Leave No Trace: Incongruous Environmental Affiliations in American Art after 1970

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Declaration

I, Gabriella Beckhurst, confirm that the work has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, towards the fulfilment of any other degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Abstract

This project investigates the junctures of US-based queer and feminist artistic practices with environmental and spatial politics between 1970 and 2008. Across three chapters the thesis examines how the work of David Wojnarowicz, Eleanor Antin, Stanya Kahn, Harry Dodge and others engages an imaginary of ecological affects and disaffects through self-reflexive registers in performance, video and photography. I focus on conceptual persona as a dynamic form used by these artists to critically dramatise struggles within resistance practices and sketch coalitional alternatives under settler-colonial and western economic regimes.

The thesis is organised around a set of aesthetic-affective modes such as improvisation, slapstick and situational irony that target the system relations shaping the incongruous dimensions of lived experience, ecological imperatives and suspended agency. Considering both artistic innovations and failures presented by these artists, the project articulates incongruity as a critical aesthetic that draws together fantasy and the ordinary to interrogate trenchant power relations across land use, tourism, gentrification and access. In turn, the project maps fruitful coordinates between queer and trans, critical race and ecocritical epistemologies and aesthetic forms across key points in the contemporary development of these histories.

Impact Statement

This study represents the first critical appraisal of 'incongruous' artistic modalities to be staged between art history, the environmental humanities and theoretical formations in ecocriticism, queer ecology, Black feminism, Indigenous studies and critical whiteness studies. While this project contributes to an emerging 'ecocritical art history', it also opens a space for an alternative appreciation of the critical capacities of visual forms. In taking an interdisciplinary approach to this examination, I have sought to strengthen conceptual and theoretical alliances across the above fields through questions of subjectivity, agency and political figuration. While I have encountered challenging incumbrances in this effort, I have interrogated these in the hope that this project potentiates their coming together in new ways around environmental justice infrastructures in life and art.

In foregrounding the struggles and possibilities of realising agency between fantasy and ordinary sentiments in times of ecological crisis, this research has implications for two epistemes in particular: how queer and feminist resistance practices are theorised in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century and how art centred around environmental questions is anticipated. The project extends the dynamic use of persona in artistic and literary modes as a form highly suited to social critique, historically situating and dialectically composing the intersections of lived experience and creative fabulation. This emboldens a critical environmental imaginary that doesn't seek to transform cultural actions or shake out behavioural inconsistencies but rather provides a receptive framework for constructed moments of connection and commiseration. Though theoretically motivated, this research may also be of value to activist and social collectives discursively engaged in the psychological and behavioural pressures of sustained political investments.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have materialised without the guidance of Dr James Boaden and Dr Cadence Kinsey, first at the University of York, where this project began, and later at UCL. I am thankful they saw potential in the shaky project outline I wrote in 2017 and have both, in their own ways, encouraged me to roam widely and challenge my summations. I couldn't have asked for a better supervisory relationship in this endeavour, and I'm so grateful to Cadence and James for their insights, generosity and support in navigating academic systems over the years.

I feel fortunate to have been a part of two departmental communities. At the University of York, I'd particularly like to thank Professor Jason Edwards, whose enthusiasm and curiosity in the project made York's progression panels less daunting. I'm also grateful to have met Kyveli Lignou-Tsamantani, Martha Cattell, Francesca Curtis and Cecilia Tricker-Walsh in the context of WRoCAH's intercollegiate structure and whose friendship – especially Cecilia's, as a co-conspirator in ambivalence – has been deeply felt. At UCL, I'd like to thank Dr Richard Taws, who mitigated the imposter syndrome I felt in entering an academic institution, twice over. The *Object* board and editors over the period I've been a member have been formidable.

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James once asked me if I felt prepared to work on a project about trauma and difficulty more encompassing than the individual. I think the answer lies somewhere in the appreciation of humour in this thesis, which provides an opening without purporting to repair or make good. In allowing me to follow my arrow, sometimes unwisely, I thank my parents, as well as Juli, whose support I've felt from afar.

My deepest gratitude goes to Rosa: your counsel and careful reading over the years has been immeasurable. Thank you for giving me the courage to commit to this path and riding out its highs and lows with me.

This project is dedicated to the late Barbara Hammer, a fearless icon of lesbian and queer feminist cinema, and an agent of self-description. While there is no named chapter on her work, it was under the cloak of this project that I had the pleasure and privilege to interview her and spend time in her ‘conscious archive’. Barbara taught me to think in ‘-isms’ and her politics of plurality will stay with me beyond this project.

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Introduction

> I've spent most of my life photographing nature. What impresses me is the constantly renewing cycle of nature […] but for some time now we have been interfering with this cycle. Now it's up to man to protect and replenish nature. So, when I heard what Datsun is doing, I was really eager to help. [….] So do something nice for both of us: Drive a Datsun, Plant a Tree.[1]

> With Adams, […] the camera became the romantic's last defense. There was no irony. What you felt—scrupulously and with great technical skill—is what you got.[2]

Appearing in the 1973 campaign 'Drive a Datsun, Plant a Tree' the photographer Ansel Adams walks toward the camera with his own device tucked under one arm. The setting is a secluded forest bordered by snowy peaks, but his car is stationed nearby. Adams is promoting an offer by the car company Datsun: to plant one tree for every test drive in a new Datsun vehicle. Following the commercial, print advertisements ran with the header 'Datsun is Greening America' (figure 0.1), indicating that marketing executives had discovered the lucrative potential of championing green causes to an American public awakened by the 'ecological carnival' of the first Earth Day on the 22nd of April 1970; the incentive of an Ansel Adams poster made this offer particularly enticing.[3]

Adams' long-held interest in nature conservation and in human relationships with the natural environment was evident in his position as both photographer and board director of the Sierra Club, a role he held for thirty-seven years. With their dramatic contrast and shadow, his monumental photographs of the Kings and Kerns Rivers helped bolster the case to grant them protected status as the Kings Canyon National Park when

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[1] Ansel Adams, *Datsun (Nissan) Commercial* (1973), online video recording, YouTube, 14 October 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp6Ao7-NP_4&ab_channel=AwayAwayAway> [accessed 2 December 2021]. Transcription by author.

[2] Robert Hughes, '"Master of the Yosemite": Photographer Ansel Adams is the Grand Old Man of a still young art', *Time*, 3 September 1979: <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,948591-3,00.html> [accessed 10 October 2021].

[3] The American press widely touted the bipartisan successes of the first Earth Day. Henry Fountain effused that 'Like Mother's Day, no man in public office could be against it'; Joseph Lelyveld recounted that 'if the environment had any enemies they did not make themselves known'. See Henry Fountain, 'How The Times Covered the First Earth Day, 50 Years Ago', *New York Times*, 21 April 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/climate/NYT-first-earth-day.html> [accessed 26 August 2021]; Joseph Lelyveld, 'Mood Is Joyful as City Gives Its Support', *New York Times*, 23 April 1970: <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/04/23/archives/mood-is-joyful-as-city-gives-its-support-millions-join-earth-day.html> [accessed 29 August 2021].

they were presented to Congress in 1936. Adams was a strong advocate for the national park system, not simply as a strategy for preserving wild nature but also for inspiring patriotic pride in those who visited the parks or saw his photographs of them. Indeed, scholars have ascribed the lack of human presence in his landscapes as 'yoking the birth of American national identity to the vision of an unpeopled, wild, Western frontier'.[4] Adam's ardent defence of his beliefs evinces a foundational merging of artist and ethos in the twentieth century. He influenced a generation of photographers with his exacting model of the Zone System, '[immortalizing]' as Alice Gray has suggested, 'our American heritage with untempered reverence'.[5] Yet, his legacy has also catalysed a reappraisal of prevailing visual associations between visuality and territory.[6] Where Adams provides something of a litmus test for what constitutes an effective environmental strategy, the Datsun campaign carries these questions beyond the artist himself, operating as both a personal statement of green values and the instrumentalisation of those values towards commercial interest, troubling the reception of Adams' vision that 'what you felt […] is what you got'. This reconfiguring of optimism toward capitalist interests might not strike contemporary readers as novel, yet it puts into perspective a track record of the market absorbing affective dispositions since the 1970s, a decade often credited as the one in which America awakened to the dangers of pollution and global warming.

Where Adams' appearance fits the profile of 'corrective irony' – identified by the literary scholar Nicole Seymour as a dismissive strategy used to undermine ecological or environmentalist integrity when faced with ambiguities of position – I use the ambiguities of Adams' legacy as a jumping off point for a key set of aesthetic-affective engagements with environmental and spatial justice.[7] The philosopher Timothy Morton

[4] Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, 'Introduction: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use', in *Critical Landscapes*, ed. by Scott and Swenson (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), pp. 1–15 (p. 4).
[5] Alice Gray, 'Introduction', in *Ansel Adams: The National Park Service Photographs* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), pp. 7–11 (p. 11).
[6] On 'interpretative' vision as remapped territory of the United States, see Lauren Johnson, 'Reading and Re-Reading Ansel Adams's My Camera in the National Parks', *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Fall 2020): <https://editions.lib.umn.edu/panorama/article/re-reading-american-photographs/reading-and-re-reading/> [accessed 6 August 2021]. The photographer Robert Glenn Ketchum describes having come out of 'the Ansel Adams school', qtd. in Charles Hagen, 'Land and Landscape', *Aperture*, 120 (Late Summer 1990), 16–23 (p. 20). Mark Klett's 'The Legacy of Ansel Adams: Debts and Burdens' (72–73) in this issue is further useful.
[7] Seymour suggests that corrective approaches are limiting because they limit opportunities for reflection on past behaviour. See Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 63; as well as Mark Stoddart, '"If we

has remarked that in the green movement '[t]here is scant space for humour' and we can observe a similar earnestness at work in contemporary art history. Resistance to how a sentiment like embarrassment might creep into the reception of the Datsun campaign and disturb Adams' artistic legacy exemplifies the kind of expectations that have consolidated the ideal environmental subject in art history. The thesis proceeds from this point to investigate core tensions between subjective and economic interests through this period and to make a forceful case for their appraisal as part of art historical interest in environmental and ecological contexts. Of the case studies I examine, none can be said to operate in ways expected of them nor can they be considered easily placeable, for none chime with an 'emotional presentation of "what we are fighting for"' as advocated by Adams.[8] Yet, as I argue, these creative formations are exemplary in communicating the personal stakes of resistance to the wider system relations that frame, maintain and even monetise environmental crisis. Through these works, I ask what kind of juncture is created when environmental perspectives seek to articulate the suspended agency of doing something in the world – and explore this through incongruous tonalities such as irony, satire or humour that initially seems at odds with the matter at hand. While modes such as humour have largely been overruled by ecocritical art history's insistence on sincerity, such modes operate nimbly on two levels by staging environmental politics as lived experiences and facilitating a critical path through righteous narratives of the visionary as the primary vehicle through which a public is compelled to act. By suspended, I refer here to a set of self-aware responses like despair and uncertainty concerning how one influences or participates in a culture. Though agency informs the current 'imperative' of the ecological in art history, rarely have accounts of suspended agency been explored as a complex subject position in this field until now.

To engage these questions, I fixate on a largely under-theorised aspect of environmentally engaged art – *persona* – as a framework capable of critically following the modernist evolution of liberal individualism to the shuttering of the communal under neoliberal economic regimes. I have collected a set of artistic projects across different decades that use personae in unique and dynamic ways to explore the forms that individual action takes and the feelings that arise from doing so. Each case study connects to incongruity through a specific exploration of insider/outsider positions in

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wanted to be environmentally sustainable, we'd take the bus": Skiing, mobility and the irony of climate change', *Human Ecology Review*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Summer 2011), 19–29.

[8] Ansel Adams' letter to Assistant Secretary Burlew, 28 December 1941, qtd. in Gray, 'Introduction', p. 11.

relation to a larger cultural body. Persona offers a particularly salient method for engaging with these dialectics because it gives its protagonist access to the creative possibilities of invention and juxtaposition by evoking a subject position that is *out of place* or *time* with popular attitudes to environmental issues. Doing so invites a consideration of the difficult affects that arise in political work such as despair or ineffectiveness – feelings that are more generative than we might think. I approach these considerations through dedicated chapters on the uses of persona in works by David Wojnarowicz, Eleanor Antin, Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn. In the first chapter on Wojnarowicz's photography this concerns a mode of camouflaged being that performs imaginative possibilities beyond punitive conditions for queer life; as a critical aesthetic enacted through Antin's multifaceted persona of the King in the second chapter; and finally in how Dodge and Kahn's survival videos address the absurdity of the preparedness industry that has grown under neoliberal economies. A corollary set of works by the photographer Robert Frank and artists David Lamelas, Mike Smith, Alex Soth and Lorraine O'Grady are of further significance to the thesis.

My engagement with specific bodies of work by these artists across photography, video and performance is drawn through several historical archives and video collections, enabling close attention to the conceptual developments of these medium-specific practices as well as crucial points of intersection, such as the genre of performance for video. While these art forms should be differentiated, their shared interest in the camera's role in mediating embodied actions and gestures beyond an immediate time and space is a recurring thread in this project.

In foregrounding affect in this study, I contend that emotional responses to environmental issues are yet to receive due process in art history because of how the discipline has, much like mainstream environmentalism, resisted exploring difficult or conflicting presentations of sentiments like hopelessness, despair, futility and complicity, as reactions one might have in being aware of environmental crisis or in response to a lack of systemic change in mitigating these crises. I sketch out the emotional presentations most prevalently cultivated by environmental cultural discourses and show how these have in turn shaped prevailing environmental imaginaries in art history. Where terms like pathos, grief and wonder are frequent hallmarks, little attention has been given to *how* such emotional responses are elicited beyond the purpose they are called up to serve. 'Is it any wonder so many of us oscillate between guilt, frustration, and powerlessness?' the educator Elin Kelsey has asked, 'We are, they tell us, locked in a

battle to save the planet. In battle, *one does not have time for emotion*; *one does not have time for ambiguity*'.[9] Ambiguity, however, is not thoughtless or unfeeling – it describes a position of being pulled in different directions that cannot be resolved or squared. A sentiment like ambiguity registers *incongruously* because its sensations do not conform or agree; it can give rise to conflict and inconsistency, as well as inappropriateness. I argue that these sensations are all valid responses that art history should engage with for what they tell about how imperatives to respond and act enter the visual arts.[10] Indeed, I argue that what we have been encouraged to avoid as incongruous positions which do not imbibe the appropriate tone of reverence to engage with environmental issues, in fact offer crucial perspective on the affective processes of responding to environmental concerns, particularly the question of *how to feel*. A goal of the thesis is thus to demonstrate that incongruities aren't only present within these specific case studies but exist in well-charted legacies too.

If Adams serves as an entry point into the figure of the 'visionary' ecological artist, his 'selling out' to Datsun invites an *otherwise*: a frank artistic legacy that would include the foibles and evolutions of human behaviour.[11] This doesn't mean being gleefully *for* ambiguous engagements with the ecological. Rather, in carefully attending to affective composition, I consider how incongruities are revealing of the conditions of involvement, such as by highlighting the dependencies of artists upon economically determined systems of visual production. Blurring the realms of art and ethics, the Datsun campaign reveals the check-balancing of artistic integrity and subsistence. Where hypothetical imperatives remain prevalent in ecological spheres ('we must', 'we should'), the broader point to be stated here is that illuminating these tensions can be generative. One of the central ways in which I map out their generative dynamics is by looking at the critical possibilities of dramatising didactic claims drawn from the prevailing cultural discourses. The projects discussed demonstrate how environmental claims of straightforwardness can actually harbour a complicated set of normative ideals, proprietary sentiments, and personal hubris. By pushing back against a unified way of thinking about art's relationship to environmentalism, what transpires is a historicity of

[9] Elin Kelsey, '"Dear _____": Writing Our Way Beyond Doom and Gloom', in *Beyond Doom and Gloom: An Exploration through Letters*, ed. by Elin Kelsey, *Rachel Carson Perspectives*, no. 6 (2014), 5–9 (p. 7) [emphasis added].
[10] Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, pp. 4 & 61.
[11] Photographer (and friend) Imogen Cunningham took Adams to task for his commercial work, especially the Datsun appearance. For further reactions to the campaign, see Mary Street Alinder, *Ansel Adams: A Biography* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 255–56.

how art has been leveraged towards the ecological. In doing so, the thesis makes a case for an ecocritical art history that is capable of handling complex affective formations.

Crucially, the bodies of work under discussion can be interpreted through the lens of metacriticism, in the sense of a 'dialectical form of criticism that bends back upon itself'.[12] I draw on alternative ways of sensing to encourage a history of art that is cognisant of the magnitude of fossil-fuelled crises of global warming, pollution and toxic drifts to move in different directions beyond the hammered 'battle cry we constantly hear'.[13] Guided by visual practices, I invite an interpretative reading of incongruity in articulated positions where epistemological resolve isn't neatly granted. Couched in the notion of looking or feeling *out of place,* incongruity describes a situation in which an entity, being or action is deemed 'unusual or different from what is around or from what is generally happening'.[14] I position incongruity as a crucial framing term for the thesis to practically describe underexamined ecocritical approaches that may be judged unusual, different or even inappropriate to the cause at hand because they do not fit the reverent profile of 'good' political engagement. Here I bring scholarly attention on affects that have long been pathologised into productive dialogue with ecocritical art history to examine how the discipline has subtended similar judgements around 'good' artistic engagement with environmental concerns. This is important to scrutinise because, as the literary scholar Ann Cvetkovich has powerfully argued, conditions such as depression and inertia are not just personal states, but deeply intertwined with political life and prevailing social conceptions of what is 'normal'. Taking seriously the notion of 'political depression' put forward by Feel Tank Chicago – as the recognition that responses such as direct action and critique may not 'work' in the way these have previously – Cvetkovich urges that we do not take for granted the equation that 'good politics can only emerge from good feelings'; 'feeling bad' she contends, 'might, in fact, be the ground for transformation' by generating new and alternative forms of response and inquiry.[15]

Because incongruity directly engages with feelings of either not doing enough or not doing something effectively, I am also insisting that it is a compelling conceptual

[12] Timothy Morton, 'Queer Ecology', *PMLA,* vol. 125, no. 2 (March 2010), 273–82 (p. 6). Morton uses the term 'ecocritique' in this article, thus extending the work of Tim Luke, *Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
[13] Kelsey, '"Dear _____": Writing Our Way Beyond Doom and Gloom', p. 7.
[14] Cambridge Dictionary Online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/incongruous> [accessed 5 December 2021].
[15] Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 1 & 3.

space from which to consider why the question of *how* to act remains as unanswered as it did at the beginning of the contemporary environmental movement in the 1970s. I contend that because of circling questions such as this, incongruity is a generative place in which to transform engagement because it sets the occasion for acknowledging political disappointment or failures constructively. When identified as part of a creative method or strategy such as humour, a form I explore at length in this project, incongruity sets up the conditions for critique through dramatisation and exaggeration. Whether engaged as a form of hopefulness from the here and now, a humourlessness or situational irony that acknowledges the possibilities at one's limited disposal, my argument is that these sentiments grant insight into ignored and trivialised feelings that expand the scope of art historical study to imagine collective futures and forms of collective inquiry from places of critical juxtaposition and transgression. Such directions are insightful not only for the questions they ask of what art can *do*, but for how they critically intervene into mired distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' responses to environmental concerns that have become a feature of the marketisation of artistic solutions in the reconfiguring of environmental crisis through late capitalism.

Incongruity as Ecocritical Hermeneutic

'Art may never save the world, but saving the world is not the same as saving the phenomenon "world" itself, which is something art *can* do' Suzi Gablik wrote in 'The Ecological Imperative': 'art can help us to recollect our belongingness to something precious and worthy of protection'.[16] Within each chapter I examine how ecological imperatives have been shaped by prevailing cultural attitudes and economic forces seeking to maintain a social order. While this shaping is not exclusive to environmental affects, as the cultural theorist Sara Ahmed notes of how emotions 'elevated' as a result of a perceived cultural value are 'experience[d] as the "appropriate" emotions at different times and places' it has a particular moralising result in this arena of cultural responsibility. Indeed, value metrics within ecocritical art history are similarly constructive of 'appropriate' feelings for ecological and environmental response, as the prevalence of 'eco-grief' suggests.[17]

[16] Suzi Gablik, 'The Ecological Imperative', *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), 49–51 (p. 50).
[17] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 3. To his credit, Andrew Patrizio suggests that 'Scholars need to construct an art history that works with degrees of irony and playfulness', see Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 12. On eco-grief see *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of*

While instrumentalisation is not necessarily intentional, art historians have long been interested in the instructive value of visual practice to environmental issues. As Jackie Brooker asked in her introduction to the 1992 'Art and Ecology' issue of *Art Journal*: 'What is the relevance of art in this context? Can it be instrumental in the process of revisioning ourselves and our ways of living? How does the need for new paradigms and new solutions challenge our assumptions about the functions of art?'[18] Brooker finds remedial projects by Alan Sonfist, Patricia Johanson, Mel Chin, Viet Ngo and Nancy Holt exemplary for countering displays of *ignorance*, *greed* and *denial*. In aiming their 'imaginative powers at real-world problems' the artists tackle unwanted affective responses.[19] The artist Peter Fend echoes this point, noting that, '[a]rtists intuit material conditions; […] In other words, let artists do something in the real world'.[20] Any sense of anxiety or doubt in one's powers to affect is absent from these declarations, while the flourish of 'real world' suggests the limits of conceptual exploration if it does not reach a wider cultural audience.

