program (Woodside, CA). In 2015 he was awarded the Eureka Fellowship from the Fleishhacker Foundation.

A Saskatoon-based experimental short filmmaker, **Lisa Birke** examines notions of self through the lens of gender, bringing the cultural tropes of women into focus and question. In addition to her solo exhibitions across Canada, she has shown her works at film/video festivals and media centres internationally, including the Vancouver International Film Festival, the European Film Festival, the Athens International Film and Video Festival, and International Short Film Week Regensburg.

Nao Bustamante, whose practice encompasses performance art, sculpture, video installation, visual art, filmmaking, and writing, resides in Los Angeles. Her works have been performed and exhibited in numerous galleries, museums, universities, and underground sites, including the Institute of Contemporary Art (London), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Kiasma Museum (Helsinki). In 2001, she received the prestigious Anonymous Was a Woman fellowship. She was a contestant on Bravo's "Work of Art: The Next Great Artist" and teaches at the USC Roski School of Art and Design.

Suzanne Caines' video, performance, and participatory-based projects typically explore public interactions and constructed situations. Her work has been shown across Canada and internationally, including at The Nunnery Gallery (London), Transmediale 2006 and Trampoline (Berlin), VertexList Gallery (Brooklyn), Optica (Montreal), and the Projection Gallery (Liverpool). Caines has participated in a number of international residencies including Marnay Sur Seine (France), The Banff Center (Alberta), Binaural (Portugal), and Red Gate (China). Her work has been supported by the Canada Council and Nova Scotia Arts. She teaches at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax.

Carolyn Doucette is an American/Canadian multidisciplinary artist of Mi'kmaw/Métis descent who examines the connection between humans and nature, the ecological implications of Western paradigms, and nature's sublimity. Based in Santa Barbara, her work has been internationally shown and screened at art events and galleries such as the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Oshawa), and the Berlin Art Week, and film festivals including the Edges Canadian Short Film and Media Arts Festival (Victoria), the Annual One Minute Film and Video Festival (Aarau, Switzerland), and MADATAC, the Contemporary Audio-Visual and New Media Art Festival (Madrid).

Emily Vey Duke and **Cooper Battersby** have been collaborating since 1994. Their work explores human experience through inter-actions with the natural world and has been exhibited in festivals and galleries such as the Walker Center (Minneapolis), the Banff Centre, the Vancouver Art Gallery, YYZ Artists Outlet (Toronto), the New York Film Festival, the European Media Arts Festival (Osnabruck), Impact (Utrecht), and the Images Festival (Toronto). They have won prizes at the NYExpo, the Onion City Festival (Chicago), and the Ann Arbor Film Festival.

Steven Eastwood works across experimental video, essay film, documentary, and feature-length formats. His feature *Buried Land* (2010) was an official selection for Tribeca, Moscow and Mumbai Film Festivals. His work has been exhibited and screened at the London Film Festival, QUT Gallery (Brisbane), Fabrica Gallery (Brighton) and Jerwood Space (London). He co-founded OMSK, a cross-disciplinary London-based collective, and is the founder of Paradogs Film & Video, a film production company. Eastwood lives in London and School of Arts and teaches Digital Industries at the University East London.

Québec-based image-making artist, **Isabelle Hayeur** is known for large-size photomontages, experimental videos, and site-specific installations. Her work critically engages with the environment, urban development, and social conditions. She has participated in international artists'

residencies, such as the Rauschenberg Residency (Captiva, FL) and the International Studio and Curatorial Program (New York), and has shown at major institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), the Fonds national d'art contemporain (Paris), and the Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago).

The Holiday Movie Initiative is an international filmmaking collective that has been producing films on group holidays since 1995. The group's fluctuating members often include Antonia Baehr, Nancy de Holl, Alice Könitz, Jennifer Sindon, and Isabell Spengler. Holiday movies are filmed entirely on vacation and are created spontaneously and collectively. Working with situations, people, places, and objects encountered while on vacation as scenarios, characters, locations and props, the collective creates worlds of their own and challenges the logic of narrative conventions.

Zoe Leigh Hopkins first became known for short films, which have premiered nationally and internationally at the Sundance Film Festival (Park City, UT), Worldwide Short Film Festival (Toronto), Berlinale Film Festival (Berlin) and the Native American Film Festival (New York). She was selected by ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival to participate in the Embargo Collective, a group of seven Indigenous filmmakers. The first Canadian to participate in the Sundance Institute's Filmmaker's Lab, she is also developing a television series for APTN, co-produced by her

company Blanket Dance Productions and Violator Films. Hopkins is Heiltsuk (Bella Bella, BC) and Mohawk (Six Nations, ON) living in Six Nations.

Oliver Husain is a filmmaker and artist working in Toronto and Frankfurt. His videos and experimental short films incorporate music video, 3D animation, performance, and dance and have been exhibited at numerous galleries and museums in Canada and abroad, including Gallery TPW (Toronto), Oakville Galleries, the Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphia), MOCA Cleveland, Frankfurter Kunstverein, and Para Site (Hong Kong). His award-winning works have been screened at the Toronto International Film Festival, Berlinale Film Festival, Experimenta Festival (Bangalore), and San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival.

