

FOREWORD

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This issue is one of transition. Its content was conceived by an editorial team passing the baton to another one. In this sense, it is also one of transmission. It is also one of delay, as the selection of artists, contexts, event, works and exhibitions presented here were initially selected for Issue 50. This edition, the second designed by Pacific, is also the first to adopt this new aesthetic fully rethought for the next issues to come. The life of a journal is made of these concrete realities and processes and what is brought into existence as a finished object in fact results from a multitude of micro-operations. The appearance of something completed is only the organisation of messiness, discontinuities, unevenness, the product of negotiations enabling the intellectual and sensible experience a journal like *Afterall* hopes to offer. Editors are mediators, a journal a medium.

It is also under the umbrella of questions of medium, media and mediation that one is invited to enter and read Issue 51. In recent years, art historical and theoretical debates have been marked by increasing concerns for questions of mediation. On the one hand, this has brought back to the scene what might have been thought to be long gone discussions around ‘the medium’ in art while, on the other, contemporary art discourse has been confronted with fields of study such as media studies (in both their English-speaking and German variants, drawing from theorists Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler, respectively) or media archaeology, reopening reflections not only on the modes of mediation in art, but also on their materialities. Today, rethinking the medium is about approaching art as a form of mediation through its technical and material dimensions and about recognising and examining the latter in their capacities to shape experience, perception as well as setting the conditions of possibilities for the production, circulation and archiving of

visual culture. What is more, with technological change and the expansion of contemporary art practices on a planetary scale, global art occupies a front seat when it comes to questioning the way regimes of the sensible are shaped under technical and material conditions, in their local and cultural specificities. In this regard, ‘understanding media’ today, to paraphrase McLuhan, but also to reorient them to respond to the contemporary crux of aesthetics and politics, indeed necessitates one look at locally specific and differentiated understandings of the technicality of regimes of mediations. As philosopher Yuk Hui has suggested, the modern paradigm might be understood as the generalisation of a linear and homogeneous temporal order synchronising all other logics according to Western rationality, a process exacerbated by globalisation. And so, to resist and articulate alternatives to modernity and to champion and produce a proliferation of ‘technodiverse’ milieus, theory and practice must reconstruct a cosmological and historical understanding of the relationships between the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, and between Asia, Africa, Latin America – to name but them – and the West, an approach Hui calls *cosmotechnical*.

Through audiovisual media, various exhibition formats, or practices that produce new milieus (which refers to the etymological root of ‘medium’) between life, art and other fields of inquiry, the artists and contexts presented in this issue explore the production of new sensible environments by modulating various kinds of information. Lens-based artworks, curated spaces, auditory objects or situations enabling performativity shape modes of representation and, ultimately, our psycho-social schemas. In this regard, *Afterall*’s long-standing interest in examining and diagnosing ‘minor’ (in a Deleuzian sense, that is, a mode of collective becoming that eschews logics of domination) artistic positions – be it from a geographical or historical frame – is furthered by paying attention to a plurality of artistic languages, not only to their regional or cultural conditions, but to their technical-material conditions.

This issue opens up with a focus on Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen, whose thorough research-based practice examining Southeast Asia as historical and cultural constructs unfolds through single-channel moving-image work, installations and intermedia environments. In the first essay addressing his work, curator and critic David Teh discusses the artist’s investigations

into Singapore and Southeast Asia in works including his opera *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014) or his *Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (2012–ongoing). Rather than merely using technical media to address Southeast Asian identity and histories through a representational frame, Teh argues that they are defined by the very mediatic and technical operations of the work themselves, which, by so doing, de-universalise and localise them. As for film scholar Jaimie Baron, her analysis inscribes Ho's *The Name* and *The Nameless* (2015) as part of the experimental cinema strategies of the found footage film and of the supercut. Baron, questions the re-use of existing footage from mainstream cinema to re-tell the history of the Malayan Communist Party, the supercut becoming in Ho's videos, a mediating technology between layers of fiction and what the author sees as an irrecoverable actual past.

The issue continues its inquiry into Southeast Asia with an insert by the Yogyakarta-based collective Lifepatch, reflecting their work at the intersections of community-oriented art, science and technology. The collective's collage is put in dialogue with an essay by anthropologist and film-maker Rosalia Namsai Engchuan, which examines Lifepatch's DIWO (Do It With Others) ethos and the Indonesian notion of *gotong royong*, which roughly translates as 'communal way of doing things'. Examined through different life situations, science workshops for local communities, or art institutional projects, Engchuan's contribution, based on time spent with Lifepatch, affirms a technicity radically 'de-coupled from the imperatives of productivity and progress' inscribed in a cosmological relation with *gotong royong*. In her text, curator and art historian Kathleen Ditzig discusses yet other kinds of materially embedded articulations between Southeast Asia and transnational flows. Based on thorough archival research, Ditzig looks at the Museum of Modern Art in New York's International Programme in Southeast Asia. Including seminal exhibitions such as 'Visionary Architecture' or Edward Steichen's 'The Family of Man', the author reconstructs the trajectories of these shows and the complex negotiations through which the exhibition as a material-semiotic medium was appropriated in various localities by Southeast Asians to showcase regional understandings of modernity.