With incongruity as a hermeneutic, I am placed to examine the specific reference points for promulgating affective and aesthetic conventions around creative response. The thesis spans an extended period of environmental interest in the United States, from Antin's persona of the King in 1972, Wojnarowicz's photography of the 1980s and 1990s, and Dodge and Kahn's video work in the early 2000s. Covering a range of conceptual and aesthetic compositions, what unites these projects is their engagement with the affects and *dis*affects of environmental concerns. While there is an explicit onus on art to 'get into the business of saving', other contributions emerge from this sphere that are no less significant; these artists demonstrate the different forms that care and stewardship take.[21] Importantly, while ecological and environmental referents can be found in these artists' work, these motifs haven't been pursued in the wealth of published surveys on ecological and environmental art.[22] I avoid stating their inclusion within

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Ecological Loss and Grief, ed. by Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017). Titles on eco-anxiety are bountiful, a search in August 2021 through Wiley Online Library returned over 2,900 entries.

[18] Jackie Brooker, 'The Heart of Matter', *Art Journal,* vol. 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 8–11 (p. 8).

[19] Ibid, p. 9.

[20] Peter Fend, qtd. in Alan Jones, 'Thinking Big', *Arts 66* (November 1991), p. 54.

[21] Sarah Ensor, 'Queer Fallout: Samuel R. Delany and the Ecology of Cruising', *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 1 (May 2017), 149–66.

[22] An inexhaustive list includes *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1992); *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009*, ed. by Ariella Yedgar and Francesco Manacorda (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009); Andrew Brown, *Art & Ecology* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014); Mark Cheetham, *Landscape Into Eco*

constructed categories such as the 'eco pioneer' as Linda Weintraub historicises, instead taking the opportunity to examine instead how prevailing criteria can only account for so much.[23]

Indeed, rather than appraise what is critically 'applied' through an ecological perspective in art history, I locate uses of play, humour, irony and other modes within the case studies as sensibilities ordinarily considered wayward or 'wrong' and devoid of 'useful' ecological content.[24] In unpacking these forms, I benefit from several scholarly explorations of the critical faculties of layered aesthetic forms, from Seymour's framework of 'bad environmentalism' to Susie O'Brien's observations that the coupling of irony and ecology offer 'insight through the mutual illumination of one another's differences'.[25] My central proposition is that a term like incongruity helps us think through the metrics used to evaluate an environmental artwork and the model of environmental subjectivity being expressed. I claim that this strategy makes room for other critical and metacritical approaches beyond the lionised and simplified 'positive images of participation and regeneration'.[26] As demonstrated by Adams' Datsun campaign, getting beyond this tonal range is necessary in order to reckon with how heroic participation is not only the prevalent mode in this period but how it has been harnessed through greenwashing interests. Exploring unexpected turns of feeling and response is to consider what creative modes can tell us about the negotiation of environmental pressures in life and work, and how artworks themselves might foster strategies for resisting creative extraction.

Even with the range of historic and curatorial surveys and monographs on eco registers in the visual arts, there is no singular development from which to ratify an origin. As scholarship has drawn on 'eco art', 'land art', 'environmental art' and 'earthworks' almost interchangeably – terms that continue to dominate scholarly terrain despite indeterminable ethical intentions – I find no benefit to stabilising their definitions

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*Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60*s (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2018); and Linda Weintraub, *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[23] See Weintraub, 'Twentieth-Century Eco Art Pioneers', in *To Life!*, pp. 53–318.

[24] 'An ecocritical perspective, whether applied to nineteenth-century paintings by Audubon or current environmental policies, relentlessly exposes such false assumptions for what they are while pointing the way to a more sustainable future'. Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perspective,* p. 19. On the functionality of ecological art see Brooker's 'Heart of Matter', p. 9. On the value granted to 'proper' environmental feelings, see Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism,* p. 21.

[25] Susie O'Brien, 'On Death and Donuts: Irony and Ecology after September 11', *Cultural Critique,* 58 (Fall 2004), 148–57.

[26] Brooker, 'Heart of the Matter', p. 9.

here.[27] I do however extend a close consideration of spatial relations within each of these genres to examine how these formations set up the possibility for artists to construct their own value systems around land use. In appraising this, I entreat the significance of aesthetic and affective engagements specifically developed in and through visual registers reliant on a lens-based economy. My consideration of performative *registers* alongside that of performance art provides space for expressions produced in gesture and subtext. With political efficacy in environmental quarters bound to feelings such as shame, melancholia and depression, I have considered it necessary to draw on a set of theoretical frameworks in which historically 'bad' feelings and modes of response (such as inaction) are found to speak to how certain political work is conceived and felt.[28]

Incongruity provides a scaffold for thinking about the plethora of difficult feelings that either emerge through or are evoked by environmental concern. Before going into greater detail, I first outline the relevance of incongruity to each case study. In the first chapter, incongruity encompasses the coalitional intersections between queer liberational politics and a spatial justice perspective. Here I introduce Wojnarowicz's photography, contact sheets and negatives produced in the context of the artist's road trips to the US Southwest and Mexico between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. With its focus on this aspect of his artistic practice, which has received little scholarly attention, this chapter does the dual work of opening up geographic peripheries within Wojnarowicz's practice to critical insight and using the framework of travel to consider how the artist used photography to engage with spatial justice issues. Examining how Wojnarowicz positions himself and others within these settings, I put queer forms of

[27] Mark Cheetham sees 'eco art' as overlapping with several other terms including 'environmental art', 'ecoventions' and 'art in nature'. Drawing on Felix Guattari's usage of the term to describe the 'praxic opening-out' to society and environmental concerns, Cheetham uses 'eco art' as an umbrella term. See Cheetham, *Landscape Into Eco Art*, p. 209n2; Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 2000), p. 53. On Earthworks and Land Art in the United States, see Lucy R. Lippard, *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West* (New York: The New Press, 2014); as well as Amelia Groom, *Beverly Buchanan: Marsh Ruins* (London: Afterall Books, 2020).

[28] On 'Left-Wing melancholy' see Walter Benjamin, 'Left-Wing Melancholy* (On Erich Kästner's new book of poems)', *Screen*, vol. 15, issue 2 (Summer 1974), 28–32; and Wendy Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholy', *boundary 2*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1999), 19–27. On shame as a hermeneutic for queer encounters with loss, see Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Scholarship on sentimentality is extensive: Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), are of relevance here. For a broader reading of 'negative' feelings in literary tone see Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 28.

spatial belonging in dialogue with an unlikely 'straight' precedent: American road photography. Charted through cultural figures like Walker Evans, Robert Frank as well as writers of the Beat Generation, this canon has come to iconise the perspective of the transient observer who relays worlds left behind by modernity. While the work of these photographers clearly inspired Wojnarowicz, he also extended their perceptive modalities through a queer, anti-imperialist mode of social critique to disrupt the touristic ordering of space and bodies.

Viewed in tandem with his published journals, texts and postcards produced in and circulated from these spaces, the spatial critique I sketch here is interpretative and contextually investigative, particularly with regards to the visual material reviewed in the artist's archive. With much of his photographic materials elliptically annotated, this material has provided opportunities for historical clarity as well as extrapolation. I have also taken care to retain Wojnarowicz's performative and authorial voice across the various sites of production and presentation he experimented with across his life, from his published work to his incendiary live readings. I connect literary voice to the language of performance to underscore how Wojnarowicz's use of persona extended beyond the boundary of his highly regarded photographic series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978). In locating qualities of performance in his touristic vision, a queer profile of embodied movement emerges, tracing layered spatial occupancies that aren't always visible. I consider how persona in Wojnarowicz's archive enlivens the problematics of recreational capitalism through these imaginative acts. Crucially, these acts aren't always predicated on vision but also extend through tacit cues of body language and gesture.

The capacity of the body to perform spatial juxtaposition extends through the second chapter where I present a new reading of Eleanor Antin's use of persona as an ecocritical work explorative of political failure. Within this reading I flesh out humourlessness as a self-reflexive strategy that grapples with sentiments concerning political effectivity and hope following a set of despairing events for the political left in the 1970s such as the Watergate scandal and the prolonged occupation of Vietnam. I argue that the King persona demonstrates that failure can be meaningful by revealing the brokenness of a certain way of *doing* and highlighting the dangers of certain power formations. Seeing this work as a performance of humourlessness proposes an alternative dialectic to environmental positions, such as the problem of handwringing or apathy seeded by deep-seated despair. Rather, by confronting failure my reading of Antin's

persona examines how suspended action may be dramatised as suspended for specific conceptual and pedagogical reasons.

Unlike Wojnarowicz, personae have been well-assessed in Antin's oeuvre. Yet, despite this scholarship the problematics engaged by Antin's characterisation of power in the King persona remain overly focused on the work's gender play.[29] The reading I pursue becomes possible through an ecocritical methodology – one supported by critical race and critical whiteness studies, as well as queer theory, providing specific inroads into the conditions of imperial governance. Because queer studies and queer theory are two of the most robust arenas for theorising around the properties of failure, melancholy and capriciousness, I draw substantially on these two avenues of thought in the hope that ecocritical art history may be more open to its hermeneutics. If, to extend the position articulated by Morton that irony is not only absent from ecological writing and criticism but *productive*, then the incongruities expressed by Antin's persona realise multiple possibilities for the work and beyond. For one, it requires dismantling normative thinking that would either serve to overlook the King's environmental stakes or seek to steer us away from his non-purposiveness. As a work partially enacted as a historically incongruous 'life performance' within the setting of Solana Beach, it also draws into its fiction the 'real world' context of the town where the artist lived. Questions raised by the work around the juxtaposition of authentic and performed contexts are extended in the final chapter through two key videos by Dodge and Kahn, referred to here as their survival works. Though stylistically unique from one another, *Nature Demo* and *All Together Now* both fictionalise survival responses by revolving around an amateur exercise drill and the postapocalyptic hideout, respectively. Like Antin, Dodge and Kahn use persona to characterise a form of suspended activity that is equally caught between genres. These works ape popular mediations of disaster while presenting the lived experiences of drought in Southern California as a form of tedium. Resilience in these works is deliberately skewered as an anti-empowerment narrative: their personae are either ill-prepared or demonstrate behaviours that are at odds with survival mandates of triumph over natural disaster. That Dodge and Kahn could be mistaken for actors in any Los Angeles-based disaster film during its production makes this work the least

[29] A clear example of this renewed interest is the exhibition *Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin's "Selves"*, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery Columbia University, New York, 4 September–7 December 2013, and its accompanying publication, Emily Liebert, ed., *Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin's "Selves"* (New York: Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2013).

incongruous of the three chapters in location. And yet, the use of verité locations in these two works is paramount to their critical function, giving this subject matter a lived rather than speculative material geography that demonstrates how crisis has already been absorbed into an existing capitalist order in Southern California.

Ecocritical Art History: Developing Insight

In providing a set of alternative access points, the thesis builds upon avenues in art history that engage with questions of ecological perception, representation and relation. Prefigured by a broader 'environmental turn' in the humanities, the development of an ecocritical art history proposes an episteme for a more ecologically attendant field while encouraging the study of epistemological confluence and co-occurrence; such an approach could thus consider, for instance, how natural history and histories of visuality are deeply interlinked through colonial and imperial practices.[30] With aims of opening the field up to ecological responsibility, scholars draw from a range of discourses, nomenclature, practices and analytical frameworks across political ecology, environmental philosophy, postcolonial studies, animal studies, new materialisms, and the posthumanities. With the remit ostensibly wide open, scholars such as Kirsten Swenson have also considered how artists expanding the terms of land and environmental practices 'actively eschew art-world reference points' by relating more closely to community-based activism, land management agencies and cultural geography.[31] Yet, for others, such 'new forms' of practice and theory *constitute* 'eco art history', imbuing this field with an expansive sense of itself by 'transcend[ing] conventional borders of inquiry'.[32] These perspectives not only propose how art history may respond to existential threats presented by environmental degradation but use the ecocritical as a lens for interpreting human and nonhuman interactions of earlier periods.[33]

[30] On an 'environmental turn' for art history see *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, ed. by Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 3.
[31] Scott and Swenson, 'Introduction', p. 1.
[32] Cheetham, *Landscape in Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s*, p. 3.
[33] Elizabeth W. Hutchinson, 'Conjuring in Fog: Eadweard Muybridge at Point Reyes', *Terra Foundation Essays*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art/The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 114–47 (p. 130). On the English dissemination of ecology in the 1860s, see *Ecology Revisited: Reflecting on Concepts, Advancing Science*, ed. by Astrid Schwarz and Kurt Jax (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 145–53.

As this term acts as a hinge of the thesis, the influence of literary ecocriticism on ecocritical art history needs attending to here. Since the late 1980s, ecocriticism has built up a wealth of scholarship around the ethics of place, environment and nature through landmark monographs including Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) and Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells's *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (1998). Though this field hasn't always named its focus on American literature, it is often configured as such, baking into its conceptual imaginary the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey and Barry Lopez, among others. But to consider what ecocriticism actually invites – simply put, as a set of inquiries into the relationship between literature and the physical environment, it has played a significant role in reframing categorical distinctions of nature and culture in the humanities.[34] Through time, ecocriticism has also investigated thornier questions about the constitutive status of place and identity, as Glotfelty puts it: 'In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category?'[35] Moreover, given its attention to the limits and consequences of human actions, ecocriticism probes the methodologies upon which fields such as art history have relied to *record* human interactions with natural systems.[36] For scholarship that continues to evaluate the tools provided by ecocriticism, the conceptual language of ecology as well as its material sense of mutual dependency are seductive; more significant for the thesis, however, is how thought around dissolved 'nature-culture' boundaries provides the groundwork for an intersectional accounting of socio-political inequities in human-environmental relations.[37]

The kind of ecocritical art history this project sees itself contributing to is one in which ideas can be tracked across theoretical concepts, cultural histories of the environment and visual arts practices. In recent years, there has been an effort to open art history in related ways to alternative and novel approaches. Seeking to avoid instantiating

[34] On 'waves' of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) is a useful guide. Buell here distinguishes between an earlier category of nature writing that evoked nature as a distinct domain and later literary styles that problematised these boundaries.
[35] Cheryll Glotfelty, 'Introduction', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. by Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. xv–xxxvii (p. xix).
[36] See Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, pp. 3 & 19.
[37] In this phrasing, Donna Haraway's insights are crucial. See Haraway's influential synthesis of 'naturecultures' in recognition of their entanglement. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

icons of ecological or environmental art, Andrew Patrizio proposes an 'eclectic' approach that would '[draw] on a wide range of materials, methods and practices'; while Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher consider the importance of an ecocritical art history inclusive of artworks 'apparently indifferent, or even hostile, to such concerns'. In moving beyond strict or obvious 'ecological content' these authors speculate upon 'previously unnoticed complexity, ambivalence, or even antipathy regarding environmental concerns'.[38] More than the '"greening" of art history', this scholarship concerns challenging the utility of extant modalities for interpreting and relating to natural environments rather than a unique approach.[39] As such, while the concession that art historical scholarship can no longer insulate itself has taken place somewhat belatedly, scholars are directed in particular ways. Sria Chatterjee, for instance, calls on art historians to 'critically rethink concepts that are fundamental […] such as time and scale, in ways that are productive for an intersectional eco-politics'.[40] From this, I extend two provocations: firstly, that ecocritical scholarship would benefit from expanding its sense of critical possibilities drawn from art; and relatedly, for a discipline so attentive to the role of culture within public life, that such challenges are better served by a nuanced understanding of the relationship of visual forms to political action. Taking Antin's performance of humourlessness as a key example: to recuperate the difficulties the project dramatises, from the claim of representing a community's interest to the inability to acknowledge one's own hero complex, we see how the work builds commentary on the insecurity of one's relevance to political life and the cynicism that arises from such 'sentiments of disenchantment'.[41] Despite these critical mechanics, Antin's project forms just one example of a range of artworks that have remained under the radar of art history's 'environmental turn' yet as a range of 'eclectic' historiographic approaches rises to understand indifference or inaction, are more relevant than ever.

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[38] Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, pp. 3 & 9; Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye*, p. 10.
[39] Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, p. 3.
[40] Sria Chatterjee, 'The Arts, Environmental Justice, and the Ecological Crisis', *British Art Studies*, Issue 18, November 2020. <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-18/arts-environmental-justice-ecological-crisis> [accessed 28 August 2021]. Prior to the epistemological model of the Anthropocene, the writer Barry Lopez described patterns of disregard for the environment as that of an '*aberration'* in human history. See Lopez, 'Unbounded Wilderness', *Aperture*, no. 120 (Summer 1990), 2–15 (pp. 14 & 17).
[41] Paolo Virno's formative term 'sentiments of disenchantment' considers how, in the post-Fordist worker's alienation from a traditional wage labour system and acquaintance with a system that valorises flexibility and adaption, contemporary capitalism's affects of 'opportunism, fear, and cynicism […] *enter into production*'; in other words, capitalism absorbs these conditions as operational values. Paolo Virno, 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment', in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. by Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 13–36 (p. 14).

'Americanness' within Ecocritical Art History

To consider how American art and ecocriticism both reinforce certain norms, there is no better place to start than the contested origins of the Anthropocene, which is a term that, having received much attention from the humanities and posthumanities over the last decade, frames the above provocations. Though industrial expansionism and technological interventions of the late 1800s have been proposed as the 'golden spike', the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the European conquest of the Americas between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries is the catastrophic event recognised by many scholars of critical race, ethnic and diaspora studies.[42] For Zoe Todd and Heather Davis, aligning the Anthropocene with the beginnings of colonialisation renders ecocide *decisive* rather than inevitable, emphasising the 'violence at its core'.[43] Part of the work of decolonising the Anthropocene is the identification and critical transformation of transnational histories of exploitation, displacement and accumulation practiced through colonial modernity. These conditions extend through US geographies in, for example, toxic hazards on or proximate to hundreds of native lands on the seismic scale the Anishinaabe activist and economist Winona LaDuke outlines as the 'direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity'.[44] As the proportions of the Anthropocene's 'great acceleration' have arguably become more pronounced in the writing of this work (a term first proposed by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and limnologist Eugene Stoermer to describe the intensification of anthropogenic alteration we are living through) so too is the need to move between planetary scales and the

[42] On dating of the Anthropocene to the invention of the steam engine in 1784 see Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the Ends of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 4. For a materialist reading of the 'golden spike' see Douglas Kahn, in Chatterjee, 'The Arts, Environmental Justice, and the Ecological Crisis'. As a genocidal event, the Anthropocene can be traced to the 1784 boundaries of the original settlements of the first thirteen colonies in the United States to its rapid movement west justified under manifest destiny in the nineteenth century. Westward expansion claimed in less than a century approximately two billion acres of Indigenous territory. On US citizenship as it enforced relinquished collective treaty rights, see Nick Estes, *Our History is The Future* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 210.

[43] 'If the Anthropocene is already here, the question then becomes, what can we do with it as a conceptual apparatus that may serve to undermine the conditions that it names?' write Heather Davis and Zoe Todd in 'On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2017), 761–80 (p. 763). On the Anthropocene as the 'Capitalocene' see Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015); Andreas Malm, 'The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry', *Historical Materialism*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2013), 15–68; and Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

[44] Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), p. 1.

relational worlds of lived experience.[45] For such reasons, underwritten norms of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity in American ecocritical imaginaries cannot be understated, having filtered through land claims, scientific and pseudoscientific systems, theories and taxa, citizenship and property rights, all of which structure modes of relating to place through the bifold lens of nation and nature.[46]

Given that these conditions are geographically specific, the case studies focus on the staging of works within the particular land use contexts of California, Arizona and New Mexico – states often homogenised as the 'US Southwest'. With this I acknowledge a central paradox of environmental thought, that efforts to engage publics are also those often deployed through encompassing and universalising pronouns of 'we' humans and 'our' environment. As outlined by Sylvia Wynter's notion of a postcolonial world 'after man' these are often falsely encompassing.[47] As such, my focus on self-reflexive sensibilities is a direct effort to consider how self-awareness and the evolution of approach is factored into the work. Here, a further comment on specificity is needed. Where preferences for *eco-* over *environ-* may be claimed in ecocritical scholarship, I retain both terms here for how they grapple with questions of affiliation, place and belonging through the *environmental*, a term which foregrounds relationality and *environ-*, which helps situate the geographies of the case studies. There are also various patrimonial intersections between nature, ecology and nation-building, as evoked by Adams' patriotic interests. Subsequently, ecology's shared etymological root with domestic economics through the Greek *oikos* (household or home) and nature's shared root with *nation* and *innate* (*nasci*) has emphasis here, not least for how the chapters attend to the transformation of American landscapes by western economic regimes of the late twentieth century. If, as John Grande argues, the nationalisation of ecological discourse is often verbalised as 'home management', then an ecocritical art history

[45] 'Great acceleration' in Will Steffen et al., 'The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration', *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 2, issue 1 (2015), 81–98.
[46] For insight into the constructed racial hierarchies that informed the work of natural historians such as Carl Linnaeus, see Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 104–5.
[47] Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument', *The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 257–337 (pp. 260–61).

attendant to these formations should also seek to decolonise the reiterative relationship of these lands to settler-colonial identity.[48]

As discussed in depth in chapter two on Antin's character-led engagement with real estate development, property is also a deeply vexed topic in the context of the United States not least for its relationship to the total commodification of Black life.[49] Rights to property and land installed in the Reconstruction era extended across the length of Jim Crow racial segregation laws until the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Even with The Fair Housing Act of 1968, which outlawed discrimination in renting and selling homes, systematic inequities continued in citizenship rights, land holding and restrictive covenants that gave primacy and preference to white citizens as benchmarks for ownership and enjoyment.[50] This helped formalise a white supremacist rationality whereby, as Brenna Bhandar puts it, only certain societal 'ways of living, producing, and relating to land [have] value worthy of legal protection and force'.[51] Moreover, for many Indigenous societies across Turtle Island – a name that precedes the territorial colonisation of the North American continent – environment hazards have emerged as a direct corollary of territorial exploitation by government and corporate entities. This points to the ways in which cultural formations of 'Americanness' were constituted through 'legal fictions', as the political scientist Sandy Grande finds of the forcible restructuring across the Navajo and Hopi nations in the 1920s under the proviso of settling 'disputes' by 'collaboration'.[52] As a result, this thesis proceeds from the

[48] John K. Grande, *Balance: Art and Nature* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2004), p. 37; Alan C. Braddock and Karl Kusserow, 'Introduction', in *Nature's Nation*, ed. by Braddock and Kusserow (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 12–39 (p. 13).