Katherine Jerkovic is a Montreal-based filmmaker and writer. Her background of growing up in Belgium and Uruguay with Latin American parents shapes her works. She has directed and produced several short fiction and experimental films, including *Platinium Farewell* (2004), and *The Winter's Keeper (Le Gardien d'hiver)* (2010), a video installation *Bleui (Middle Sky)* (2007). Her debut feature-length fiction film, *Roads in February (Las Rutas en febrero)* (2018), premiered at Toronto International Film Festival. Her works have also appeared at the Festival international du film sur l'art (Montreal), Toronto Images Festival, and Anthology Film Archives (New York).

Mary Kunuk is a co-founder of Arnait Video Productions (along with Madeline Ivalu and Marie-Hélène Cousineau). Established in 1991 as the Women's Video Workshop of Igloolik, it produces documentary and fictional projects, and focuses on the discussion and dissemination of the cultural values of the Inuit community. Her works are the result of a collaborative process within her community, and other video artists, and have been exhibited internationally. She lives and works in Igloolik, Nunavut.

Serena Lee investigates the relationship between space, the body and collective performative practices. She lives in Toronto and serves on the Board of Directors of Vtape and Trinity Square Video, and is part of the Gendai Gallery programming collective. She is Experiential Learning Coordinator at OCAD University, and served as Programming Coordinator at Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival. Her works have been shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson, MuMok (Vienna), De Appel (Amsterdam), The Showroom (London), and Kunci Cultural Studies Center (Yogyakarta).

Toronto-based independent filmmaker and educator, **Terra Jean Long** creates tapestry-like works that draw on personal narrative, history, and the spaces between the real and the imaginary. Her works have appeared in film festivals and micro-cinema circuits around the world, including the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Seoul's Club eX, the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam, Anthology Film Archives in New York, the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the Oberhausen Film Festival, and Toronto's Images Festival.

Nahed Mansour is an artist and curator based in Toronto. Her practice explores processes of racialization and gender representation in popular culture. Her work has been shown internationally at galleries and festivals such as Articulate Gallery (Montreal), Kassel Documentary Film and Video Festival, Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, Images Festival (Toronto), and La Centrale Gallery (Montreal). She is Constituent Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Toronto), and was Artistic Director at the South Asian Visual Art Centre (SAVAC) (Toronto).

Kent Monkman is a Canadian artist of Cree ancestry based in Toronto. Working with a variety of mediums, including painting, film, video, performance, and installation, Monkman explores the complexities of historic and contemporary Indigenous experience. He has had solo exhibitions at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (Toronto), the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Hamilton. His award-winning films and videos have been screened at national and international festivals, including the Berlinale Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival.

Tova Mozard is a filmmaker and artist based in Stockholm and Los Angeles.

Working with a variety of mediums including film, video, installation, and photography, Mozard's works reveal the relationship between the camera, protagonist, and director. She has exhibited and screened her work in Sweden and internationally. Recent exhibitions include a major solo exhibition at Kulturhuset in Stockholm, which was nominated for the Deutsche Börse Photography Award (2014). Her work is represented in several public and private collections including Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Malmö Konstmuseum, and Hasselblad Center (Gothenburg).

Ariella Pahlke is a media artist who works in documentary, experimental, and multi-media forms. Her roles as a video artist, filmmaker, curator, and educator often intermix. Her film and video work has been screened for television, at festivals and in galleries throughout Canada, USA, Norway, India, New Zealand and South Africa. Pahlke has taught video in public schools and facilitated collaborative documentaries with community groups. She teaches at NSCAD University and at Arctic College in Iqaluit. Her documentary *Burning Rubber* aired on Bravo and recently won the Yorkton Film Festival's Golden Sheaf award for best point-of-view documentary.

Marnie Parrell experiments with obsolete technology and DIY aesthetics. She is a Métis filmmaker whose films have been screened internationally at YYZ Artist Outlet (Toronto), Cinematheque Ontario, Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival,

imagineNATIVE Film, New Media Festival, Hallwalls (Buffalo), and The Power Ball (Toronto). She is a recipient of a Chalmers Art Fellowship, and the Cynthia Lickers-Sage Award.

Cheryl Rondeau focuses on the liminal spaces of the everyday and its relationship with subjectivity and representation. She is co-founding member of the Elements Collective (with Mercedes Cueto and Darlene Naponse). She works both commercially and on self-initiated projects that have been included in exhibitions and festivals such as Mediawave International Festival of Visual Arts (Hungary), Festival International du Film sur l'Art (Montréal), Scope Art Fair (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (Bogotá), and the WARC Gallery (Toronto). She serves on the board of La Galerie du Nouvel-Ontario (Sudbury), and is co-editor of *METRO: Chronicles in the First Person*.

belit sağ is a videomaker based in Amsterdam. Her work unpacks the internal stratification of the media and investigates the affective and critical engagement of images in the context of the everyday. She co-founded alternative video activist groups such as VideA, Karahaber, and bak.ma in Ankara and Istanbul. Her videos have been exhibited internationally at venues such as the EYE Film Museum (Amsterdam), Anthology Film Archives (New York), MOCA Taipei, Marabouparken (Stockholm), New York Film Festival, Tabakalera Contemporary Centre for Contemporary Art (San Sebastian) and the Rotterdam International Film Festival.