Current conversations around culturally specific forms of mediations and conceptions of technology that move beyond the Eurocentrism of the Greek *technê* owe much to the work of

Yuk Hui. In his essay for *Afterall*, the Hong-Kongese philosopher articulates an alternative route to the impasses of postmodern thought and exposes his critique of other attempts such as the various propositions to uncover national or regional alternative modernities. Most specifically, it is philosopher Enrique Dussel and his notion of the transmodern that are discussed at length, which, for Hui, like most postcolonial discourses, unconsciously undermine the question of technology. Instead, for Hui, ‘to reopen world history’, one must rather engage with non-modern knowledge and conceive a future for them, an orientation enabled by his notion of *cosmotechnics*.

Two artists’ features focus on the aesthetic modulations produced through formal and conceptual experiments with, on the one hand, the medium of film in Rosalind Nashashibi’s work, and (in)auditory objects in Christina Kubisch, on the other. Curator and *Afterall* editor Nav Haq provides a panoramic account of Nashashibi’s early practice consisting, mostly, of filmic works. In her pieces from the beginning of the 2000s, the artist portrays individuals and their behaviour and interactions with other people or with objects in seemingly banal social and spatial settings. If Nashashibi’s aesthetics appears at first unspectacular, for Haq, its force lies in its capacity to capture and create reticulations between humans, non-humans and the various phenomena that surround them in a process of co-construction with the situations they are in, an approach that – following anthropologist Edward T. Hall – Haq characterises as ‘proxemic’. Focussing on later work – including *Jack Straw’s Castle* (2009), *Carlos’ Vision* (2011) or *Vivian’s Garden* (2017) – curator Mike Sperlinger considers how the various formal strategies used by Nashashibi produce ‘frames’ (in the sense of sociologist Erving Goffman) that complicate the boundaries between the natural flow of daily life and rehearsed or staged behaviour and performativity. Characterised by an openness and a form of undecidability, the way Nashashibi encounters and films other artists engages a process of self-reflection on the medium of film and on the very idea of framing, in its cinematic, social and epistemic dimensions.

Art historian Anne Zeitz and musician, composer and writer Seth Ayyaz look at Christina Kubisch’s long-standing engagement with sound and the thresholds of the audible. Looking at the artist and composer’s trajectory from the 1970s onwards, Zeitz carefully maps out the development of her experiments with the limits of

aurality, questioning the materiality of architectural sites and their histories, in their capacity to modulate sonic, visual and tactile perception. In Ayyaz's essay, Kubisch's work is interrogated for its potential to de-naturalise the ear and the practice of listening. For instance, he sees in the artist's series *Electrical Walks* (2004–ongoing) a kind of cybernetic ritual transubstantiating sensory experience through machinic sounds and the sonification of 'surveillance capitalism'. Both accounts of Kubisch's work shed new light on this pioneer of sonic arts by emphasising the materialist and non-human dimensions of her numerous projects.

Three contributions that address, echo and create new associations with the thematic conclude the issue. Curator Edwin Nasr analyses Palestinian artist Jumana Manna's video *Wild Relatives* (2018), which retraces a transnational geography of extractivist dynamics between Syria and Norway. Reading the work in relation to non-cinematic pieces by the artist as well as documentary films by Syrian film-maker Omar Amiralay, Nasr cogently reveals the complex interweaving of nature, war, colonialism and the planetary condition that traverses Manna's art. Art historian Isobel Harbison's survey of works by Northern Irish film-maker Pat Murphy and films produced by the Derry Film and Video Workshop (DFVW) established by Anne Crilly and Mago Harkin are set against a backdrop of mainstream British TV programmes and films orientalising and othering Northern Irish culture. Presenting more complex and under-represented subjects and histories, films by Murphy and the DFVW not only constitute a visual culture counter to British neo-imperialist representations but, in Ariella Azoulay's words cited by Harbison, they also create a space to rethink 'the mechanism that lies at the heart of the institution of citizenship'. Finally, concluding Issue 51 and continuing *Afterall*'s commitment to contest and decentre art critical and historical narratives away from Western frames, curator Remco de Blaaij offers an overview of recent practices from Aotearoa. Reviewing the work of the performative research and action group founded by visual artist Rosanna Raymond SaVAge K'lub, projects of the Samoa House Library as well as the barkcloth pieces of Nikau Hindin, de Blaaij shows how these projects, often dwelling in isolation, constantly mediate with the outside to build local identity.