[49] Cheryl Harris, 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 106, no. 8 (June 1993), 1707–791 (p. 1720). In his leftist critique of the English pastoral, John Barrell argued that landscape emerged, 'from a world of social and economic relations that are anything but idyllic'. Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Some of the terminology in Barrell's book precisely underpins the effects of colonial regimes on language.

[50] In the United States, white citizenship was granted the standard of legal protection under code 42 USC § 1981, where it states that: All persons within the jurisdiction of the United States shall have the same right in every State and Territory to make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, give evidence, and to the full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of persons and property as is enjoyed by white citizens, and shall be subject to like punishment, pains, penalties, taxes, licenses, and exactions of every kind, and to no other'. Civil Rights Act of 1866, parts of which are now codified at 42 USC section 1981, 1982 and 1983, see: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2009-title42/pdf/USCODE-2009-title42-chap21-subchapI-sec1981.pdf. [accessed 9 December 2021]. I thank the artist Cameron Rowland for drawing my attention to this code in their show *Deputies*, Essex Street, New York City (1 May–19 June 2021).

[51] Bhandar, 'Introduction', pp. 1–32 (p. 9).

[52] In 1922, for instance, after the realisation that there was no legal recourse to lay claim to oil discovered on the Navajo reservation, Standard Oil of California pressured the US government into hiring personnel with the primary purpose of persuading members of the tribal council to lease them the land. Following

observation that vocabularies of care and reparation are integrally shaped by colonial-imperial categories of value. This underlines the breadth of work to be done, as the diasporic Diné scholar and writer Lou Cornum puts it: 'How [to] care for land that has been overlaid with private property?'[53]

My directed aim here is to develop topical connections and interests between ecocritical art history, critical race theory, critical whiteness studies and queer anti-racist scholarship, each of which express various tools and strategies for identifying the racialised regimes of extractive capitalism and environmental ruination. As a white European scholar working within the realm of American art and its associated histories and methods of interpretation, I underscore my own decolonial motivations in this work. I also seek to emphasise the theoretical directions of this work as helping dismantle what the scholar Tiffany King has called the 'unending possibility' of property and enclosure in colonial-settler jurisdictional and territorial formations by probing their naturalised presence.[54] With this in view, each chapter revolves around *acts of noticing* how ecology and economics are brought together within mainstream cultural forms, such as in the domestic tourism of 'natural wonders' in chapter one, NIMBYISM (as the acronym for 'not in my backyard' objections to things affecting one's locality) in chapter two, and the growing industry of preparedness under climate crisis in chapter three. While all of these ostensibly act in the name of environmental concern, I consider how each inculcate distinct affective responses to said concerns, such as reverence (chapter one), outrage (chapter two) and defensiveness (chapter three). I account for the resistance to normative environmental affiliations and attachments that lie within these works, finding how each case study engages with contexts of dispossession, gentrification and privatisation and the inequitable living conditions these conditions produce. For the artists in question, these are structural frameworks engaged before the terminological tailspin of the Anthropocene, yet their critical engagements are just as relevant today.

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this non-starter, a series of 'legal fictions to facilitate oil leasing' were created by the Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall, including the creation of a 'Navajo Business Council' comprised of three tribal members. See Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 73–74.

[53] Lou Cornum and Nick Estes, 'Burial Ground Acknowledgements', *The New Enquiry*, 14 October 2019: <https://thenewinquiry.com/burial-ground-acknowledgements/> [accessed 26 August 2021]. Joanne Barker has considered has subject formation through citizenship enacts a form of political legitimisation. See Barker, ed., *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 10.

[54] Tiffany Jeannette King, 'In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 2013), p. 23.

From Vision to Affect

When it comes to ecocritical insights, it is curious that visuality continues to be heralded even after its central problematics are identified. 'What is the proper scale with which to view our environmental crisis?' asks the Marxist geographer John Bellamy Foster, or as the political theorist Jodi Dean avers: 'we can't look at climate change directly […] Once we see it—the "it" of climate change encapsulated into a data point or disastrous image—it's already too late. […] If we don't grasp the issue in its enormity, *we miss it entirely*'.[55] In climate matters, causal links between a lack of information and environmental engagement are often instated. Reading an apparent 'knowledge-deficit hypothesis' as a phenomenon within climate denialism, the sociologist Kari Marie Norgaard considers how, despite mounting evidence to suggest its opposite – from Dean's 'entrapment in distortions' to denial where presented with scientific data – knowledge is centrally underscored in the movement as the key to change.[56] Led by her findings, Norgaard encourages grappling with the emotional and psychological nature of social responses to environmental crisis beyond outright negative associations with 'stupidity or ineptitude'. By attending to conflicts that arise in the face of issues that 'feel too large to tackle', she argues that failures actually identify the nonviability of existing methods and approaches.[57] Querying the conscription placed on artists to show us the way, I draw on this critical interest in failure to invite consideration of failure's corollaries in the accidental, the unintentional and the improvised, as phenomena often received through sensorial juxtaposition and contrast rather than representational means.

In the background of this visual primacy is that the study of natural phenomena in the humanities inherits visual appreciation as a distinct pedagogical pathway from that of scientific evaluation.[58] Despite the titles of contemporary scholarship wholly suggestive

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[55] John Bellamy Foster, 'The Scale of Our Ecological Crisis', *Monthly Review*, 1 April 1998: <https://monthlyreview.org/1998/04/01/the-scale-of-our-ecological-crisis/> [accessed 5 October 2021]; Jodi Dean, 'The Anamorphic Politics of Climate Change', *e-flux Journal*, Issue #69, January 2016: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/69/60586/the-anamorphic-politics-of-climate-change/> [accessed 9 October 2021] [emphasis added].

[56] Interestingly, in her work on the sociology of climate denialism, Kari Marie Norgaard suggests that denial can arise through the desire to *participate* in social norms. See Norgaard, 'Climate Denial: Emotion, Psychology, Culture, and Political Economy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, ed. by John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard and David Schlosberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 399–413 (p. 400); and Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2011); Dean, 'The Anamorphic Politics of Climate Change'.

[57] Norgaard, 'Climate Denial', p. 410.

[58] See, for instance, Erwin Panofsky on the scientific appraisal of natural phenomena qua the humanities, in Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), p. 6.

of a visual primacy (*A Keener Perception* or *The Ecological Eye*), scholars have shifted disciplinary divisions proposed by Erwin Panofsky and others to an 'arts of noticing', as proposed by the anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing.[59] Connecting these efforts is the topic of methodological intervention in what art history and visual culture can *do for* ecology. Similar questions thrum in T.J Demos's *Beyond the World's End*, where he proposes that:

> Given this socioecological crisis – informed by past colonial genocides, ongoing corporate ecocides, and transatlantic slavery – how do we *conceptualize* the aftermath? What of the many worlds that have already ended? Equally urgent, how do we *represent* the radical potentiality of the not-yet? How do we cultivate and bring into being emancipated futures?[60]

Written alongside the objectives of the 2019 Paris Agreement and the global momentum of Black Lives Matter, Demos presses this point as a matter of critical urgency. The work that Demos undertakes in this monograph is vital, especially in how anticolonial resistance formations across the Global South and First Nations instruct change. Crucially, Demos also acknowledges the cultural currency granted to certain kinds of artistry. His inversion of these values to ask whether activist practices taught at the level of artworks would unlock the resources of a rarefied art world makes possible a point explored here concerning the imperative for artists to be *visionary*.[61] Such an imperative, I argue, when constructed by scholarly and critical interest tends to prioritise visual practices in terms of their success and transformative potential. I contend that asking questions about how these practices are valorised and historicised is significant to a body of work like *Beyond the World's End*, because it means investigating how it feels being at the 'world's end' on an experiential level. In reaching beyond critical engagements that serve to validate political imperatives, I attend to a range of perceptions, affects and embodiments *expressed* within the arts but that aren't necessarily modelled by art history

[59] These titles evoke a longer view of 'cultivating the eye' against the folly of an inexhaustible earth, as George Perkins Marsh proposed in *Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (London: S. Low, Son and Marston, 1864), see his section on 'Cultivation of the Eye' in particular, pp. 11–12; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 37.
[60] T. J. Demos, *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 1 [emphasis added].
[61] Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, pp. 11 & 171.

and visual culture. In this, I recuperate incongruous positions and objects that have been categorically disregarded or their resonances missed.

Affect, as the capacity to *affect* and *be affected*, is not absent in this literature yet it is often framed through mitigation efforts. Returning to Dean, the threat of missing the enormity of the issue is forcibly visceral: 'When we try to grasp climate change directly, we *end up confused, entrapped in distortions* that fuel the reciprocal fantasies of planetary scale geoengineering and post-civilizational neo-primitivism. The immensity of the calamity of the changing climate […] seemingly forces us into *seeing all or nothing*'.[62] Undercutting this dilemma is the pressure to comprehend something fully or else lose sight of it completely. What is at stake, Dean seems to suggest, is action over inaction, or indeed, as we saw earlier, idealistic action qua 'real world' action, in which negative feelings and emotions are identified not only as difficult but also as counterproductive. Addressing this through a historical framework, I proceed by referring to key examples that display a more complex relationship to action. While risking the 'game-over fatalism' Demos finds troublesome, Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn's evocation of apocalypse uses irony to probe narratives of triumphant overcoming.[63] I sketch this out more fully in the third chapter, yet apocalypse is worth attending to here as a conceptual imaginary that has been framed as off-limits to left politics. Scorning apocalyptic 'thinking' on the left, the Marxist geographer David Harvey, for instance, averred that '[t]he worst' that humans can do, 'is to engage in material transformations of our environment so as to make life less rather than more comfortable for our own species being'.[64] While Harvey is much less dismissive of environmental thinking in his later work, he holds onto the argument that the 'rhetoric of impending environmental catastrophe will not, [..] necessarily sharpen our minds in the direction of cooperative, collective, and democratic responses'. For Harvey, apocalypse rhetorics 'legitimise' fatalistic and hubristic positions in which disasters such as war, disease or flooding come to be seen as 'natural' correctives to ecological 'limits'. Although I share his concerns for a 'lifeboat ethic' as Harvey calls it, I do not close off certain themes that may actually engage the kind of class-conscious environmental

[62] Dean, 'The Anamorphic Politics of Climate Change'.
[63] How can the arts provide new perceptions and affects (for instance, those of justice, responsibility, and mutuality) through which life might be reinvented, avoiding game-over fatalism and commercial cynicism?'. Demos, *Beyond the World's End*, p. 165.
[64] David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 194.

critique of 'elitist and authoritarian impulses' he calls for.[65] As I find in Kahn and Dodge's visualisation of survival under neoliberalism's managed decline, this image is both metaphorical and not: exposing existing conditions within the work's verité production and figuring the absurd challenge of levelling environmental accountability within a capitalist order. The question of response is charged here, yet in reaching the kinds of listless or unsatisfying feelings that come with bridging creative and critical worlds these approaches are highly significant to the properties of environmental behaviour. The capacity for personae to heighten sensoria and experience is critical to this exploration, enriching understanding of how environmental pressures are dealt with affectively and aesthetically.

Performing Persona

The affects animated by the case studies frame the conceptual trajectory mapped by the thesis. In taking up this task I engage certain efforts *behind* the movement towards 'ecological reorientation'. As the Indian contemporary artists' group Raqs Media Collective put it, 'recalibration of the senses' means '[conceiving] of another mode of production, another set of social relations, […] between ourselves and the earth'. If this work involves the senses, then affect has a central part to play in this discursive realm.[66] In this way, the project examines not art history's suitability towards ecological ends but engagements with behaviours and metaresponses that surface when negotiating environmental stressors. I investigate how certain visual forms namely that of performance – a mode that reveals productive tensions around the modernist development of the artist as a subject – is positioned to stage difficult attachments in ways that help audiences think critically about the genealogical production of an ecocritical archive in art history.

Focus on persona in this study engages the production of layered subjectivities, reaching across boundaries of artistic and social worlds. Stretching back to the popular use of character in Elizabethan dramatic monologues, persona wasn't new or original by the time it reached conceptual art in the 1960s, yet as a form it has proved capable of intersecting key considerations concerning the social agency of the individual in modern

[65] 'It often sparks elitist and authoritarian impulses (particularly among many scientists) or even a "lifeboat ethic" in which the powerful pitch the rest overboard' writes David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 217–18.
[66] Raqs Media Collective, 'Three and a Half Conversations with an Eccentric Planet', *Third Text*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2013), 108–14 (p. 124).

and contemporary society. As I further elaborate in chapter one, the notion of an artistic persona also confers an idealised subject projected onto an artist's corpus. This subjecthood is transmitted through the work but may also be sought *beyond* the work in the pursuit of 'knowing' an artist concretely or intimately. Remaining in-character for an extended period – as is true of Antin's performances in chapter two – drives a wedge between real and fictional events through the simultaneity of multiple 'selves' crafted on the artist's body. These dimensions of persona are important to retain because they illuminate central difficulties for artists and art historians in drawing a line between the spheres of life and work. Persona invites us to consider the public composition of the self and why such strategies of fashioning may be required or desired in the first place.

By the mid-1990s, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity had influentially claimed gender and sexuality as constitutive sites of cultural, material and biopolitical production. This model of gender's stylised social production has become a near crucible for poststructuralist feminist theory and practice and has leant demonstratively to social critique in performance and theatrical environments.[67] Reading performative enactments through the formative ideas of Butler, Laura Mulvey and Simone de Beauvoir, Amelia Jones argued that feminist performers of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s actively subverted the category of the individual by exaggerating the sexual, gender, raced and ethnic particularities of the body.[68] Performance's potential to create publics as well as intervene in a presumed universality of the subject supports the critical faculties of the case studies. As such, I take up promising intersections between performance studies and ecocritical study that are yet to be fully explored in art history. Persona in this study, then, follows the enactment of the performative and its mediation in which 'multiple historically contingent events, social moments and/or social pleasures' may be recorded.[69] As discerned in Antin's persona of the King and its straddled

[67] See Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4 (December 1988), 519–31; and Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge: 1993).

[68] Jones's conception of body art challenging modernist faith in the self-portrait image to deliver a 'true' artistic subject to the viewer is critical here; perhaps more significant, however, is her intervention into the historicisation of performance art as braiding art and life. Amelia Jones, 'The "Eternal Return": Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment', *Signs*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002), 947–78; see also Jones, 'Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation', *Art Journal*, vol. 56 (1997), 11–18. On performance breaking down 'distinction between art and life', see the critic Harold Rosenberg's theorisation of 'action painting' as event. Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', *ARTnews*, vol. 51, no. 8 (December 1952), 22–50.

[69] 'This may be one way that drag, as thought by queer performativity theory, actually occults the social rather than creating it'. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 63.

temporalities and geographies of 1970s San Diego County and seventeenth-century England, historical anachronisms stitch together multiple modes of authorship and being, tangling our judgement of power and accountability. Such citational practices not only unsettle guarantees of an 'original' or genuine subjecthood, as the literary theorist Elizabeth Freeman has posited, but provide new forms of access to historical memory. How persona aids critical fabulation, as it does here, is by offering original insight into the contingent desires and stakes of compromised agency in different periods.

Performativity and performance are terms used throughout, both of which emerge from distinct epistemological projects. Jonah Westerman, for instance, describes how performance 'is a term at odds with itself'. While organising a 'vast field of divergent artistic practices', it also describes a range of contemporary forms that might be considered 'performative'.[70] But for others, clear conceptual and material distinctions distinguish it from other kinds of art that uses or implicates the body, marking a 'time-bound artefact, a trace of an action'.[71] As performance art of the 1960s grew to encompass action theatre, 'body art' and 'performed photography', the terms of 'action' and 'event' evolved; factors significant to the representational frame of environmental 'action' art participates in.[72] Action had come to be associated with challenging traditional notions of the artwork as a material substitute or sublimate for the artist's idea.[73] But when political topics were raised in performance, the personal convictions of artists who performed in their own works also came under fire. Articulating her frustrations in a 1983 essay, Lucy R. Lippard accused artists of modelling a 'stylish "political look".[74] For Lippard, the primacy of the visual was a result of an increasingly domesticated media culture – what Isobel Harbison has since traced as a media

[70] Jonah Westerman, 'The Dimensions of Performance', *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art*, Tate Research Publication, 2016: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/dimensions-of-performance> [accessed 23 August 2021].
[71] Ibid., see also Rosenberg: 'The act-painting is of the new same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life'. Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', p. 23.
[72] Philip Auslander defines 'performed photography' as performance works designed to be experienced through their documentation. See Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2006), 1–10; and Kristine Stiles, 'Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions', in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, ed. by Stiles and Paul Schimmel (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp. 234–35.
[73] Michael Fried's 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood' remains one of the most cited illustrations of the resistance to drawing the 'beholder' into performance's 'conditions of theatre'. See Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148–72.
[74] Lucy R. Lippard, 'Long-Term Planning: Notes Toward an Activist Performance Art', in Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), pp. 314–23 (p. 316).

convergence of artists performing 'under the image' of an exploding visual culture.[75] This meant that performance documentation could also be charged as complicit if it was seen to operate *like* political imagery as '*mere* effect'.[76]

For these reasons, incongruities produced in and through the performed image help elucidate the vexed relationship between symbolic and material action that is a live wire for ecocritical art history. And much like imperatives for engagement in art history, the historicisation of performance also contains commentary about how readable its political language should be. Though Lippard doesn't assume that artistic and activist methods should be one and the same, a metric of efficacy is implied – one that has even proved difficult to dislodge in recent work. Indeed, while the camp humour of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens's collaborative work on ecosexuality has been viewed as a welcome alternative to the 'straightforward somberness and relentless moralising' of environmental documentaries, scholars are still pressed to ask whether such modes are politically effective.[77] With incongruous positions marked as either counterproductive, stylistic or simply *not enough*, comes the expectations that artists should signal clearly whether their commitments to politics are symbolic or material, or else not bother at all. Yet, to dig a little deeper, we can see that their critical function may also be forged in the process of making. That results do not always emerge triumphantly is part of the process of assessing and developing counter positions to dominant cultures.

To stay with performance, it is possible to learn more from radical reuses of forms that haven't nominally met this criterion. For the performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz, performers My Barbarian, Jack Smith and Dynasty Handbag uniquely deployed failure as a mode of critical refusal, simultaneously exposing 'system[s] of valuation […] predicated on exploitation and conformity'.[78] While rarely brought into conversation with ecological futurity, Muñoz's understanding of failure as a normatively managed concept that idealises a well-adjusted life, provides a generative rationale for other kinds of failure avowed by a normative stance. I argue that incongruity orients an environmental ethos in which the *failure of things to land* doesn't define the work as a failure in itself

[75] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), pp. 15–16.
[76] Lippard, 'Long-Term Planning', p. 316.
[77] Lauren Whitworth, 'Goodbye Gauley Mountain, hello eco-camp: Queer environmentalism in the Anthropocene', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2018), 73–92 (p. 81). It is difficult to disassemble frameworks of merit entirely, even in scholarly work that has offered critical perspective on the historicisation of environmental art.
[78] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 18 & 174.

but investigates why thriving might be inconceivable. In fact, failure and impotence can be used to appraise how the work entreats its viewers to engage critically through 'an embodied occupation of historical memory'.[79] Muñoz's insights around failure provide a key analytical framework for the imperial memory Eleanor Antin invites us to experience in chapter two, which first appears playful before unfolding in perturbing ways.[80]

Both self-reflexive and embodied positions centrally engage the overlap of life and cultural production.[81] In examining how these works are made legible through specificities of context and geography, my approach is informed by Jill Bennett's notion of 'practical aesthetics'. Extending Jacques Rancière's account of aesthetics as the basis for *aesthesis* (sense-perception) to consider how aesthetics are oriented by social encounters, Bennett's term investigates what a visual imaginary of art '*does*—and what it *becomes'* in relation to events.[82] For Bennett, 'resist[ing] the idea that useful art must conform to a single ideal of "activist" art' sketches out 'the emotions, sentiments and passions of public life' that shape visual works.[83] Centring this affective substructure supports a corollary goal of the thesis in asking what becomes of ecocritical engagements that aren't considered serviceable. Committed to asking what such works *do* but cautious of holding these works to another matrix of efficacy, I theorise that these sensibilities can offer insight as sensory-emotional encounters; that in diverging from a familiar affective range, be it hopeful, jubilant or mournful, contain significant information about the nature of social critique. Placing these considerations historically, the thesis looks to artworks that contend with specific forms of individuated responsibility.