Larissa Sansour reframes the Palestinian experience through Western popular culture in an attempt to escape the stereotypical image of the nation's trauma. Her mixed media work have been exhibited extensively internationally, including at the biennials of Istanbul, Busan,and Liverpool, museums such as Tate Modern (London), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Barbican (London), MNCARS (Madrid), Townhouse (Cairo), Empty Quarter (Dubai). In 2017, Larissa was one of the six artists profiled at the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival with the program *Larissa Sansour Palestinian Territories*. She lives and works in London.

Born in Guyana, **Yudi Sewraj** is an experimental video artist working in Montreal. His interactive film and video installation work investigates ideas of authenticity that emerge between the camera and the subject. Sewraj has screened and installed his work both nationally and internationally at venues across Canada, the United States and Europe. His works are included in collections in Canada and Italy. He teaches filmmaking and media studies at John Abbott College in Saint Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

Isabell Spengler is a Berlin-based filmmaker. Collaborating with other artists, she develops concepts and experiments through photography, drawing, performance, costume design, and model making. Recently, her works have premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (Riga), the Images Festival (Toronto), the EXIS Festival (Seoul), and the KunstfilmBiennale (Cologne). She teaches at the Berlin University of the Arts.

Angela Willetts is a British artist working in the San Francisco Bay area. Her videos document solitary and physical negotiations with her environment. She has exhibited at Embark Gallery, a.Muse Gallery (San Francisco), Union Gallery (Amherst), Aggregate Space Gallery (Oakland), and Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito). The recipient of the Robert Arneson Award for Excellence, she has also received fellowships from the Skowhegan School and the Headlands Center for the Arts. Recent residencies include New Roots Foundation (Antigua, Guatemala), the Vermont Studio Center (Johnson), the Post Contemporary (New York) and the Djerassi Resident Artists Program (Woodside, CA).

The **Curators**

Mel Day is a British-Canadian interdisciplinary artist based in the San Francisco Bay area. Her curatorial, video and new media projects investigate the role of uncertainty across diverse belief systems. She has published in the *Journal of Performing Arts* and has recently curated *Love & Longing* (San Francisco) and co-curated *Two Things at the Same Time* (Toronto). Her artwork has been exhibited at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Grace Cathedral (San Francisco), San Francisco Film Festival, and Berkeley Art Museum. Residencies include Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito) and Oberpfälzer Künstlerhaus (Schwandorf, Germany). Day teaches at San José State University.

Jim Drobnick teaches at OCAD University, Toronto. He has published on the visual arts, performance, the senses and post-media practices in recent anthologies such as *Food and Museums* (2017), *The Multisensory Museum* (2014), *Senses and the City* (2011), and *Art, History and the Senses* (2010). His books include the anthologies *Aural Cultures* (2004) and *The Smell Culture Reader* (2006). He is co-editor of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and co-founder of the curatorial collaborative DisplayCult (www.displaycult.com).

Jennifer Fisher teaches contemporary art and curatorial studies at York University, Toronto. Her research focuses on exhibition practices, affect theory, and the aesthetics of the non-visual senses. Her writings have been featured in *Linda Montano* (2017), *Caught in the Act, Vol. 2* (2016), *The Artist as Curator* (2015), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Culture* (2013), and *The Senses in Performance* (2006). She is the editor of *Technologies of Intuition* (2006). She is co-editor of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and co-founder of the curatorial collaborative DisplayCult (www.displaycult.com).

Masaki Kondo is a Toronto-based writer and curator. His curatorial practice explores the potential of moving-image art as a critical means to represent, confront, and challenge a range of emerging temporalities in contemporary society. His article, "Unfolding the In-between Image: The Emergence of an Incipient Image at the Intersection of Still and Moving Images," appeared in *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture* (2014).

Almudena Escobar López is an independent curator, archivist, and researcher originally from Galicia. She is Curatorial Assistant at the Memorial Art Gallery (Rochester), and is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Rochester in visual and cultural studies. She is a member of the collective screening project *On Film* and co-programmed (with Herb Shellenberger) the Flaherty Seminar series "Common Visions" (2018) at Anthology Film Archives (New York), and recently joined the programming committee of Media City Festival. Her writings have appeared in *Vdrome, MUBI Notebook, The Brooklyn Rail, Afterimage, Desistfilm*, and *Film Quarterly*.

Isabelle Lynch is a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania where she is specializing in contemporary time-based art. Previously, she studied art history and philosophy at McGill University and at the University of Ottawa. Isabelle has worked in curatorial departments at Presentation House Gallery (Vancouver) and at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (Toronto). She was the co-recipient of the 2016 Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators and is currently a graduate lecturer at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art.

Sophie Lynch is a doctoral student at the University of Chicago who is interested in film, video and performance art. Previously, she studied philosophy and art history at the University of Ottawa and at McGill University. She completed a graduate internship at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and has worked at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa). She was the co-recipient of the 2016 Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators.

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