

FOREWORD

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The articles gathered in the present issue of *Afterall* interrogate and challenge the imposition of normative or dominant modes of being, perception and expression. The artists, art practices and ideas investigated work, in various ways, to enable forms of communication and living that have been historically and often violently *disabled* by society. An important thread running through the issue concerns the reconfiguration of voice, language and sound in art practices that centre the perspective of D/deaf and/or non-verbal communicators. In moving away from a purely logocentric and sonic conception of these three interrelated terms, their multimodal, plural and unbounded articulations are revealed.

The issue opens with a double feature on artist Imogen Stidworthy and her long-standing exploration of 'voicing on the borders of language'. In conversation with *Afterall* editor Nav Haq, Stidworthy retraces the development of her artistic practice over a period of thirty years. Her projects – borne of long-term and mutually transformative relationships with her subjects – dwell on the cusp between different modes of sense-making and perception, forging an emancipatory path beyond any reliance on normative categories of being. In her essay on the artist, Eleni Ikoniadou focuses specifically on Stidworthy's work with Iris Johansson, a therapist and writer on the autistic spectrum who was non-verbal until the age of twelve. In Stidworthy's filmic set-ups, Johansson becomes a mediator or translator between verbal and non-verbal modes of communication, disclosing the latter's rich grammar of somatic registers, gestures, movements, vibrations and rhythms. Ikoniadou shows how non- (or, better, more-than-) verbal modes of communication find powerful alliance with anticolonial, black and indigenous epistemologies – a 'chorus of voicings' attempting to disarticulate the master's language and to tune into non-human frequencies.

It was only in the 1970s that manualism – the use of sign language in the classroom – started gaining recognition as a pedagogical method. Yet the deep-rooted privileging of speech and hearing as modes of communication have left in their wake a trail of violent coercion and discrimination of D/deaf people worldwide. This critique of the dominance of spoken or verbal languages is pointedly articulated in Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz's interview with artist Christine Sun Kim, whose sharp and often humorous work celebrates the eloquence, textural complexity and subtlety of expression of American Sign Language (ASL). In an excerpt from the interview that resonates with Stidworthy's work, Kim describes voice as 'a way of being [that] gives you a relationship with society, a place'; something elusive, loose, collaborative and uncompromisingly multiple. It is, perhaps, on this definition of voice that we can map Kim's understanding of the politics of 'access', which is conceived not in the bureaucratised framework of accessing art institutions, but as an intimate, shared and generative site of creative collaboration and mutual support.

Discussing artist Tarek Atoui's sound-works developed with students from Al Amal School for the Deaf in Sharjah, UAE, Rayya Badran similarly highlights

the productive role of collaboration for the artist in his exploration of sound's physical, haptic and material nature. In the evocative description signed by one of the AI Amal students, which lends the title to Badran's piece, the bass frequencies of Atoui's performance *Below Under 60* are likened to 'waves in my body'. Through this close attention to embodied differences in perception, an expansive and sensorial grammar of sound-as-vibration emerges.

What happens, however, when institutional access is conditional upon proof of one's needs? Artist and writer Khairani Barokka takes apart the 'infrastructure of disbelief' that permeates the contemporary art world, or what she ironically dubs CAW. Looping together a violent chain of disbeliefs, Barokka shows how such infrastructure is a feature of both art institutions and increasingly privatised and over-stretched medical service providers. This digital infrastructure of surveillance that feeds incredulity and paranoia is materially grounded in a capitalist system of extraction that systematically disregards the needs of the planet and its guardians, indigenous communities. In the face of such a disempowering scenario, Barokka concludes with an empowering call to refute the deadly system of disbelief and to bolster up indigenous ecologies.

A certain 'infrastructure of disbelief' seems to surround the life of Brazilian artist Arthur Bispo do Rosário (1909/11–89). Diagnosed with 'paranoid schizophrenia', he produced most of his art while hospitalised at the psychiatric institution Colônia Juliano Moreira in Rio de Janeiro. Art Brut specialist Edward Gomez situates Bispo's vast body of objects – a replica of the universe meant to endure the end of times – within the context of work by other outsider artists who have created unique, highly personal art at the margins of society. Marlon Miguel focuses instead on Bispo's many ship-shaped objects which, he suggests, function as symbolic markers of the transatlantic slave trade and the persistent climate of antiblackness in Brazilian society. The theme of language that, like a thread, runs through the issue reappears here in the words Bispo embroidered in garments and banners. Borrowing a neologism from poet Conceição Evaristo, Miguel names Bispo's act of defiant self-inscription in a history that wanted to erase him an *escrevivência*, a writing to survive.

In a text appearing for the first time in English translation, Brazilian philosopher Vladimir Safatle describes the function of art as an opening that allows the (metaphorical) breaking of bodies, so that new circuits of affects might appear in place of fossilised formations. Building on Freud's understanding of political subjection as affectively constructed and perpetuated, Safatle sees in the production of new affective circuits the possibility of political emancipation.

Over a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Bart de Baere assesses the responses of the international cultural field. As someone with a deep personal and professional engagement with the regions existentially affected by the war (through, among other things, the focus of M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, on the geographical and conceptual entity of Eurasia), de Baere considers the role of the cultural field in forging paths to move forward from

the present stalemate. The full version of this extended article can be read on the *Afterall* website.

Sunil Shah reflects on the historical legacy of Documenta11 (2002), revisited in light of the recent edition of documenta fifteen (2022) and its critical reception. Locating in Okwui Enwezor's paradigm-shifting exhibition the roots of a postcolonial turn that paved the way for ruangrupa's appointment to the position of artistic directors, Shah wonders, however, whether postcolonial subjects working within a Western art context will ever be allowed to speak on their own terms.

The issue closes with an affectionate tribute in memory of Silke Otto-Knapp (1970–2022), penned by Director Mark Lewis. Silke, who was Managing Editor of *Afterall Journal* between 1999 and 2005, has in many ways laid the foundations for what the publication is today, and we all pay homage to her invaluable work.