Concerning Methodology and Period

In order to account for the affective mechanics engaged by these bodies of work, I draw on critical efforts to centre queer desire and affects in engagements with the natural world. Particularly useful in building these bridges is scholarship that traces feeling and

[79] Ibid., p. 180.
[80] Meiling Cheng, for instance, notes that '[Antin's] impersonation plays with the juxtaposition of a residual self (traces as female) and an other self (the King) as a histrionic add-on. This juxtaposition viably mocks the limits of a gendered self, undermining its socially assumed fixity to turn it into a playful performance'. See Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art* (Berkeley: University of Southern California, 2002), p. 41.
[81] As Muñoz risked allowing political inconsistencies to roam in the work, I extend his claim that theory can generatively provide 'openings' in queer thought to account for the ways in which queerness is brought into Antin's live performances of the King. See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 2.
[82] Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art After 9/11* (London: IB Tauris, 2012), p. 2.
[83] Ibid., p. 4.

affect as scaled insights into cultural and social experiences, such as Heather Houser's *Ecosickness*, Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*. Largely undertaken in literary studies, cultural theory and sexual cultures as opposed to art history, the attention to affect and subjectivity makes possible the kind of intersectional thought at work in this project, one answerable to an expanding sense of ecocritical art history. Though artworks are discussed in these authors' work, this work hasn't been directly realised for art history. Drawing this work into conversation with ecocritical scholarship allows me to present subjective engagements with the ecological – from its unresolved struggles to the place of gallows humour – as integral to reckoning with the lived dimensions of crisis.

In grappling with the paradox of a discipline for which human subjectivity has long been privileged, many of those engaged in ecocritical art history have put deep consideration to human and human-animal experiences within the natural world, arriving at a view that ontological, systemic and social relations are limited by binary taxonomies. Within this enmeshed perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge that practice does not always answer theory in anticipated ways; nor does theory, on a methodological level, work seamlessly in practice. The thesis draws in significant part on the development of queer ecology, a field of study prompted by the desire to provide an interdisciplinary framework capable of, as the environmental humanities scholars Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson introduced in their influential monograph, 'probing and challenging the biopolitical knots through which both historical and current relations of sexualities and environments meet and inform one another'.[84] Their book partially responded to scholar Greta Gaard's efforts to counter gender essentialisms in materialist feminist and environmental discourse from serving as the basis for heterosexist and racist rationalisms. Gaard's foundational essay 'Towards a Queer Ecofeminism' (1997) proposed a theoretical model for '[recognising] common cause across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nature'.[85] This nondeterministic view of nature bears the critical weight of Michel Foucault's earlier study concerning the 'deviant' status of nonnormative sexuality as a result of the influence of evolutionary

[84] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds., *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 5.
[85] Greta Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism', *Feminist Formations* vol. 23, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 26–53 (p. 44); and Gaard, 'Towards a Queer Ecofeminism', *Hypatia*, vol. 12, no. 1 (February 1997), 114–37.

thought on modern science.[86] One might assume then that nonessentialist views of gender and sexuality developed by queer theory are naturally placed for ecological critique. Yet, this trajectory hasn't had a smooth course. With positions of anti-futurity, negativity and pessimism some of the most emphatic theoretical concepts in queer theory, it is not difficult to see how Lee Edelman's polemic against 'reproductive futurism' appears in opposition to the hopeful beat of rousing ecological action.[87] Though challenging, the call to both *queer* ecology and *green* queer politics has been a powerful one, opening up a critical genealogy in which a queer ecological position can stand up for nature while standing *against* the routine weaponising of marginalised identities and subjectivities within moral debates around what is worth defending.[88]

I draw on a rich body of queer ecological scholarship for this and other reasons: firstly, as observed, for its insistence on an anti-heteronormative stance in facing questions of ecological behaviour, and for the recognised potential of queer politics, theory and cultural practices to enrich ecocritical understanding. In doing so, I bring us to propositions like Seymour's that 'there is something both admirable and thrillingly ironic' about a queer position in the sense 'that those with a foreclosed relationship to "the future" in heteronormative terms would be deeply concerned about the future in ecological terms'.[89] To substantiate these considerations, I turn to several modes, practices and sensibilities animated by queer modes of being and practice – whether underscoring play as political in the face of a rigid stance on pleasure or failure as a refusal of what it is to be normatively well-adjusted in a homophobic society. If 'environmentalism strives to rise above the contingency of desire' as Morton puts it, ecological thought in ecocritical art history stands to benefit from queer theory's interest in modes of irreverence, absurdity, playfulness and camp, as well as such recovered 'improper' or 'inappropriate' feelings that have historically been used to delegitimise queer experience.[90]

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[86] Foucault's approach to formations of naturality, perversity and sin in the deployment of sexuality is useful to consult here. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge, Vol. 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 77–131 (pp. 101–102).
[87] Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
[88] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, 'Unnatural Passions?: Notes toward a Queer Ecology', *Invisible Culture*, issue 9 (Fall 2005) [online]: <https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/unnatural-passions-notes-toward-a-queer-ecology/> [accessed 10 October 2021].
[89] Nicole Seymour, 'Toward an Irreverent Ecocriticism', *Journal of Ecocriticism*, vol. 4, no. 2 (July 2012), 56–71 (p. 63).
[90] Morton, 'Queer Ecology', p. 279; on the connection of public cultures formed around traumatic and catastrophic events, see Ann Cvetkovich, 'Introduction', in *An Archive of Feelings* (Durham, NC: Duke

As gender, sexuality and race are considered in the following chapters through their shaped formations under a settler-colonial apparatus, care has been taken to account for differences between characteristics of lived experience and relation, and those for whom identity is a site of conceptual exploration in their visual practice. As such, it should be stated that in prioritising works by artists whose identity confers social and political experiences, affinities and orientations, the goal is to register glimpses of 'relatedness' within aesthetic encounters that emphasise an ecocritical politics. My working definition of aesthetics takes cue from Dana Seitler's notion of the aesthetic 'encounter' which observes debates around the relationship of politics to aesthetics, while refusing to shore up the thorny equation of visual expression as emancipatory politics. The aesthetic encounter, Seitler contends, is one in which relatedness comes into the frame so that:

> we may fantasize about our affinities and affiliations, not with the aim of producing clarity or coherence about those affiliations but by means of which their very gathering mobilizes new ways of making sense of ourselves in the world, or at the very least, acts as a counter to the forms of alienation experienced every day by non-majority subjects.[91]

Whether concerning the affinities Wojnarowicz extends outward from a queer political refusal of how visual surveillance acts on minoritarian bodies in space (chapter one); Antin's despotic performance that takes affinity to the level of duplicitous intent (chapter two); or Dodge and Kahn's warped space of comradery against systemic alienation (chapter three), these forged (and sometimes failed) affiliations and affinities construct significant aesthetic responses to the systems that contain the individual.

As a critically driven project, the thesis is conceptually organised around artistic sensibilities and challenges that emerge through bodies of work rather than chronological development. By no means exhaustive, the case studies conceptualise a set of resonant

University Press, 2011), pp. 1–14. Cvetkovich is particularly focused on queer responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis, its ongoing legacies and revisitations.

[91] Dana Seitler, 'Making Sexuality Sensible: Tammy Rae Carland's and Catherine Opie's Queer Aesthetic Forms', in *Feeling Photography*, ed. by Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 47–70 (p. 52). Seitler here draws on Carolyn Dinshaw's description of 'affective relation', in how 'the rubric queer links various disjunct bodies and practices and allows us to analyse their relationships, as queer, to one another'. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 2 & 158.

sensibilities without being representative of artistic centres and peripheries. But as this requires rejecting the simplification of ecocritical engagements, it also means committing to a wider sense of ecology in culture and political life, from the development of ecology as a political category in the 1970s through high-profile events such as Earth Day and its collision of local and national efforts; the fraught resurgence of harmful analogies between toxic environments and queer being during the first wave of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s; and the neoliberalisation of disaster through the early 2000s. While distinct, there are crucial overlaps in these contexts calling forth affective registers stymied by dominant accounts of survival and sustainability. As part of this, I take the risk of situating the early 1970s as a central marker for the thesis rather than pivoting around the postwar period, which remains an integral marker for western art history. What many artists observed of this momentum in American culture was not only that a 'first wave of eco-consciousness' was underway but how their art may be used in service.[92] This marker registers ecology as a central discourse for this project and a directed arrow for the topic of art and ethics. In this regard, the ecocritical factors the entwining of ecology and market interests across this period and the neoliberal transformation of personal responsibility within climate solutions. I also stretch this chronology through the resurgence of certain self-sufficiency practices in times of economic instability and stringency in the United States since the Great Depression. I do this with awareness that the countercultural legacies of the late 1960s and 1970s remain highly significant for alternative creative formations within and beyond these decades.

The thesis closes with artworks made in the 2000s, a period in which economic precarity rippled seismically as a result of the banking collapse of 2008. The reasons for this are more than consequential: the 'war on terror' following 9/11 renewed a cultural interest in practices of self-sufficiency across an ideological spectrum of dropouts, progressives and venture capitalists. Through *preparedness* in the third chapter, I consider how resurgent forms of cultural millenarianism inspired by the Bush administration's collision of 'free enterprise' and vigilance against the 'enemy' at home helped augment America's surveillance culture. The works under discussion here explore this visual regime two, sometimes three layers deep, conferring not only the tools for appropriating and reclaiming agency through visual media but for also reimagining

[92] The New-York-based artist Rockman quoted in Braddock and Kusserow, *Nature's Nation*, p. 382.

formations of communality on the left through this period's disaffections.[93] Proposing a method for understanding the coalitional aims and failures of these works, I invite readers to reconsider how these case studies more broadly envision new ways of being in the world by working through complex affects. The periodisation undertaken by the thesis isn't deterministic, though salient resonances do take place as 'chronotopes', a term which, as the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin proposed, underlined 'the intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed'.[94]

Leave No Trace

Crucially, I investigate artworks that say something about where *we might be at*, both mentally and situationally. In doing so, the case studies invite us to reconsider art that gives form to what it feels like to engage in environmental politics. While the initial goal is of sounding out a place for incongruous objects and forms, I also investigate situational incongruities that emerge through circumstance and place. This method, here extended as something of a queer strategy of reading for subtext, acknowledges how certain insights and experiences regarded as *out of place* can reveal crucial information about the conditions *and* conditioning of these settings.

Place is a complicated term because it operates contextually, conferring all that happens within and in relation to an area or location. Plac*emaking*, by extension, is a way of constructing social traditions around given locations through which personal, familial and social identities become associated. Yet, if place-making is a way of doing history, as Keith Basso has described, reading a place culturally has profound consequences for how certain identities are historicised in those locations.[95] Crucially, as the writer Lauret Savoy contends, subject histories of place must be sought out particularly where their presence hasn't been overtly marked or memorialised.[96]

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[93] Many US countercultural communities from the 1960s and 1970s found inspiration in earlier precepts of self-reliance, from the Transcendentalist writers Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson to the socialist textile designer William Morris. Writers and artists also borrowed many incarnates from global mythologies, such as the Japanese Buddhist deity Fudo evoked by Gary Sydner in his 1969 poet 'Smokey the Bear Sutra'.

[94] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84.

[95] Keith H. Basso describes how anyone can be a 'place-maker': 'It is a common response to common curiosities—what happened here? who was involved? what was it like? why should it matter?', in Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 5.

[96] When reading George R. Stewart's *Names on the Land* (1945), Lauret Savoy notices how the naming of places by African American individuals are diminutively listed in Stewart's book as namings that 'cannot be distinguished'. Savoy uncovers an important history of placenames with partial and posited roots in

Understanding place as creational as well as topographical, enacted through cultural and social forms as much as by federal, state and other legal frameworks, encourages scrutiny of its apportionment and management over time. Moreover, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner considered in their 1998 essay 'Sex in Public', what and *who* may be present within these realms is constructed in this process through the criterion of citizenship, which is assessed on the level of 'immaculate behavior'.[97] In extending this discussion in the first chapter, I follow efforts to problematise the relational primacy of the nation-state. In this, alternative ordinances such as Gayatri Gopinath's model of queer diasporic relationality conceived through transnational movements and life practices that 'critique, subordinate, and at times bypass the nation-state' are instructive.[98] For Gopinath, a critical cartography 'place[s] in the same frame analyses of histories of settler colonialism, empire, military occupation, racialization, and diasporic dislocation'; conditions that 'indelibly mark […] bodies and landscapes'.[99] In this regard, subject-led trajectories are vital, because they help bring 'alternative possibilities, landscapes, and geographies […] into view' – a cartographic practice that bears on each chapter and its relationship to being inside of or external to citizenship.[100]

The routes the thesis takes through California, Arizona and New Mexico – states often organised under the settler nomenclature of the US Southwest – follow familiar tourist throughfares. Yet, the trajectories I take here trouble celebrated badges of national heritage by paying close attention to their colonial-imperial formation. I examine how the fantasy of certain places lives on in seemingly benign environmental formations like the principles of the 'Leave "No Trace" Land Ethics' from which the thesis takes its title. More than guidelines for visiting parks and reserves of the United States, these land ethics take forward an earlier preservation ethos of protecting wilderness ecosystems. 'Take nothing but pictures […] leave with only your memories', read the guidelines by the USDA Forest Service, USDI National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management produced in 1989. The photographic metaphor closely echoes the original wording of the Wilderness Act of 1964 which legally constituted wilderness as 'an area where the earth

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Africa that were long thought to be of Indigenous origin. See Savoy, *Trace: Memory, History, Race and the American Landscape* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2015), pp. 12–13.

[97] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998), 547–66 (p. 549).

[98] Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 18.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., p. 16.

and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain'.[101] In doing so, the imperative to be ecological by being *traceless* relies on a confected absence across unceded territories, demurring the lived experience of place for Indigenous peoples and minoritarian publics within the production and management of recreational space. For Thoreau, the incongruity of the trace captured a central issue in the painful disjuncture between experience and memory, as described in his published lecture 'Walking':

> These farms which I have myself surveyed, these bounds which I have set up, appear dimly still as through a mist; but they have no chemistry to fix them; they fade from the surface of the glass, and the picture which the painter painted stands out dimly from beneath. The world with which we are commonly acquainted *leaves no trace*, and it will have no anniversary.[102]

Thoreau's metaphor of an image on glass as lightness – evoking condensation on a windowpane or calling to light-sensitive emulsion on a photographic plate – embeds visuality within the mandate of 'Leave No Trace' as the question of how to materialise the meaningful textures of lived experience. Yet, the trace is not an innocent absence but the retention of signs that are left behind or 'effaced'; it is, as Derrida suggested, 'constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance'.[103] For the thesis, 'Leave No Trace' – itself a maxim in which 'No Trace' is wrapped in quotation marks – holds in tension the forces of appearance and disappearance, while capturing the process of an environmental 'public culture' solidifying through normative identities, institutions and relationships to the outdoors.

If to approach environmental affiliations after the Anthropocene is to construct alternative analytical frames for 'environmentally aware and responsive interpretations of [works] of art', this work entails a different approach to conventional or expected objects

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[101] See the Wilderness Act of 1964, Id. at § 1131(c): https://www.justice.gov/enrd/wilderness-act-1964 [accessed 2 December 2021]. The USDA Forest Service, USDI National Park Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management, 'Leave "No Trace" Land Ethics', June 1989; and revised in September 1991.
[102] Henry David Thoreau, 'Walking', *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 9, no. 56 (June 1862), 657–74 (p. 672) [emphasis added].
[103] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), p. 230.

of study.[104] Yet if incongruity can be easily detected in conventionally popular photographers associated with an environmental ethos like Adams, then the criteria for ecocritical study is demonstrated as anyway provisional. While art history is no stranger to epistemic opportunities to construct imaginative possibilities for sensing and seeing, this wider sensorium of feeling remains unexplored. Given that the associations of *out of place* also include scholarly disposition, a trespassing of disciplinary boundaries within these chapters has proved necessary to investigate how the case studies reflect on the forms that knowledge takes. In doing so, I examine how these artists thought keenly about the systems relations that shape the work's making. Of the works I look at, thought and action and life and art do not seamlessly align. I propose a method for discerning where these engagements *take us*, affectively and emotively, if not to measurable change.

Chapter Overviews

The study begins with the chapter 'Checking out the Landscape: Automobility, Cruising and Spatial Injustice in the Photography of David Wojnarowicz', introducing core terms that are instructive to the following chapters. The artist, writer and activist David Wojnarowicz made several road trips across the United States, Mexico, South America and France in his lifetime. Despite this cartography, scholarship on Wojnarowicz has largely centred on his life and community in New York City, where the artist lived and worked for much of his adult life until his death in 1992. Turning to Wojnarowicz's photography made in the context of trips to California, New Mexico and Arizona, I consider the artist's road photography as staking out a fleeting mode of belonging within the commercialisation of southwestern locales. Wojnarowicz's picturing of surveillance and social control in his photography reveals a claiming of what Nicholas Mirzoeff termed 'the right to look', providing a critical addendum to the prominent history of perspectival looking in American road photography charted by Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Robert Frank, Stephen Shore and others.[105] Focusing on Wojnarowicz's contact sheets from these trips, I contend that the plural advantages of the contact sheet were integral to the artist's intervention in this genre's apportionment of space. Wojnarowicz's photography evokes an atmosphere of entrapment that interpolates 'illegal' queer

[104] Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, p. 9.
[105] Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'The Right to Look', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011), 473–96 (p. 473).

relations at a time when anti-gay sentiments were reaching fever pitch. In this context I consider how the artist conceived of 'Joe Tourist' as a persona for avoiding capture and touristic imperatives of access. Finally, finding pleasure and sociality threaded through Wojnarowicz's reading of environmental and spatial injustice, I argue that his photographic practice constructs deeply relational experiences of place that enrich his sense of being.

Developing the framework for persona as a critical aesthetic, the second chapter 'Chapter Two: Loser Environmentalism: Humourlessness and the Hero's Bluff in Eleanor Antin's The King' examines the artist's ambulation through *The King of Solana Beach* (1974–75), a multi-storied project that included an extended walking performance through Solana Beach in San Diego County, staged photography and theatrical revues of the King in *Battle of the Bluffs* (1978–81). While formally differentiated, these iterations respond to timely changes affecting Solana Beach's built environment. In developing the male persona, Antin gravitated towards King Charles I (1600–1649), a personage of imperialist rule and ignominy with whom she found a likeness. Crucially, Antin's King morosely dwells on might be called the 'obvious' option of 'melancholic resignation', casting him within several humiliating scenarios.[106] What makes this performance an insightful exploration of ecological behaviours, is how the claim of 'likeness' is drawn into the performance's embodied dramatisation of imperial relations.[107] This chapter develops a critical framework for reading the King in two ways: as a project with important environmental insight and as a critical performance of whiteness. Where revolution at the time of Charles' reign more accurately described the restoration of traditional values, what complicates the affective dimensions of character is that Antin develops the King as materially and metaphorically out of step with his environment and peers, marking his waning power as a product of his social irrelevance. With this, I contradict extant readings of the performance's mischievous humour as sentimental play, arguing that the work's use of historical juxtaposition gives rise to a form of 'loser environmentalism'. The rise and fall of this feudal overlord are staged by Antin as humourless, characterising a 'loser' who is unable to adapt and evolve. This affective dramatisation is crucial to the work's incongruity – provoking the values of mastery and hero worship that run across contemporary environmental debates.

[106] Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye*, p. 6.
[107] Ibid., p. 6.

The third and final chapter, ‘Goofing on the Margins: Screwball Survivalism in the Videos of Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn’ extends the theme of mastery through apocalyptic imaginaries of ecological survival in Southern California between the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Survivalism is a recurring ‘end of times’ trope in fiction that extrapolates lived scenes of economic ‘shock’, major health concerns, resource insecurity and climate crisis, as well as a cultural phenomenon with its own accelerated market. This chapter focuses on two video works by Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn that stage the comic behaviours and interactions of subjects within the anticipatory registers of the postapocalyptic and the video ‘demo’. The comic here engages the social and affective dimensions of survival by fixating on the absurd interpersonal negotiations in making life work. Within Dodge and Kahn’s send up of cinematic and media conventions I insist that the comic has a critical drive in locating environmental disaster within the lived environs of Southern California rather than the future anterior of escapist disaster genres. Because the destruction of Los Angeles has played out catastrophically to both real and virtual effect for nearly a century, the material historicity Dodge and Kahn lend this work gives insight into how economic interests shape the reception of crisis contexts. Calling Dodge and Kahn’s critical aesthetic a form of ‘screwball survivalism’, I argue that their videos are exemplary in producing a comedy around coping mechanisms, tied not to the levity of a diminished environmental condition, but to moments of comradery under crisis.

Chapter One: Checking out the Landscape: Automobility, Cruising and Spatial Injustice in the Photography of David Wojnarowicz

A Visiting Photographer

In early 1990, David Wojnarowicz was invited to give a lecture at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia as a visiting photographer. He accepted on the basis that 'visiting' reflected his relationship to photography: 'I have never called myself a "photographer"' he wrote in an essay derived from the talk; rather, he was someone who 'sometimes makes photographs'.[108] The artist's comment was about categorical distinctions rather than a lack of regard for the medium; for Wojnarowicz the camera was instrumental in 'preserv[ing] an alternative history' in the face of biased media representations that purported to reflect national interest.[109] While he didn't claim the identity of photographer, he spoke lucidly about the role of photography in his practice:

> I thought at the time that it would be making pictures of the world I lived in. One that was never seen on television sets behind the windows of electronic shops or in the pages of newspapers floating around the 5:00 a.m. streets. Or it was possibly an act of validation of our lives, something of value being implied in the preservation of our bodies.[110]

Wojnarowicz refers directly to his own practice, yet the passage speaks more broadly about the role of the photographer as an agent. While photography has long been used to arbitrate social value, Wojnarowicz suggests that critical interventions may also reconstruct the meaning of value itself as a form of social recognition. In the context of anti-gay legislation in the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, photography offered the artist a tool for disrupting visual representations made 'by unseen hands belonging to faceless people' that moved to criminalise certain persons:

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[108] David Wojnarowicz, 'Do NOT DOUBT THE DANGEROUSNESS OF THE 12-INCH-TALL POLITICIAN', in *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 138–62 (pp. 138–39).
[109] Ibid., p. 144.
[110] Ibid., p. 142.

Black, Brown, Indigenous, poor, disabled, houseless, and/or trans and queer.[111] 'Are photographs just tiny windows looking onto the world, frozen moments of it that lie flat and quiet without sound or smell or movement?' he wrote; 'To me, photographs are like words and I generally will place many photographs together […] in order to construct a free-floating sentence that speaks about the world I witness'.[112] To act as a witness to social injustices at a time when they were notably absent from mainstream media placed a responsibility on the photographer to show what the 'newspaper owner was afraid to address', namely lives and livelihoods disproportionately regulated by the state, shaped by imperialism and neoliberal retrenchments.[113] For Wojnarowicz, to name these forces was to practice survival in the face of what he called 'this killing machine called America'.[114]

Visiting not only reflects intermittency and transit but the discomforts of feeling *out of place*. In the introduction, I suggested that understanding place and identity as mutually constitutive allows us to think carefully about the affective sphere of environmental understanding. This chapter focuses on how Wojnarowicz used the camera and car – the latter an incongruous means of ecocritical engagement – as a pivotal tool for reflecting on the relationship of bodies, geographies and spatial governance. Wojnarowicz's photography reveals a sustained interest in the car as a lens and framing device for engaging spatial injustices. More than an interest in threshold spaces mediated by the car window, the landscapes that feature in Wojnarowicz's photography demonstrate a keen spatial awareness of land commodification and privatisation. Considering how these conditions both directly impacted the artist, as well as encouraged a self-reflexive consideration of the repercussions of settler-colonial regimes on communities of colour and Indigenous subjects, I understand Wojnarowicz's relationship to automobility as having fundamentally shaped his photographic practice, influencing core subjects and themes across his visual and literary work. In what follows, I consider the interstices of medium, technology and space to which the notion of visiting pertains, as relevant to place, genre and bodily state.

[111] Wojnarowicz, 'Do NOT DOUBT THE DANGEROUSNESS OF THE 12-INCH-TALL POLITICIAN', p. 143.
[112] Ibid., pp. 143–44.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 108.

The Last of the Beats

Transition, by desire and necessity, underscored the artist's acquaintance with the medium. When Wojnarowicz lived on the streets of Manhattan as a teenager he had been in the habit of 'sometimes mak[ing] photographs' after a street buddy had given him his first (stolen) camera sometime between 1972 and 1973.[115] Intermittent periods spent hustling and sleeping rough in Times Square meant that the street was primarily a place of survival, yet the camera led Wojnarowicz to engage with his surroundings on a visual level rather than merely endure them. He was not yet twenty and with no access to a darkroom or studio much of the film generated in these years was lost. This intermittent mode of picture-taking constituted by make-do circumstances proved influential, even after Wojnarowicz moved into an apartment and started to develop an artistic practice.

In the years that followed, Wojnarowicz would become connected to New York's East Village, a scene and locale in which he lived and worked through the 1980s, and an association that is lasting. As a writer, a band member of 3 Teens Kill 4 and HIV/AIDS activist affiliated with ACT UP as well as the small offshoot The Candelabras, his output exceeds characterisation even as his affiliations with the short-lived East Village evoke specific associations.[116] Wojnarowicz also felt conflicted over this exposure. Writing in *Artforum*, the writer Dennis Cooper described Wojnarowicz as one of the scene's 'few crossover stars'. As a result, he opined, Wojnarowicz's visual art bore the scene's failures.[117] At the centre of Cooper's piece were East Village galleries like Civilian Warfare and Gracie Mansion Gallery – spaces where Wojnarowicz had staged solo exhibitions.[118] The Hudson pier terminals Wojnarowicz had used as a studio and cruised

[115] Wojnarowicz kept early rolls of unprocessed film in bus terminal lockers. Once or twice when he failed to remember to top up the lockers, the contents were taken to a lost property and became untraceable. See Barry Blinderman, 'The Compression of Time: An Interview with David Wojnarowicz, in *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, ed. by Blinderman (Normal, Il: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1990), pp. 49–64 (p. 56).

[116] For further reading on the longevity of the East Village art scene see Julie Ault, *Alternative Art, New York, 1965–1985, A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[117] Dennis Cooper, 'Odd Man Out', *Artforum*, vol. 38, no. 2 (October 1999), 130–31.

[118] Wojnarowicz had solo and group exhibitions at P.P.O.W Gallery (1984–85; 1989; 1990), Civilian Warfare (1983; 1984), Gracie Mansion Gallery (1984; 1986) and Sensory Evolution Gallery (1984). Growing success, particularly in the wake of the Whitney Biennial in 1984, caused some conflict, and he frequently performed and showed his work elsewhere, 'keeping a foot in other worlds of writing, film, and performance' according to David Breslin, 'Chaos Reason and Delight' in *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night*, pp. 19–39 (p. 29). In Wojnarowicz's words, 'There was a point in 1984 when I was at the Whitney, which was very emotional for me to have certain kinds of recognition. That opened up doors left and right, and people just wanted anything with my name on it. It was unsettling, disturbing, confusing stuff'. Qtd. in Julie Ault, 'Notes Toward a Frame of Reference', in *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night*, pp. 75–111 (p. 92).

after hours were notably absent from the piece.[119] While loosely associated with the banner of the East Village, the collapse of a section of the West Side Highway in 1973 meant the piers were accessible only on foot or by bike. Cut off from the rest of the city, the terminals escaped the attentions of city officials, developers and commercial gallerists, a condition which attracted artists and photographers like Wojnarowicz, Kiki Smith, Alvin Baltrop, Mike Bidlo, Luis Frangella and Gordon Matta-Clark as well as those without fixed addresses seeking shelter (figure 1.1).[120] New York was thus not one orbit but two for the artist: the East Village and the Hudson Piers that the commercial scene couldn't commodify in the same way. Summoned at length in his writing, Wojnarowicz's contact sheets configure the piers as an erotic and social world and not just a location: bodies are exposed through portholes and apertures provided by broken windows, and graffiti and drawings of sexual acts decorate their walls (figure 1.2).

New York City was integral to the artist's life and has understandably been the focus of much scholarship on his work. Less charted are the periods he spent hitchhiking and freight-hopping across North America between 1975 and 1976, trips that would lead to longer stretches away from New York, including a spell working on an organic farm on the Canadian border and a year-long job as an 'egg bootlegger' in San Francisco. Clearly hooked by the road, his early journals are replete with Whitman-esque riffs: 'Into dense sound of all of America rushing forward' he recorded of the first day of one such trip, 'all the country moving […] crossing state lines into areas unknown myself now homeless (no base place) makes me feel that disconnectedness'.[121] Influenced by Kerouac, Burroughs and Genet's aesthetics of the hallucinogenic and picaresque, Wojnarowicz frequently wrote about the pleasures of itinerancy in these years.[122] Like

[119] See here the 2016 exhibition and accompanying publication on the creative life of Pier 34, *Something Possible Everywhere: Pier 34 NYC, 1983–84*, ed. by Jonathan Weinberg and Annie Wischmeyer (New York: Hunter College Art Galleries, 2016).

[120] With the commercial diminishment of the piers by modernising technology and the city's fiscal crisis, these spaces lacked public oversight. This negligence shouldn't be taken lightly, queer bashings were frequent yet roused little compassion. See police notices in the artist's papers. David Wojnarowicz Papers, series XI, subseries D, box 149, folder 35, Fales Library and Special Collections.

[121] Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 69. 'Egg bootlegger' was Wojnarowicz's term for a job in which he sorted eggs, see David Wojnarowicz and Cynthia Carr, 'Biographical Dateline', in *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night*, ed. by David Breslin and David Kiehl (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018), pp. 285–308 (p. 300). On stylistic similarities between Wojnarowicz's early prose and Walt Whitman, see the poem 'Song of the Open Road': 'Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road / Healthy, free, the world before me / The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose'. Whitman's poem idealises the road as the essence of life and liberty, see *Leaves of Grass: The Poems of Walt Whitman*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: Walter Scott, 1886), pp. 43–56 (pp. 43 & 56).

[122] As one former roommate recalled, '[h]e was very enamored of William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac and this sort of self-destructive brilliance'. Qtd. in Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 61.

Kerouac, he was struck by the realities of life for fruit pickers and farm workers he observed in agricultural regions; while Burroughs's novel *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* (1971) would compel Wojnarowicz to work on a script for a film version and an autobiographical novel based on Burroughs's cut-up method.[123] Back in New York Wojnarowicz met Herbert Huncke by chance – a poet and former hustler thought to have given Kerouac the term 'beat' and introduced Burroughs to narcotics. Wojnarowicz admired Huncke and when both their work was included in the published anthology *Low Rent: A Decade of Prose and Photographs from the Portable Lower East Side* (1994), two years before Huncke's passing, the acquaintance was brought full circle.[124]

The longstanding influence of Beat Generation writers on Wojnarowicz's work has been noted; for the artist and writer William E. Jones, Wojnarowicz was 'the very last of the Beats'; while for Fran Lebowitz, his 'love' of driving as a 'Kerouac thing' is evocative of the artist's interest in the methods of this intellectual and artistic generation as much as their creative output.[125] But my claim here is that automobility had a greater effect on Wojnarowicz's practice beyond a 'neo-beat' revival.[126] I consider how the car acted as a tool for navigating the taxonomies of tourism and the constructed character of the natural world, enabling Wojnarowicz to imagine future possibilities in coalitional politics without compromising nonconformist modes of queer being. I demonstrate that the social and artistic capacities of the car exerted a consistent force in Wojnarowicz's creative life that requires scholarly cogitation.

This chapter is sensitive to how Wojnarowicz's reflections on politics, culture and society extended across a range of artistic media. His visual art, writing and music spanned output and form, including painting, printmaking, photography, collage, live performance, installation and film (super 8 and 16mm), giving weight to his rejection of

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[123] Fiona Anderson, *Cruising the Dead River: David Wojnarowicz and New York's Ruined Waterfront* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 124. The beat's once-mythic stars fared the countercultural movement differently. Burroughs was proudly celebrated in The Nova Convention held in New York in 1978, an event that included Patti Smith, John Giorno, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and other luminaries. See John Rockwell, 'Disks: Nova Convention That Saluted Burroughs', *New York Times*, 27 December 1979: <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/12/27/archives/disks-nova-convention-that-saluted-burroughs.html> [accessed 10 September 2021].

[124] Included in the anthology were writings by Ameena Meer, David Wojnarowicz, Hubert Selby Jr., Herbert Huncke and Richard Hell, alongside photographs by Annie Sprinkle, Nan Goldin and Robert Frank.

[125] William E. Jones, 'A Season in Hell', *Artforum*, vol. 56, no. 10 (Summer 2018), 238–43 (p. 243). Fran Lebowitz: 'I think of David like the Beat poets, whose work he loved. […] David loved to drive places. It was a real thing with him, but it was also a kind of Kerouac thing'. 'Fran Lebowitz interviewed by Melissa Harris', *Aperture*, 137 (Fall 1994), 70–83 (p. 79).

[126] Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 61.

medium-specific boundaries. Sometimes these forms were directly overlaid, such as in excerpted passages exposed and reprinted in works such as *Untitled*, from the *Sex Series (For Marion Scemama)* (1989) or screen-printed over acrylic in his flower paintings exhibited as part of *In the Garden* at P.P.O.W. in New York in 1990 (figures 1.3 & 1.4). Wojnarowicz's writing could construct scenes at the level of cinematic composition and pacing, while his photographs, relational and often tightly framed, effected an elliptical writerly quality suggestive of pioneering approaches in American photography in the 1950s. The photography historian and curator John Szarkowski credited bodies of work such as Robert Frank's *The Americans*, first published in 1958, as ground-breaking in its production of images that were 'tentative, ambulant, relative, centrifugal'.[127] Frank, according to Szarkowski, didn't comply with American traditions of the medium that required 'the picture state clearly and simply what its subject was' but was highly responsive to experience that was 'kaleidoscopic, fragmentary, intuitive'.[128]

Wojnarowicz's characterisation of his images as 'free-floating' sentences in the opening quotation dovetails with the itineracies of place and subject in the work of the photographer Robert Frank, as well as a shared appreciation for combining photography, contact sheets, single-frame images from video and text in photo-collages. With regard to a seminal project like Frank's *The Americans*, this connection proposes Wojnarowicz's photography as a critical addendum to the genre and style of American road photography. Also, in his intertextual approach to the photographic image through manipulation, layering and juxtaposition, Wojnarowicz extends techniques that Frank ostensibly used in his return to stills photography after moving from New York to Nova Scotia in 1969. As Anne W. Tucker described of Frank's process, the words one might find in a photocollage like *Sick of Goodby's* (1978) (figure 1.5), 'were[n't] captions. Their purpose was not to describe but to direct. They were an integral component of the image'.[129] The influence of filmic time is palpable within both of their photographic practices, as is the self-reflexive intimacy of the camera as a diaristic form.

Despite Wojnarowicz's and Frank's shared publications, scholarship has largely fixated on conceptual links between Wojnarowicz's literary prose and Frank's photography. As a result, key opportunities to observe connections across their

[127] John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978), pp. 11–26 (p. 20).
[128] Ibid.
[129] Anne W. Tucker, 'It's The Misinformation That's Important', in *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia*, ed. by Tucker and Phillip Brookman (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 90–100 (p. 97).

photographic practices remain unaccounted for. Where the conceit of being 'on the road' is more synonymous with settler cultural histories of transit rather than migration, Wojnarowicz's automobilised vision extends this artistic lineage through the latter half of the twentieth century while complicating chained associations between medium and nation at stake in these photographic legacies. Connecting the artist's photographic work and negatives to an expanded sense of road photography, I demonstrate how Wojnarowicz thought keenly about the relational conditionality of the camera to its environment as a contextual rather than representational medium. Given that Wojnarowicz often framed environs in his writing through photographic as well as cinematic composition, the camera's capacity to challenge forms of reality was of clear interest to him. Frequently these scenes contained frames for looking – whether the edges of domestic and car windows and structured vistas – amplifying the situational conditions of the environments in which the photographs were taken (figure 1.6). In particular, the artist's contact sheets relay this fractured condition, as if outlining the perturbations and energies of daily circumstance, as Wojnarowicz put it in 1989:

> [E]verything I do with a camera is like a journal. I take fragments of things. If people were to look at my years worth of negatives, they would wonder what the hell was he shooting at? [...] People wouldn't know if they were looking at a piece of Ohio, or a piece of California, or a piece of the 12th Avenue Expressway. Yet, I can look at some of these contact sheets, and there can be something that's so charged with a certain kind of energy or memory and smell and sight.[130]

Cross-reading photographic material in Wojnarowicz's archive with his published essays, stories and journal entries pieces together a highly sensory account of these landscapes and the imaginaries these fragments support. But as I consider in the following section, the contact sheets configure an acute sense of spatial subjectivity that is not simply reducible to their latency as source material for subsequent collages, paintings and intermedia works. My theorisation of the artist's contact sheets instead presents these as conceptual tools for expanding and contracting time and space through their specific narrative possibilities. In doing so, I articulate a mode of reading Wojnarowicz's

[130] Sylvère Lotringer, 'David Wojnarowicz [interview]' in *David Wojnarowicz: A Definitive History of Five Or Six Years on the Lower East Side*, ed. by Giancarlo Ambrosino (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), pp. 157–95 (p. 163).

photographic oeuvre that moves centrifugally from the contact sheets in the artist's archive out through his photography and film. To echo Kelly Baum's sense of 'unconventional, extra-artistic … site[s] of creation' associated with the post-studio practices of American art in the 1950s and 1960s, Wojnarowicz's use of the medium can itself be figured as *incongruous*.[131] As a methodological intervention, I invite the reader to think photographically rather than *about* photography and to use this as a frame for how Wojnarowicz related to space and to spatial justice across media and form.

Automobility: From the Beats to Postmodern Geographies

The sensorium produced by automobility is vividly rendered in Wojnarowicz's journals and monologues, with motion conceptually and metaphorically conceived.[132] At the Hudson piers, the distorted effects produced by the partial sightlines of shattered windows at night cast erotic illusions that produce multiplying male bodies in 'cinematic motions unfolding before [his] eyes'.[133] The embodied narrator of these writings cruises the night and post-industrial architecture as much as the bodies that pass within them, an experience only intensified by half-lit misrecognitions and imaginings. Where Wojnarowicz engaged in some of the scenes of his description, many encounters are also staged in profilmic detail or from a discrete distance, as though perceived with a telephonic lens. This is also the case for his monologues, an early edition of which was published as *Sounds in the Distance* by the London publisher Aloes Books in 1982 and to which William Burroughs contributed an endorsement. Wojnarowicz was keenly aware of how the erotic possibilities of automobility made for compelling literary extraction: he had read John Rechy's *Numbers* (1967), a novel chronicling the obsessive pursuit of hook-ups by its handsome protagonist, the former hustler Johnny Rio, within the car-centric landscaping of Los Angeles's Griffith Park.[134] Though eventually dropped from the final version, his aesthetic tooling of automobility in his first collection of 'road

[131] Kelly Baum, 'On the Road', in *New Jersey as Non-Site*, ed. by Kelly Baum (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), pp.11–55 (p. 14).
[132] It is also a reflective space where he recalls and processes dreams. See Wojnarowicz's transcribed audio tapes (1981–1989) in David Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth: The Tape Journals of David Wojnarowicz*, ed. by Lisa Darms and David O'Neil (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018).
[133] *In the Shadow of the American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz*, ed. by Amy Scholder *(New York: Grove Press, 1999).*, p. 136.
[134] Wojnarowicz seemed underwhelmed by *Numbers*. In a journal entry from September 1978, he wrote: 'there's a lot I could do with the material had there never been books written by him'. See Scholder, *In the Shadow of the American Dream*, p. 62.

philosophies' is clear, given that he considered adding the subtitle: *35 Monologues from the American Road*.[135]

While Wojnarowicz's lyrical appreciation of being in motion was amplified by his experiences of cruising the derelict Hudson waterfront and adjacent car parks, his writing also collaged atmospheres and environs from other travels.[136] In fact, Wojnarowicz wrote extensively about cruising by car as it capacitated social encounters and casual sex beyond his familiar environs of New York City.[137] In *Close to the Knives*, these possibilities seem to emanate from the landscape itself.[138] As his vehicle swings by a passing car, the momentary frames of bodily fragments linger as a 'fractured bare arm' or a 'dim face'; he imagines their arms reaching through to embrace him as their cars pass each other, conserving the sexual atmosphere of motorised hook-ups in the elongation of cinematic time.[139] Driving between Holbrook and Flagstaff, Arizona, he recalls a fantasy of his youth where he imagines riding a motorcycle over a cliff. He describes the weightlessness before his body is harnessed by gravity, but instead of a downward fall, he simply vanishes.[140] Wojnarowicz further articulates the Arizona landscape as mnemonic; here, 'time expands and contracts' to reveals 'bursts of bodies and situations' from 'months […] years ago'.[141] Such visceral scenes inculcate the sensory drifts through time and space that car travel accorded for the artist, drawing a chronotopic register from the road in which his environs could be viscerally encountered.

In addition to visiting California and Arizona, Wojnarowicz travelled to South and Central America and lived between Paris and Normandy from 1977 to 1979. Despite these trips, Wojnarowicz's work is primarily framed through the lens of New York City, as the site of habitus and return.[142] Though I am not the first to observe the art historical pre-eminence of New York as a frame for the artist's work, my concern is directed at

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[135] Letter written to the editor Christian Bourgois while Wojnarowicz was staying in Paris, dated 16 October 1978, in Scholder, *In the Shadow of the American Dream*, p. 63.
[136] See David Wojnarowicz, *The Waterfront Journals*, ed. by Amy Scholder (New York: Grove Press, 1996).
[137] Particularly evocative is 'IN THE SHADOW OF THE AMERICAN DREAM Soon All This Will Be Picturesque Ruins', in Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, pp. 24–63; also David Wojnarowicz, 'Into the Drift and Sway', in *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline* (San Francisco: Artspace Books, 1992), pp. 9–13.
[138] For an account of the queer erotic pull of American roadways in the 1970s, see Dominic Johnson, 'Naked Hitchhikers: The Unknown Photography of William A. Rhoads', *Porn Studie*s, vol. 4, no. 1 (2017), 67–87.
[139] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 29.
[140] Ibid., p. 169.
[141] Ibid., p. 47.
[142] Hanya Yanagihara considers periods of time Wojnarowicz spent in Mexico as a geographic outside to the cultural environs of the Downtown scene, see Yanagihara, 'The Burning House', in *David Wojnarowicz*, pp. 67–73.

challenging the perception of automobility in the artist's work as a simple cultural revival of road photography, a view that risks trivialising the artistic insights as well as problematics Wojnarowicz negotiated in his journeys by car.[143] Those who spent time travelling with Wojnarowicz noted how creatively generative these trips were. Anita Vitale, who went with Wojnarowicz to Mexico City, recalled that '[Wojnarowicz] was stimulated by everything. He didn't sit quietly much'.[144] Vitale reports being amazed by how he would shoot out of the window while driving, sometimes, as Tom Rauffenbart, Wojnarowicz's partner of eight years observed, with one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the shutter.[145] Neither did Wojnarowicz ostensibly miss opportunities to take photographs when others attended on the proviso of a vacation. Travel companions noted how he would begrudgingly share photos from trips only when asked and that images he would share looked nothing like vacation snaps. Steve Doughton, who had travelled with Wojnarowicz on one such trip, stated his surprise in seeing one particular evening rendered so abstractly because '[David had] reduced this wild experience to anonymous sweaty male bodies in some bizarre state of rage and ecstasy'; even then, he concludes, 'David was making his art'.[146] It seems that Wojnarowicz did intend for this photograph to have another life: the photomontage *Spirituality (For Paul Thek),* (1988–89), where the wild and sweaty scene appears in its upper midsection (figure 1.7).

Rather than distinguish pleasure from creative endeavour, my interest lies in the artist's engagements with the car as a means of spatial and environmental mediation. By focusing on Wojnarowicz's imagemaking in the context of trips made between 1974 and 1991 (1991 being the year that Wojnarowicz made his last southwestern trip to Death Valley National Park in the Northern region of the Mojave Desert), I contend that automobility brought Wojnarowicz into contact with the cultural and environmental histories of these geographic regions in ways that both acknowledge and problematise conventional tourist profiles. As I set out in greater depth in the following section, the rolls of film taken on these trips reveal salient qualities about the artist's engagement with land use through his interactions with roadside vernaculars. I argue that the contact

[143] Carr describes Wojnarowicz as being enamoured with his wandering literary lodestars: 'Rimbaud leaving Charleville, wandering beneath the stars in torn clothes, sleeping in a Paris doorway, getting arrested and sent home as a vagrant. […] David romanticized that life, certainly he saw it as a model for how to think about his own experience'. Carr, *Fire in the Belly,* pp. 54–55.
[144] Anita Vitale, as told to Carr, qtd. in Carr, *Fire in the Belly,* p. 386.
[145] Rauffenbart described how 'Cameras were David's constant companions. […] Riding around in a car, David would snap photos through the windshield or from a camera held outside the window in one hand while steering with the other'. 'Tom Rauffenbart', *Aperture,* 50–54 (p. 50).
[146] Steve Doughton, as told to Carr, *Fire in the Belly,* pp. 289–93.

sheets are a fruitful place from which to cross-reference Wojnarowicz's written engagements with space because they give greater context to the transformation of landscape through tourism scrutinised in his writing and audio tapes. Visiting hotspots such as Meteor Crater in the northern Arizona desert, Wojnarowicz apprehends these locations as landscapes balkanised for capitalist profit (figure 1.8).[147] His camera eye hovers on the markers of access and restriction accorded by tourism, which defines these spatial relations through profit-centred appreciation rather than reciprocal community interest.

Driving this aim is the argument that cut-and-dry distinctions between Wojnarowicz's photographic prints and his contact sheets and negatives do not serve the expanded frame of the photographic he explored. Here understood as a mode of critical observation, I contend that Wojnarowicz's photographic vision should also be connected through engagements with gay and queer struggles for recognition and privacy in this period, proving salient for taking place outside of the usual urban quarters. These rights were explicitly threatened by reports of a spike in homophobia in the late 1980s, in part animated by rulings such as Bowers v. Hardwick (1986) and the legal overreach into privacy rights it emboldened. In the upholding of the Georgia sodomy law by the Supreme Court, private sexual acts were not only criminalised between consulting adults under Bowers v. Hardwick, but the right to privacy at home was fundamentally debated.[148] Activism around the 1986 ruling was attributable to the earlier galvanisation of the Stonewall rebellion as well as the anger that would flow into the formation of direct-action groups like ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in the months that followed. These contexts sharpen Wojnarowicz's sense of the car as a setting for erotic, social and artistic encounters, while exposing the surveillant apparatus – what Eric A. Stanley has called the 'technology of anticipation' – upon its interior.[149] As such, this chapter also conveys the stakes of automobility in Wojnarowicz's work as an important record of sexual autonomy staked in public space, a right for which gay, lesbian and trans subjects have long fought.[150] How the car moved within and was apprehended by

[147] See Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, pp. 167–71.
[148] The legal case *Bowers v. Hardwick*, in which the US Supreme Court upheld (5–4) a Georgia state law banning sodomy, was ruled on the 30th of June 1986.
[149] Sharon Hayes, 'The Creative Time Summit: Revolutions in Public Practice', in *Coming After: Queer Time, Arriving Too Late and the Spectre of the Recent Past*, ed. by Jon Davies (Toronto: The Power Plant, 2012). pp. 57–64 (pp. 62–63); and Eric A. Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 78.
[150] Nicole Seymour, *Strange Futures*, p. 135.

surveillant frameworks is vital to this discussion. Imaginatively 'populating' the car with virtual lovers as well as desiring bodies, Wojnarowicz's work indicates how fantasy and travelogue were intimately forceful in countering this form of social governance.

The car as an erotic space is contingent on the safety of its environs, where those engaged must negotiate the threat of overlooking authorities and danger of arrest. In this way, the car brings Wojnarowicz into contact with the conditions of space while requiring an amplified sense of social consciousness of the world around. Travelling could also warp the properties of time: 'moving in now or pretty much unexperienced environments keeps away the passage of time'.[151] Yet while the car suggests possibilities for attenuating the dimensions of lived time, the car isn't idealised in Wojnarowicz's archive. Rather, he recognised its limitations of insulation against external threats and prying eyes, as I later discuss with respect to *Untitled* (figure 1.9).

Through his work, Wojnarowicz acknowledges the ways in which tourist infrastructures extend the settler-colonial transformation of land and property relations. This takes place through his observation of incongruities between a received nationalistic culture and his own formulated understanding of its wider cultures. As such, I proceed by thinking carefully about how Wojnarowicz used the camera to mediate how disjunctive power relations shape or constrain without necessarily mitigating their effects. These are largely unsymmetrical relations articulated by the geographer Steve Pile as 'map[s] of resistance' that layer atop of 'map[s] of domination'.[152] Even where opposition to hegemony is unequivocally exerted, Pile suggests that resistance alone isn't enough to depose power axioms for good. How the car, camera and highway intersect in Wojnarowicz's account of the surveillant development of the built environment is of crucial importance. In fact, some of the most significant contradictions of late modernity concerning economic and social mobility, the commodification of the American landscape and appropriation of Indigenous culture, are amplified by this nexus of intensified visibility and movement. Wojnarowicz was keenly aware of these contexts: 'if you don't have a car, you own poverty' he observed in an audio tape from one of his

[151] When Wojnarowicz reflected on his bodily limitations in light of his seropositive status, he also used the car as a metaphor for mortality: '[T]his body is still a vehicle, and it's not breaking down'. Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, pp. 144–45.
[152] Steve Pile, 'Introduction: Opposition, Political Identities and Spaces of Resistance', in *Geographies of Resistance*, ed. by Pile and Michael Keith (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1–32 (p. 6).

travels – a comment that acknowledges the car as an agent rather than cipher in the apportionment of space.[153]

Making Contact: Windows or Mirrors?

Before proceeding, it is necessary to outline the primary materials under examination. Wojnarowicz's extensive contact sheets are held as part of the artist's papers at NYU's Fales Library in New York City. Those I draw on here refer in subject and annotation to a set of geographies the artist visited: New Jersey, Arizona, New Mexico, California and Mexico City, as well as locations in Europe, including Paris. While formalising a selection from this vast body of photographic material has practical considerations, more significant is how the selection reflects Wojnarowicz's self-reflexive engagements with touristic space. Given the limited and freely associative marginalia accompanying most of Wojnarowicz's contact sheets (figure 1.10), some interpretation has been necessary to my reading. In this, I am not the first to infer meaning through analytical cross-sections of the artist's work. In her introduction to *In the Shadow of the American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz*, the book's editor Amy Scholder specified that the selected were 'very much [her] own assemblage'.[154] That said, I am careful to not overinterpret this material as a discrete 'body' of work, a position Richard Meyer and Peggy Phelan took in their work on Andy Warhol's extensive negatives and contact sheets that were acquired by Stanford University's Cantor Arts Center in 2014. Although exhibition formats are not central to my reading, the ontology of these forms is important to clarify, as Phelan posed: 'is "the work" […] the entire contact sheet? Or is each exposure, whether or not it was ever printed, its own unique work of art?' [155] I offer an interpretation of the contact sheets as a printed form that provided a conceptual as well as practical purpose of allowing the photographer to review a set of exposures frame by frame and make decisions about enlarging and printing individual photographs. In this, I find evidence to support my claim that the contact sheets had an aesthetic pull for Wojnarowicz. Furthermore, in traced affinities between Wojnarowicz's photography and

[153] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 169.
[154] Scholder, *In the Shadow of the American Dream*, p. vii.
[155] In *Contact Warhol*, Richard Meyer and Peggy Phelan speak at length about reviewing some 130,000 exposures and 3,600 contact sheets by Warhol and the insights the collection provides into artist's photography. Meyer and Phelan, 'Talking Warhol', *Contact Warhol* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), pp. 14–21 (pp. 25–26).

writing, I argue that the contact sheets transmit an aesthetic-affective response to the environments in which he moved.

While archival access to the contact sheets at Fales Library has made this directed inquiry possible, their taxonomical positioning within this institution raises important scholarly considerations. With the exception of certain artists such as Warhol, contact sheets are often catalogued as part of an artist's papers, configuring them as supporting documents rather than visual entities in their own right.[156] Wojnarowicz's contact sheets demonstrate an attentive encoding of time and space through sequencing that is analogous to cinematic pacing, providing ample justification that closer inspection of their visuality is needed. On occasions, they instruct a narrative designed for the form, with compositions revisited and reworked. More than the connective tissue between Wojnarowicz's still and moving images, the contact sheets evidence the working out and motorisation of scene change and juxtaposition. Showing the *Rimbaud* series to a lover, Wojnarowicz reported how his acquaintance attempted to convince him that he should be 'doing cinema, moving pictures'. To his lover, the 'evident space in the photos' and sense of them as 'a clip from a series of movements' was closer to film than stills photography.[157]

Wojnarowicz also used the contact sheets as a material for his collages, lifting them from the preliminary or proofing stages of darkroom processing. For *Untitled* (1988), two spliced chromogenic contact sheets follow the outline of two men kissing, emphasising their embrace with a thick gold acrylic line (figure 1.11). Windows structurally constitute the piece, provoking the lingering question of whether photography *is a mirror*, 'reflecting a portrait of the artist who made it', or *a window*, 'through which one might better know the world?'[158] Each frame winks to another: a friend posing as Saint Sebastian in a dilapidated room at the Hudson piers then appears behind an oversized dog's head that has been stencilled onto the pane of a window. In an exposure on the left, friends gather around a pool table and wisecrack over plates of chips, a clipped wing of an airplane instantiating a sense of time passing. The contact sheet functions as two forms: a background and a structural device, inviting the viewer to look through and beyond the lovers' embrace. This makes the subject of the work

[156] Meyer and Phelan's quandary is slightly different in that it pertained to a substantial exhibition of the contact sheets, which involved selecting sheets taken by an artist who may not have had any intention in presenting them publicly. Meyer and Phelan, 'Talking Warhol', pp. 14–15.
[157] Scholder, *In the Shadow of the American Dream*, p. 160.
[158] Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows*, p. 25.

indeterminate – do we settle on the intimacy of touch or use touch as a lens? Further uses of the contact sheets as a conceptual conceit can be found in an unfinished video *Fragments for a Film About Peter Hujar* (1987–88). Sections of the film include a first-hand view of the camera passing along a contact sheet of the photographer Peter Hujar in the hospital after his death. The camera drifts over Hujar's face, hands and feet, following the sequencing of the exposures as if to conjure the physical revolutions of a camera moving around Hujar's body in the room. Wojnarowicz's treatment of the contact sheet as an index for movement rearticulates Hujar's presence, creating new temporal possibilities between photographic print and video.

Where much has been written about the photographic index as certifying something that existed, Roland Barthes' melancholic attribution of the photograph as conferring a lost presence through the 'that-has-been' (*noème*), is most emblematic.[159] The contact sheets in Wojnarowicz's *Fragments…* initially seem indicative of this loss, if it weren't for the central repetition that has the effect of displacing the singularity of a lost article. While living in Paris, Wojnarowicz had been interested in Gertrude Stein's method of the 'continuous present'. In a journal from 1979, he scrawled the extract: 'Real thinking is conceptions aiming again and again always getting fuller'.[160] Stein considered at length the possibilities posed by repetition in relation to the problem of writing in the tense of the present. Cinema offered an analogue for these phenomenological ideas, with Stein presenting her thinking in 'Portraits and Repetition' in the following terms: 'Funnily enough the cinema has offered a solution of this thing. By a continuously moving picture of any one there is no memory of any other thing and there is that thing existing'.[161] The insistence on images that grow and expand in the video provide a counterpoint to melancholic or sentimental form. The contact sheet becomes a generative point of return because its meanings grow and shift over time. Thus, where Wojnarowicz indicated his desire to preserve an alternative history through images, the contact sheets speak in the register of what the philosopher Marie-José Mondzain has described as 'all that which grows in the image'. For Mondzain, the

[159] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 78–79.
[160] Scholder, *In the Shadow of the American Dream*, p. 88.
[161] Gertrude Stein, 'Portraits and Repetition', in *Stein* (Penguin Group USA, 2001), pp. 287–312 (p. 294).

expanded, even 'inexhaustible' durations of images 'escapes the reduction of its presence to what [the image] shows'.[162]

Returning to *Untitled* (1988), we can see how the collaging of subject matter also confounds properties of inscription, unsettling polar distinctions between the photographer/the photographed, spectator/subject and visual art/vernacular imagery. The invitation to look through and beyond the embrace onto textured intimacies transports its viewer into the social worlds of imagemaking. The contact sheets are put to work conceptually, instructing a mode of framing that can be read alongside photomontage works like *Weight of the Earth* (Parts I and II), (1988–89), a diptych containing twenty-eight prints composed from photographs taken by Wojnarowicz on several of the trips already introduced (figure 1.12). In the following I discuss in depth the environs of Wojnarowicz's imagemaking by car, moving out from articulated centres to the greater geographies in which he moved and worked. Before this examination, however, I turn first to Wojnarowicz's relationship to self-image as a coded presence that allows for greater forms of identification and being beyond what is afforded by queer visibility.

The 'I' of Wojnarowicz's Public Persona

Wojnarowicz wrote extensively about how images circulate and are instrumentalised for ideological benefit. Much of his work through the 1980s and early 1990s responds to the rampant conservatism and sex panic during the first decade of the HIV/AIDS crisis. As the cultural historian Simon Watney wrote in *Policing Desire*, AIDS wasn't just a medical crisis, but 'a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure'.[163] Wojnarowicz's much-cited statement that, 'WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT I'D CONTRACTED THIS VIRUS IT DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO REALIZE THAT I'D CONTRACTED A DISEASED SOCIETY AS WELL' foregrounds the shaping of HIV/AIDS medical provisions, social services and cultural discourse in the United States by powerful institutions such as the conservative pro-Catholic organization The Catholic League and adversarial members of Congress like the senator Jesse Helms.[164] On record as referring to the historic 1987 March on Washington for gay and lesbian rights as a 'mob', Helms had forced through clauses to

[162] Briankle G. Chang, 'An interview with Marie-José Mondzain: what is an image?', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2019), 483–86 (p. 486).
[163] Simon Watney, *Policing Desire*: *Pornography, AIDS, and the Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 9.
[164] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 114.

provisions for AIDS research with an amendment that saw grassroots organisations, many of whom provided significant AIDS education and social services, lose their federal funding overnight.[165]

Advocacy for fair images emerged as a primary critique of visibility politics for gay and lesbian activists in the 1970s. This position was revitalised through the demands of gay, lesbian and feminist AIDS activists and organisers for their unprejudiced inclusion as medical subjects.[166] Wojnarowicz's work offered a crucial counterpoint to the portrayals of infirm gay men 'lost to' tragedy. These images filled mainstream American media outlets, with many paid for by health insurance companies.[167] Though the commitments of direct action shouldn't be confused with other forms of cultural activism, Wojnarowicz's interest in public accountability is echoed in his conceptual work of this period: Helms as a spider in *Sub-Species Helms Senatorius* (1990), for instance, deploys appropriation as a political act of calling out your antagonists (figure 1.13). For such reasons, the artist's work continues to be revisited by those engaged in efforts against HIV/AIDS criminalisation. In 1992, the journalist Elizabeth Hess had suggested as much: 'I keep returning to Wojnarowicz', she wrote, 'not to turn him into a deity (he was no saint), but to propose his work as a model for the '90s'.[168]

But, as I consider here, the first-person address in Wojnarowicz's work also presents a set of challenges in understanding his more experimental methods of appearance. His image was not entirely a product of his own making. Take the

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[165] Helms's amendment (No. 956) to the FY1988 Omnibus appropriations bill prohibited the use of federal funds for AIDS research that would 'promote, encourage, and condone homosexual sexual activities or the intravenous use of illegal drugs'. See Jan Grover, 'Safer sex guidelines and bibliography', *Jump Cut*, no. 33 (February 1988), 118–23. On the dissemination of AIDS information and its shaping of cultural discourse, see Douglas Crimp, 'How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic', *October*, vol. 43 (Winter 1987), 237–71.

[166] The emblematic slogan 'Women don't get AIDS… they just die from it' by the artist group Gran Fury encapsulates the absent recognitions of women and trans subjects as medical subjects until the Center for Disease Control (CDC) was pressured into expanding risk categories for the disease. See the sourcebook by the ACT UP, New York / Women and AIDS Book Group, *Women, AIDS, and Activism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990); Alexis Shotwell, '"Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die From It"': Memory, Classification, and the Campaign to Change the Definition of AIDS', *Hypatia*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2014), 509–25; and Monica Pearl, '"A Thousand Kindred Spirits": Reflections on AIDS Activism and Representations of AIDS in US Culture and Conversation', *Radical History Review*, vol. 140 (2021), 217–25.

[167] The fight for self-representation wasn't exclusive to the corporate mediascape, it also beset cultural institutions. Writing on protests around the exhibited series 'People with AIDS' included in Nicholas Nixon's photography exhibition at MoMA in New York City in 1988, Douglas Crimp signalled to a cultural readership that the activist demand for different pictures involved the visual arts. See Crimp, 'How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic', pp. 266–67. Crimp's 'Portraits of People with AIDS', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1991) is further significant on this point.

[168] Elizabeth Hess, 'Notes on the Blood-Filled Egg', *Village Voice*, 22 September 1992, n.p., p. 95.

photograph of Wojnarowicz's sewn lips by Andreas Sterzing used for the cover of Rosa von Prauheim's 1989 documentary film, *Silence = Death* (figure 1.14). Appearing head-on and looking directly into the camera, the resonance of the image depends on Wojnarowicz's existing profile, elevating him as a 'poster boy' for the acquainted. Wojnarowicz's stitched mouth conjures into bloody being the shouts of 'SILENCE = DEATH' that had spread as a wheat-pasted poster around New York City in 1987 before its adoption within ACT UP campaigns. Though echoing the direct address of his prose, Wojnarowicz both extended the realm of lived experience in his work and tinkered with personal history, most notably for his 'Biographical Dateline' produced on the occasion of his 1990 exhibition *Tongue of Flames*.[169] While some of the changeability in the Dateline can be forgiven as imperfect memory, fluctuations in personal chronology probe the emotionally patent qualities that have been appended to the artist's legacy. Autobiography as an *adjunct* to truth rather than a *witness* contributes an understanding of first-person pronouns in Wojnarowicz's work for establishing a position from which to project and connect with others. To think of Wojnarowicz's construct of the 'I' in this way factors the strategic legibility of self into analysis.

Where LGBTQIA+ subjects are often interpreted through defining markers of identification, I interpret the artist's use of persona as challenging the sanctioned terms of legibility provided by a heteronormative present. Rather than single out 'authentic' experiences in the artist's work, I pursue this consideration as a quality of experience when forced to interact with a world hostile to queer existence on its terms. Wojnarowicz's multiplicity of self can be read as partially and provisionally constructed: a fugitive mode of expression that confounds clarity. Taking Wojnarowicz's defamiliarised self as a mode of resistance to the capture of queer life, I argue that this emerges in his work in specific ways through his placemaking beyond the city. This permits a deeper understanding of contingent interaction between Wojnarowicz's photography and the places he transited for work and pleasure.

[169] In her introduction to the artist's 'Biographical Dateline', Carr appraises Wojnarowicz's inconsistencies as partially motivated by a desire to project a persona, noting that 'there was a part of David that always wanted to be masked'. She also considers how he accepted narrative fallibility, observing, '[h]e had decided to let everything in his emotional history become part of his palette, whether or not he remembered it accurately'. Carr and Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline', p. 285.

Rimbaud, Elsewhere

In Wojnarowicz's artistic practice, photography provided a medium for engaging with other subjectivities across time and space. In *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978–79), one of the artist's most examined photographic series, Wojnarowicz and three or four friends visit various corners of New York City wearing a photocopied mask of the nineteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud (figure 1.15). As the only known photographic portrait taken by the French photographer Étienne Carjat in 1871 reproduced by the artist Ray Johnson for the cover of the 1966 New Directions edition of *Illuminations*, the photocopy references a chain of circulations of the poet's image since its mechanical reproduction.[170] That Wojnarowicz's 'Rimbaud' haunts parts of the city selected through the lens of Rimbaud's imagined interest, demonstrates the significance of persona to the artist's subjective use of space. The series conjures new recognitions and encounters within a set of environs familiar to Wojnarowicz, as if extending the poet's much-cited and deliberated quotation: 'Je est un autre' (variously translated as 'I is an other' and 'I am an other').[171] In his identifications Wojnarowicz wasn't alone: Rimbaud's punkish rejection of an insular Charleville was idolised by various members of New York's literary underground in the 1970s – Dennis Cooper even dedicated the 1978 issue of his zine *Little Caesar* to Rimbaud.[172] Yet, ostensible parallels between Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz's biographical lives would make their contemporary comparison an enduring one.

Arthur Rimbaud in New York was Wojnarowicz's first photographic exploration of a recurring idea: the compression of "historical time and activity"'.[173] While *compression* here gives a sense of the artist's historiographic methods, it also indicates his attention to the signifier and signified in the dialectical relationship of the caption to an image. The captions for the series are elliptical, gesturing to an erotic linguistics beyond the intimacy pictured within the visual frame. The subtitle for one 'Rimbaud'

[170] Several scholars have speculated on Wojnarowicz's personal identification with Rimbaud, as well as how masking in this work enabled Wojnarowicz to simultaneously 'be himself' and to step outside of self-representation. See Lucy R. Lippard, 'Passenger on the Shadows', *Aperture*, 137 (1994), pp. 6–25 (p. 9). For an extended commentary on the series see Mysoon Rizk, 'Constructing Histories: David Wojnarowicz's Arthur Rimbaud in New York', in *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. by Deborah Bright (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 178–94.

[171] Arthur Rimbaud, 1854–1891, Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/arthur-rimbaud> [accessed 9 November 2021].

[172] This issue stages various male figures, from the actor James Dean to the artist Chris Burden and musician Syd Barrett as 'Rimbauds' of different eras, though none wore masks as Wojnarowicz did for his series on the poet.

[173] Wojnarowicz and Blinderman, 'The Compression of Time', p. 118.

engaged in a sexual encounter is '(Kissing)', yet beyond the physical encounter of these two bodies is the suggestive millimetric space between the paper mask and the model's lips that brush the verso of Rimbaud's face (figure 1.16). Most, if not all, reveal the poet spectrally visiting decrepit corners of the city long appropriated for informal sexual encounters, defying their socially sanctioned function within an urban economy through Wojnarowicz's anachronistic presence as Rimbaud.

In studying *Arthur Rimbaud in New York,* scholars have been attentive to the cross-temporal staging that takes place across a summoned late-nineteenth century Paris within late-1970s New York.[174] Where writers like Henry Miller conducted their own revisitation of the poet's life to speculate how Rimbaud might have lived in another century, Wojnarowicz's homage was intimately connected to the invitation to consider, as Fiona Anderson writes, 'where a contemporary Rimbaud might live and cruise'.[175] Though Wojnarowicz shared little about what these photographs meant to him at the time, scholars note the political project of temporal reconfiguration. Focusing on the presence of literary forebears such as Jean Genet in additional works made in 1978–79, Anderson configures Wojnarowicz's queer homage to these writers in collages such as *Bill Burroughs' Recurring Dream* (1978) and *Untitled (Genet portrayed by Brassaï)* (1979) (figures 1.17 & 1.18) as a mode of homage that is intimately constructive of 'interpersonal subjectivities'.[176] In *Arthur Rimbaud in New York,* Rimbaud's 'presence' can be read as an erotic recasting of history, a mode of writing the literary scholar Elizabeth Freeman has theorised as 'erotohistoriography' to name how queer historical figures may be creatively woven into the present through embodied encounters that treat 'the present itself as hybrid'.[177] Erotohistoriography provides a scaffold for Wojnarowicz's revival of a 'lost' Paris within contemporary New York. For Jonathan D. Katz, the artist's transchronic imaginary has significant implications not only for the self but for formations of community. The multiple is staged in Wojnarowicz's 'Rimbauds', writes Katz, thus moving gay liberation 'away from a narrative of individuality […] and towards a new, more historical consciousness'.[178]

[174] See Katz, 'Queering Masculinity', in *Masculinities: Liberation through Photography*, ed. by Alona Pardo (London: Prestel Publishing, 2020), pp. 42–49.
[175] Fiona Anderson, *Cruising the Dead River,* p. 102.
[176] Ibid., p. 129.
[177] Freeman, *Time Binds*, p. 95.
[178] Katz, 'Queering Masculinity', p. 49.

Anderson and Katz's readings of the Rimbaud series outline a mode of encounter with queer literary forbears that is plural and multi-tensed, providing a steppingstone to the role of placemaking in these encounters. Here, I demonstrate how the spatial remixing of the Rimbaud series provides an important entry point into how Wojnarowicz used persona to rearticulate the cultural definition of place. While *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* was created in New York, its spirit arguably lies in an earlier pursuit of travel that began with Wojnarowicz's 'neo-beat pilgrimage' to San Francisco in the 1970s. Not included in the final series, for instance, was the 'Rimbaud' Wojnarowicz had staged in Paris in front of the Eiffel Tower and in the grounds of Père Lachaise cemetery (figure 1.19).[179]

This omission from the exhibited series suggests that Wojnarowicz preferred the contrast between New York's post-industrial decline and the peregrinations made on behalf of Rimbaud. Indeed, the ambulation through the city warranted by the work is demonstrative of how performed and mediated actions animate issues of the built environment as 'partially connected to but also partially dislocated from spaces of domination'.[180] As city officials attempted to purge public sexual encounters in their clean-up of the city's twilight sexual economies, the series claims the city as momentarily *theirs* with the mediated persona of Rimbaud centring queer uses of the city that are incongruous with the normative functioning of the city around them. Rimbaud cruises the Meatpacking District and porn theatres in Times Square, areas with sexual economies under the hammer of gentrification. Through the deliberate juxtaposition of people and signs of sanitised commerce in the backgrounds of these images, Wojnarowicz demonstrates how gentrification not only dispossesses working-class and poor communities of their neighbourhood but also covers up its tracks. Just as Rimbaud couldn't have known Wojnarowicz's New York City, these locations would be transformed beyond recognition after Wojnarowicz's death, leaving barely *a trace*. While the series cannot be said to picture this material transformation comprehensively, it anticipates its changes with the elective pleasures of contact momentarily refusing the homogeneity and bright lights of regeneration.

[179] At Père-Lachaise Wojnarowicz made a set of 'graveside portraits', as indicated by a 1979 photograph of the artist propped up against Guillaume Apollinaire's grave cradling his head in reference to the poet's fatal head injury.
[180] Pile, 'Introduction', p. 14.

The use of persona is crucial to the work's transchronic engagements with space. Whoever dons the mask – whether Wojnarowicz or his acquaintances – are anonymised *as* Rimbaud, confounding access to their identity. As defamiliarisation was a central tactic used to justify the sweeping remodelling of Times Square, the work's relationship to anonymity is charged. Dog-whistling around 'strangers' uninitiated in 'community values' served as a tactic for building outrage about how an area was used. In this way, Wojnarowicz resists the visual determination of queer subjects as a 'visible totality', constructing a new map – one of desire and relation – through the work – one that is tactically incongruous with 'the systems in which they develop'.[181] Protected from the glare of city officials, the mask extends a counter-geography of 'contact' – a term developed by the writer Samuel Delany from the work of the urban theorist Jane Jacobs on the significance of 'no strings attached' interactions within cities.[182] Delany's account of gay sexual practices in New York is not only relevant to Wojnarowicz's sense of space but to core issues outlined in the thesis introduction around how the heterosexual and racialised fantasies of 'small-town safety' versus 'big-city danger' have supported the spatialisation of queer life as an urban existence.[183] Delany's text vociferously rejects the framework of public safety as primary motivation behind the development of Times Square in the 1980s, attributing its gentrification to the culmination of a real-estate master plan. 'What I see lurking behind the positive foreground of "family values"' Delany wrote, 'is a wholly provincial and absolutely small-town terror of cross-class contact'.[184] The notion of contact Delany sketches not only problematises the spatial determination of queers beyond the city, it also helps contextualise Wojnarowicz's strategic use of anonymity as a critical aesthetic.

With its transgeographic attributes amplified, the Rimbaud series reveals the influence of multi-temporal and spatial imaginaries on Wojnarowicz's broader work. Regarding this as a form of queer placemaking – a term elaborated by Halberstam to articulate how certain queer people relate to and embody spaces within postmodernism – frames the creative and erotic possibilities of inviting an 'elsewhere' within the

[181] Ibid.
[182] Delany is careful to stipulate his attention to *inter*class contact within the city, whereas Jacobs' text conducts an analysis of defined class relations. See Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 126–27; see also Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
[183] Given her homophobic characterisation of 'pervert parks' it is likely that Jacobs wouldn't have anticipated use of her theory to underscore queer social forms.
[184] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, p. 153.

characteristics of any given place.[185] As the geographies of literary modernism are brought into view through Rimbaud, the poet's extended peregrinations require some attention here. For Wojnarowicz, the poet's itinerancy was a compelling feature, not only for the settings in which he debuted his most well-known work but for his travels to the southern hemisphere. While Rimbaud was an influence for the artist through the 1970s, Wojnarowicz later downplayed this likeness through the indication that he didn't agree with the permissiveness around the poet's legacy.[186] In an interview by the arts editor Sylvia Falcon for a feature in *East Village Eye*, Falcon reported how: '[Wojnarowicz] does not share Rimbaud's boyish enthusiasm for evil'.[187] While 'evil' is ambiguous, the colonial temporality of Rimbaud's life provide an entry point. While he hadn't visited New York, he was an avid traveller within Europe, as well as Indonesia, Yemen and Ethiopia. In Harar, in eastern Ethiopia, he settled for an extended period, working as an arms trader and as a beneficiary of European occupation through the routes and laissez-faire principles expanded under colonial activities.[188]

The extent to which Wojnarowicz engaged with Rimbaud's chapter in Ethiopia can only be intimated, yet, as this aspect of the poet's life was widely known among the artist's peers, there is reason to explore this beyond coincidence. A year after Cooper's Rimbaud issue of *Little Caesar*, which also featured a selection of Wojnarowicz's series and text, Cooper published *Arthur Rimbaud's Travels in Abyssinia and the Harar* (the poet's first English language edition of his 'study of Africa') through Little Caesar Press.

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[185] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, pp. 4–6.

[186] These aspects of Rimbaud's life have largely been downplayed by publishers and biographers, even in new editions of his work as late as 1980. The German writer and ethnologist Hubert Fichte, reproved Rimbaud for his lack of engagement with the context in which he wrote his letters in Africa and his 'schoolboy prose'. More barbed is Fichte's accusation of 'poetic fascism', see Hubert Fichte, 'Revolution as Restoration: Jean-Nicholas-Arthur Rimbaud, Ethnologist', in *The Gay Critic*, trans. by Kevin Gavin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 213–50, originally published as 'Revolution als Restauration. Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud als Ethnologie' in German in 1980. Wojnarowicz likely didn't encounter Fichte's work as it was translated after his death. On the colonial framework of Rimbaud's poetic legacy see Rosa Eidelpes, 'Arthur Rimbaud and the Colonial Foundations of the Avant-Garde', published as 'A Plea for an Avant-Garde Ethnography', in *Love and Ethnology*, ed. by Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019). On the ethnocentrisms of Hubert Fichte's own work, see Roberto Strongman, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería and Vodou* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

[187] Sylvia Falcon, 'Twenty Artists: the emerging East Village art scene by the Art staff', *East Village Eye*, October 1983, 12–15 (p. 17); on Wojnarowicz's embarrassment, see Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 243.

[188] Though Ethiopia was not colonised by European forces in a traditional sense, the country was subject to an invasion by Mussolini's fascist government in 1935 as well as foreign trade interventions. Ethiopia's neighbouring countries of Eritrea and Somaliland also endured Italian colonial settlements. These are significant points, 'although Rimbaud never tried to profit directly from the slave trade, it is quite clear that no European could do business in Abyssinia without it'. See Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (Pan Macmillan, 2001), p. 391.

Wojnarowicz's desire to play down the likeness of the poet highlights Rimbaud's involvement in Harar as a potential factor. In light of the criticism levelled against the poet – from charges of poetic fascism to Sontag's rebuke of the poet 'mak[ing] a fortune in the slave trade' – Falcon's observation of Wojnarowicz's change of heart sets in motion a longer cautionary existence of *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*.[189] Looking at the work as an evolving site of identification, the series probes the construct of travel as leisure in the wake of transcontinental routes carved by colonial regimes. When appraising *travel* as well as the transitory in Wojnarowicz's photography, Rimbaud's personal history sets the ethnocentric attributes of wanderlust in view. Such attributes lie at the heart of contemporary critiques of 'queer tourism' that, for the queer theorist Jasbir K. Puar, risk replicating imperial paradigms when a 'singular axis of identity' is transported across the Global South.[190]

Wojnarowicz's changing relationship to the figure of Rimbaud provides an account of self-scrutiny in how colonial formations have historically fulfilled western artistic practices. When Wojnarowicz travelled to New Mexico, Arizona and California, as well as Mexico City, he reflected on his limitations as a tourist and the ethnographic ties in visualising these geographies. The time travel of this work through the lens of nineteenth-century travel prompts a corollary set of considerations, framing the complicit relations of twentieth-century tourism to historic settler-colonial formations. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* introduces concerns of access and entry, with persona here operating as both a tool of identification and reappraisal of the problematics of the past.

The Other Side of the Hudson

Beyond the Hudson waterfront, Wojnarowicz's attraction to other post-industrial geographies remains largely under-examined. With focus on the area of Caven Point in Jersey City, this section considers how Wojnarowicz engaged the post-industrial transformation of lands beyond New York City through the spatialisation of the car, the invention that first transformed spatial relations before being received by the earth in processing sites like Caven Point, a waste facility and scrap yard. Much like the artist's visual material from the piers, Wojnarowicz's contact sheets taken at Caven Point

[189] Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2009), pp. 1–34 (p. 5).
[190] Puar continues, '[t]he assumed inherent quality of space is that it is always heterosexual, waiting to be queered or waiting to be disrupted through queering'. Jasbir K. Puar, 'A Transnational Feminist Critique of Queer Tourism', *Antipode*, vol. 34, issue 5 (November 2002), 935–46 (pp. 935–36).

indicate a keen interest in how spatial conditions make different ways of seeing possible. In particular, the contact sheets demonstrate an attempt to link the state back to New York City through its peripheral status as a destination for cosmopolitan waste.

Kelly Baum has discussed how a post-1950s generation of artists including Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Dennis Oppenheim and Charles Simonds gravitated to New Jersey out of curiosity for its dump yards, crumbling cities and suburban sprawls, as well as in search of jobs and cheaper rents in the face of escalating rental prices in New York City. New Jersey complimented the developments of the so-called postwar avantgarde not only through the creative attraction to its '*otherness'* as New York's '"other" place: a "provincial", "backwater" state on the margins of a cosmopolitan center', it was also readily '*produce[d]*' by artists through prevalent motifs of desolation, ruination and blandness.[191] While Wojnarowicz appears to follow these tracks, his remapping of accumulated waste between New Jersey and Manhattan varies from the pattern of exporting artworks produced or enacted in New Jersey to a New York audience.[192] For a state subordinated to its affluent neighbour, the effort of material restitution in the contact sheets reappraises the 'vilified' county; beyond a 'host and muse' in conceptual terms, I consider how these demonstrate a material interest on the part of Wojnarowicz in the system relations of waste.[193]

Prior to its demolition, the waste facility and scrap heap at Caven Point was one of Wojnarowicz's favourite haunts.[194] He made the short drive with Peter Hujar on several occasions and both brought cameras. In one contact sheet, Hujar appears in the visual field, busy with his camera or a cigarette. Sometimes he is seen whole and at other points a hint of his person is captured from a distance (figure 1.20). In others, Hujar's body is obscured by the windshield and door of the car Wojnarowicz shoots from; indeed, annotations around the image read 'Hujar crucified'. Tightly cropped, Hujar swims out of focus while the roofs of industrial warehouses and steel canopies above are sharply rendered. In one, a car in front is tracked at mid-range by the camera with the next shot bringing into focus a car jacked up higher than Hujar's body. From Hujar's figure the camera tracks looming gaps in the rotten bridge beneath his body, revealing the fragile supports of the decking. Those taken at Caven Point lack a certain focus or quality

[191] Baum, 'On the Road', pp. 13 & 36. Baum also notes that as many of these artists were either born or raised in New Jersey, their returns to the state are also a form of homecoming (p. 45n9).
[192] Ibid., p. 11.
[193] On New Jersey as a 'host and muse' see ibid.
[194] Car, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 273.

of a directed shoot, such as of Wojnarowicz's friend and collaborator Marion Scemama who appears in the contact sheets wrapped in cloth and doused in mud at New Jersey's Great Swamp (figure 1.21). Yet the sheets from Caven Point reveal their own aesthetic inclinations. Hujar's movement through these environs fall under shadow from the towering structures at the site and at other points blend with the car's steel composite. Throughout, the car remains integral as a framing device in the act and experience of imagemaking.

While I do not suggest that Wojnarowicz sought to instrumentalise these contact sheets for an explicit environmental cause, the artist's picturing of New Jersey waste sites shows how locations like Caven Point were fascinating for Wojnarowicz because of how they accumulated late-capitalist detritus out of sight for New York residents. This registers Caven Point as an incongruous setting within public consciousness: a sequestered space on the peripheries of social interest that provided a playground of vistas and sightlines for Wojnarowicz and Hujar to explore. Caven Point also wasn't far from the artist's childhood home: Wojnarowicz grew up in Red Bank, New Jersey and largely came to reject it, finding the suburbs of his adolescence home to a reprehensible strain of conservativism. 'I grew up in a tiny form of hell called the suburbs […] the Universe of the Neatly Clipped Lawn', he wrote in 1990.[195] At Caven Point lies the accomplice of suburban growth in the piles of automobiles found rusting away; less the ghostly 'trash' of history as evidence of twentieth-century social values in conflict.[196]

Ruins have long been cast as disjunctive architectures that straddle multiple temporalities. Tim Edensor, for instance, describes the ruin as manifesting 'half-known ideas, fuzzy memories and dreams and fantasies in the shreds and silent things that remain'.[197] More than an oneiric symbol, however, the ruin is also a figure of cultural projection. Indeed, during the first decade of the HIV/AIDS crisis the 'ruins' of the Hudson piers stimulated metaphorical evocations of empirical or apocalyptic collapse. As language readily exploited by a number of well-known figures, this constructed the queer body as a social system, one in which, as Judith Butler described, 'any kind of unregulated permeability [would] constitute a site of pollution and endangerment'.[198]

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[195] An essay first delivered as a talk in 1990, later published in Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 151.
[196] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 93.
[197] Tim Edensor, 'Haunting in the ruins: matter and Immateriality', *Space and Culture*, issues 11 & 12 (2001), 42–51 (p. 46).
[198] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 132.

Recent scholarship has compellingly mapped the ruin away from bodily metaphors of illness to parse the material value the piers held for pre-1980 sexual cultures. Anderson, for instance, insightfully identifies a homophobic causality at play in the cultural preoccupation with 'ruin lust' for which the conservative revival of 'last days of Rome' linked queer cruising cultures to HIV/AIDS as the inevitability of disease.[199] Tracing the ricochets of metaphor between bodies and places, she argues that, beyond a chorus of homophobic metaphors, the erotic, creative and social reuse of the Hudson piers are actually embodied, lustful sites that 'provide us with a means of visualizing sexual liberation'.[200]

Caven Point has escaped such homophobic articulations. Yet, as Wojnarowicz's camera reveals, the site contains more than gauzy metaphorical ruins within 'a continuously re-membered past': it is a material outpost for industrial decomposition.[201] As with the Hudson waterfront, the shipping industry is integral to Caven Point's history, having once served as a major manufacturing and transportation hub for both sides of the Hudson. Deindustrialisation and the transition to containerised shipping left vast swathes of the Jersey City waterfront behind with operations at nearby Paulus Hook phased out in the 1980s and demolished by 1990. Against the backdrop of New Jersey's financial issues, Caven Point absorbed much of the state's industry. Though it was largely vacant from the mid-1970s onward, decades of heavy metal industry and local incineration had a deep impact on the site.[202] It is through these events that the Garden State would inherit the most sites of any state in the EPA's Superfund programme. As the writer Robert Sullivan articulated of the nearby Meadowlands, one of New Jersey's largest dump sites that Wojnarowicz and Hujar also frequented, '[it] was the nation's eyesore, the blight separating New York and America', while a 1978 federal report outlandishly describes the landfill sites as 'a swampy, mosquito-infested jungle [...] Where rusting auto bodies, demolition rubble, industrial oil slicks and cattails merge in holy, stinking union'.[203]

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[199] Fiona Anderson, 'Cruising the Queer Ruins of New York's Abandoned Waterfront', *Performance Research*, vol. 20, no. 3, 135–44 (2015), (pp. 136 & 140).
[200] Ibid., p. 143.
[201] Kathleen Stewart, *A Space by the Side of the Road* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 96.
[202] In response to excessive concentrates of contaminants, remediation efforts began at Caven Point in 1974, before partially opening to the public as Liberty State Park in 1976, a 1,212-acre land and water property on landfilled tidal flats created by the central railroad of New Jersey and the Lehigh Valley Railroad, whose lines had terminated there. The site is now home to Liberty National Golf Course.
[203] Robert Sullivan, *The Meadowlands: Wilderness Adventures on the Edge of New York City* (London: Granta Books, 2006), p. 17*;* the 1978 federal report is qtd. on p. 18; on Wojnarowicz and Hujar's visits to the Meadowlands, see Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 273.

Wojnarowicz's images of the Caven Point, with its rising stacks, might as well fit this description. Vestiges of the railroad jut through the swampy surface water (figure 1.22), while the rows of abandoned buildings capture the site's industrial architecture before demolition, when much of this site would be backfilled.

Wojnarowicz was certainly compelled by a prehistory of New Jersey, and at one point he described the nearby Great Swamp as a 'primordial place […] where dinosaurs once slept'.[204] The contact sheets visualise how industrial wastelands extend in two directions – accruing a past through the shouldering of late-capitalist detritus and extending into the future in the compound metals processed at these sites. In fact, mechanical dinosaurs do 'sleep' in New Jersey's swamps in the WWII ballast from Europe and styled Roman remains of the Pennsylvania Station, which sat between 31st and 33rd St in midtown Manhattan until its demolition in 1963, both of which were found submerged here. Wojnarowicz's contact sheets expose the socio-economic relations between urban centres and their surrounding localities, which are entreated to sequester and absorb cosmopolitan excess. Geography here does not operate ambiguously: it is attached to the locations that materially constitute its present. Through the spatialisation of Wojnarowicz's camera, the contact sheets enact a conditionality between localities, making it difficult to see them as discrete places. In visiting industrial areas, the artist found cars rusting into rivers and reported how 'You go along the rivers of any country into the industrial areas, and you'll see what's left of God. It's like a shell, a rusted shell'.[205] How Wojnarowicz responded to these cars rusting into the earth at these sites is a key distinction from anthropomorphic characteristics of bodily 'decay'.

Wojnarowicz's contact sheets also support a queer ecocritical analysis of body-environmental relations. Queer*ing* as a verb runs a flashlight over human values encoded within language, what Judith Butler has referred to as 'an exposure that disrupts the repressive surface of language—of both sexuality and race'; a *queer ecocritical* framework, as Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson put it, 'asks important questions at interrelated conjunctures of sex and nature' that frequently underline understandings of terms like 'environment' and 'nature'.[206] Mainstream environmental discourse has long deployed nonnormative sexuality as an ecological threat, using highly metaphorical

[204] Wojnarowicz in Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 383.
[205] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, pp. 118–19.
[206] Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 13; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 'Introduction', p. 5.

language to defend conservative and normative ideas, spaces and values.[207] Similarities extend through associated 'eco art' genres such as land art, to which the artist Robert Smithson has been associated. Smithson's account of the Passaic landscape in his photo-essay 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey' published in *Artforum* in 1967 prefigured the decaying 'body' of the ruin: cars are 'carcasses' whose 'indifferent backs' absorb the afternoon sun while 'sodomising pipes' actively pollute the river.[208] Smithson articulates gay sexuality as an incongruity that puts Passaic's natural features at risk. Placing Smithson's photo-essay in dialogue with Wojnarowicz's explorations of decrepit sites across the Hudson, Anderson reveals a consideration that is instructive to this point. While Wojnarowicz's work tells a different story to Smithson's articulation of defunct industry *rising* into ruin as a 'failed sexual economy', it also provides new insights into Smithson's practice through his metaphorical collapsing of so-called non-reproductive sites and bodies.[209] There are also significant implications for the ecological here. Though Smithson's text precedes the early years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, reading his somatisation of degradation along a continuum with Wojnarowicz's photographic engagements offers a telling view of how sexual panic features in descriptions of environmental blight as an unlimited source of moral outrage or derogation.

Turning again to the car in Wojnarowicz's contact sheets, we see how subject-spatial relations are articulated by the artist rather differently in the environs of Caven Point.[210] As his camera shifts from Hujar standing in the foreground to the background, the empty windows of abandoned warehouses float into view. Distance is always relative to the poles that establish it. With this shift, Wojnarowicz toggles bodies and land in

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[207] For an example of the weaponisation of anti-gay rhetoric in media reporting on wildlife areas, see Stephanie Mansfield, Homosexuals Disrupt Bird Sanctuary', *The Washington Post*, 3 December 1978: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/12/03/homosexuals-disrupt-bird-sanctuary/d26addc4-2802-43c2-adbd-ceb9f579a51c/> [accessed 3 November 2021]. Despite the developments of the gay and lesbian liberation in the 1970s, Peter Coviello argues that the HIV/AIDS crisis renewed national interest in apocalyptism, with calls for mandatory testing in 1987 and the tattooing of HIV-positive people. Coviello, 'Apocalypse from Now On', in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, ed. by Joseph A. Boone, Martin Dupuis, Martin Meeker, Karin Quimby, Cindy Sarver, Debra Silverman and Rosemary Weatherston (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 39–63 (p. 50). Wojnarowicz's contact sheets trace this history photographically across several newspaper articles, one of which reads 'AIDS tattoos'.

[208] Robert Smithson, 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey', *Artforum*, vol. 6, no. 4 (December 1967), 52–57 (pp. 54–6).

[209] Anderson, 'Cruising the Queer Ruins of New York's Abandoned Waterfront', p. 143.

[210] Further interest in Caven Point generated a film script with Steve Brown. The annotated storyboard opens with a description of two men driving by two 'furtive' lovers in a stationary car. The lovers appear nervous and are increasingly aware of being watched. In this way, the two lovers are placed within a 'trap of visibility' that risks violence from the passing men upon sight of their intimacy. Tension hinges on the interplay between the watcher and the watched through the car windshield.

relation to one another, undercutting the personified denigration evoked by Smithson. The effect produces a contingent rather than contiguous relationship between landscape and subject. Moreover, the frame of the car models a self-reflexive sensibility, evoking a set of untitled photographs of plane windows by the artist Zoe Leonard from 1989 (figure 1.23). In this series, Leonard troubles the image as a document created to authenticate experience. The car windscreen in Wojnarowicz's contact sheets, like the contours of Leonard's window, hint for the viewer the terms of its situated and circumstantial production. Leonard, who had shown the work to Wojnarowicz and been touched by his response to these images, suggested as such:

> People often seem to be under the illusion that that they are real, that a photograph is a real moment. I think that is ridiculous. For me it's not reality; it's a subjective view… I want to invite people to understand that a photograph is a work on paper. It's an object. It's not reality. It's not truth… This is my truth. And my truth is no [truer] than anyone else's.[211]

The frame of the windows in Leonard and Wojnarowicz's photographs reads as an effort to retain the essence of subjective experience without claiming to represent a social reality. Taking this full circle is an image in which a foreshortened gap between Manhattan and Caven Point produces the effect of an adjoined landmass (figure 1.24). A photograph taken by Hujar in 1976, *Landfill, Hudson River and New Jersey Skyline*, gives us this perspective in reverse: New Jersey seen through New York City (figure 1.25). Hujar and Wojnarowicz had both grown up in New Jersey and left it for New York, a detail that allows these two states to be held in tension here. In *Landfill, Hudson River and New Jersey Skyline*, concrete rubble and concrete posts heaped in the foreground are lit by the cosmopolitan buzz that is behind the photographer. The painted metrics on the posts suggest their former purpose as water level measures. Whether or not these are relics of the Hudson piers now cast aside, the shore location anyway rouses these associations. Looking out across the Hudson to New Jersey from the Manhattan shoreline, the foreshortened distance between the two states again produces the illusion of seamlessness; and rather than a sparkling New York that casts New Jersey in shadow,

[211] 'Zoe Leonard Interviewed by Anna Blume', in *Zoe Leonard*, ed. by Kathrin Rhomberg (Vienna: Secession, 1997), p. 12. For further context on Leonard making these images, see Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, pp. 419–20.

it is an electric New Jersey that floats above the Manhattan shoreline. It is a glitzy illusion of radiating light that Hujar endorses in the photographic gesture of turning from the 'centre' of Manhattan to the 'margins' of New Jersey.

Both *Landfill, Hudson River and New Jersey Skyline* and Wojnarowicz's contact sheets from Caven Point entreat their viewer to conceptualise an ontology of waste beyond what is conceivable to the naked eye, echoing, in a sense, Deborah Bright's call for landscape photography to tell us something about how we construct a 'social landscape'.[212] In attending to what lies in and is potentially submerged in the frame, the image alerts us to the material history of site beyond what has been purposely placed *out of sight, out of mind* by city officials. Within this spatial redrawing, a queer placemaking is also performed. Hujar is present in nearly every contact sheet from Caven Point. He holds Wojnarowicz's gaze and allows it to wander around him as he makes his own investigations. Wojnarowicz's dedication of five consecutive frames to Hujar's slow smoking of a cigarette invites a particular parsing of time. Focus on Hujar here returns the experience of time back to its referent, where the pleasures of wasting time may be spent as desired. Though undated, a timeframe may be constructed for the contact sheets. Hujar and Wojnarowicz met in 1981, meaning that these images were made against the backdrop of the political context of the HIV/AIDS crisis; their production is further linked in that Wojnarowicz printed a vast sum of his contact sheets after inheriting Hujar's darkroom following his death to AIDS-related complications in 1987. If pleasure is a form of resistance, then Wojnarowicz's photographing of Hujar at Caven Point and printing of the material from Hujar's darkroom extends both the time and space of these images at will, moving back and forth in time, as well as laterally across the Hudson.

The Car as a Studio

Wojnarowicz's use of the car for artistic, social and erotic encounters problematises cultural paradigms of modern and postmodern space. Though the automobile wasn't conceived as a visual technology per se, its role in landscaping vision has been of great interest to scholars engaged in the visual nexus of industrial and post-industrial space and

[212] Deborah Bright, 'Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography', in *The Contest of Photography: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. by Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 125–44 (pp. 135).

technology.[213] Examining the artifactual parallels between cinema and space, Vivian Sobchack suggests that the rise of American car culture in the first part of the twentieth century extended 'our capacity to see and make sense of ourselves' in time and space.[214] Kelly Baum has also discussed the profound shaping of postwar artistic production by the 'motorisation' of the United States, with the car influencing movement and gesture as well as extra-studio practices and locations. She notes how '[d]is-identified with the square canvas and deframed by the white cube, art [of the 1950s and 1960s] was spatialized' with configurations such as '"sprawl" and "spread" providing expanded conditions of perspective'.[215] Wojnarowicz's writing is populated with sights and scenes that are derived from his drives through southwestern states, while his photographic works, collages and contact sheets configure the car spatially and sensorially. As Wojnarowicz used the car in part as a studio during these trips, I do not deny that the car served a practical function. As noted by friends who travelled with Wojnarowicz on several longer trips, his car was often ambitiously packed with equipment and materials.[216] Given that the warehouses on Pier 34 where Wojnarowicz intermittently worked were demolished in 1984, it may be that he was looking for a new studio space.[217] Yet, I argue that the space of the car also offered more than what Baum calls a 'means to an end' for artists that had sought to transform the studio and gallery.[218] More than function or theme, the car and the road trip in Wojnarowicz's work enabled conditions of queer possibility from which art could emerge.

Wojnarowicz rented cars during many of these trips before purchasing his own car in February 1985: a green 1967 Chevy Malibu station wagon that he personalised by lining the Chevy's dashboard with tchotchkes and totems – one of the first was a figurine of St Lazarus and his attending dogs.[219] Though vastly compressed, the car was not

[213] On the aesthetic role of the car in wilderness settings, see David Louter, 'The Making of Windshield Wilderness, 1900–15', in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West,* ed. by David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pp. 249–50.
[214] Vivian Sobchack, 'The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic "Presence"', in *Post Cinema: Theorizing 21st-century Film*, ed. by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016), pp. 88–128 (p. 92).
[215] Baum, 'On the Road', p. 43.
[216] As recounted by Philip Zimmerman, 'This car is just loaded to the gills. We're all making sculptures, and we're going to be doing art on the road, so we need our materials. It was just absurd'. Qtd. in Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 289.
[217] Wojnarowicz's use of the car as a studio has not been widely discussed in scholarship. However, an obituary by Elizabeth Hess commends the artist's ability to 'fol[d] and put [his studio] in his pocket as he trailed around the country'. See Hess, 'Notes on the Blood-Filled Egg', p. 95.
[218] Baum, 'On the Road', p. 37.
[219] Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 273.

entirely different to the piers in its mingling of opportunity, function and creative motivation. Passengers could be purposeful in different ways, companions that became photographic subjects either in the car or between shoot locations. As such, the car pushes several conventions of photography simultaneously, inviting consideration of the mutability of photographer and subject, candid and posed qualities of the image in Wojnarowicz's visual work. While I do not pursue these thoughts at length here, the qualities of these contact sheets raise questions of value – whether artistic, personal or archival – and what was intended as components for collages or enlarged as photographic prints. For this chapter, however, more significant questions loom about the potential with which Wojnarowicz imbued the car to both offer an expanded communal space for friends and lovers, as well as an embodied place from which to experiment with the visual and optic economy of the automobile, as a technology indivisible from the development of American photography.

The aesthetic confluence of car and camera wasn't new in the 1970s, 'if you were a serious photographer in the 1960s […] you needed a car as much as your Leica' surmised the critic Karen Rosenberg.[220] Rosenberg's article invoked a coterie of male photographers, such as Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander, who journeyed across the United States to capture their 'mirror' view of an economically divided populace. The author Don DeLillo sketched this dichotomy in his 1971 book *Americana* to dramatic effect. His protagonist David Bell, a hubristic Manhattan highflyer, is nostalgically drawn back to the world he left behind during a visit to his rural hometown of Old Holly:

> The streets were somewhat less than broad and people could be seen walking at all hours of the day and evening to the stores on Ridge Street. There were no parking lots in the middle of town […] There were many hills, nagging little curves instead of neat intersections, and the sight of headlights picking out trees through low fog was, to a boy, something beautiful and rare, for the car was alien to this environment, its passage difficult and bizarre.[221]

[220] Karen Rosenberg, 'Landscapes framed by a Chevy', *New York Times*, 2 September 2010: <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/03/arts/design/03car.html> [accessed 15 September 2021].
[221] Don DeLillo, *Americana* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 131.

In *Americana*, the inhabitants of Old Holly can't help but be transfixed by the motor's gleaming presence.[222] The car is 'alien' to the vernacular, just as Bell now only deviates from his trajectory of upward mobility out of sentimentality. The automobile performs this class elevation metaphorically and materially, as the object that transfers its object holder between past and future, arrival and departure. However, it also refers to the question of placemaking. After all, *home* is not only a felt sensation but subject to external social expectations and judgements about how bodies arrive and depart. As Avtar Brah observes in the context of migration, diasporic spaces 'do not simply begin to take shape with the arrival of migrant bodies' rather bodies undergo *placement* whereby, '[t]hose who are "in place" also must arrive, they must get "here" but their arrival is more easily forgotten, or not even noticed'.[223] Amplified by the fleeting apparition of Bell's car, those who have stayed put in Old Holly exist in a figurative premodernity.

Heightening this atmosphere by slowing down the scene, the contrast of a rarefied mobility in a town 'not built for the automobile' portrays the divisive realities that have cohered around the automobile in the twentieth century.[224] It is a dichotomy that extends beyond fiction as a defining characteristic of American road photography into the 1960s. Reflecting on Robert Frank's work, for instance, Peter C. Marzio considers how '[Frank] photographed the *nonmobile American*, the working classes who live the life of a specific place'. Mapping old-world imperviousness onto a more 'natural' way of life, he contends that 'Frank's people appear to have an *organic connection with their environment* and to be oblivious to the whirligig of a mobile society'.[225] For Marzio, technology is profoundly periodising; jukeboxes, radios and televisions in Frank's photographs are indicative of a popular culture '[brought] to the people […] their expectations of moving up in society appear to have died generations ago'; he concludes that the 'only mobile person in Robert Frank's *The Americans* is the artist himself'.[226]

To examine these connections is to do more than coincidentally drop Wojnarowicz into this genre. It is to consider how he engaged with the characteristics of a medium that licensed, not without shock and scandal, 'truths' about the American

[222] For further consideration of the car in DeLillo's fiction, see Elise A. Martucci, *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).
[223] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (Routledge: London and New York, 1996), p. 16 [emphasis added].
[224] DeLillo, *Americana*, pp. 131–32.
[225] Peter C. Marzio, 'Introduction', in *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia*, p. 6 [emphasis added].
[226] Ibid.

nation to pass so influentially, as W. J. T. Mitchell has described.[227] It is worth pointing out that Mitchell's sense of subjectivity doesn't automatically create space for nonnormative subjectivities and how they might relate to paradigmatic concepts such as nation, gender and sexuality, and indeed, the natural. Yet, a queer reading of these relations not only provides a forum for Wojnarowicz's critical sensibilities to take centre stage, it also refreshes a 'hypercanonised' work such as *The Americans*, by asking whether Mitchell did not in fact selectively frame Frank's photo-essay in normative terms.[228] As Wojnarowicz's photography invites us to see, *The Americans* in fact contains liberatory ways of being and living in the world whose brilliance is inadmissible to societal pressures (figure 1.26).

Wojnarowicz would have been keenly aware of the affinities between Frank's work and those of the Beat generation: he had multiple editions of *The Americans* (1968) with Kerouac's introduction, as well as later editions of Frank's first retrospective book *The Lines of My Hand* (1972) and *From New York to Nova Scotia* (1986). Being in Hujar's company for years most certainly would have enlivened these connections. Yet, where influence may have offered the catalyst, Wojnarowicz's interest in the car as a photographic space challenges perceptions of Frank's exceptional mobility and attraction to the premodern.[229] This is significant given how critics continue to reify these traditions decades later. Introducing photographs made between 1972 and 1973 in a reedition of Stephen Shore's *American Surfaces*, Bob Nickas uses the analogy of cinema to account for the body of work as 'a road movie […] in which its protagonist is 'drawn to *the bleak and the mundane'*.[230] In similar terms, Nickas evokes the language of social impassiveness also used by DeLillo: 'nothing seems to be happening' Nickas contends,

[227] W. J. T. Mitchell, 'The Ends of American Photography: Robert Frank as National Medium', in *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 272–93 (p. 276).
[228] On Frank's hypercanonisation, ibid., p. 276. 'In Frank's photo-essay, the men are never shown with children. The women, by contrast, are usually shown as warm, sweet, and nurturing, enveloping and protecting the children'. Ibid., p. 288. Further characterisations of fatherhood and family can be found on p. 289.
[229] Or indeed of Kerouac's praise of Frank's 'awakening' vision. A year after their initial meeting, Kerouac accompanied Frank on a trip from New York to collect Kerouac's mother in Long Island, producing the text 'On the Road to Florida' as a result of this experience. In travelling with Frank, Kerouac felt convinced of photography's superiority to produce an image of the road because the photographer noticed 'details writers usually forget about'. This experience highlighted how, as Elsa Court writes, 'photography may return the obvious to the common passerby, better than the writer could'. See Court, 'Off the Beaten Track: Jack Kerouac on Robert Frank', *MoveableType*, vol. 8 (2016), pp. 24–33 (p. 32); and Jack Kerouac, 'On the Road to Florida' (1958), *Evergreen Review*, no. 74 (January 1970), pp. 42–47.
[230] Bob Nickas, 'Introduction', in Stephen Shore, *Stephen Shore: American Surfaces* (London: Phaidon, 2005), pp. 5–11 (p. 7) [emphasis added].

'or something wholly remarkable has been recorded'.[231] For Wojnarowicz, the indexicality of 'car to Leica' didn't concern a style nor did it capture a premodern American society left behind. Rather, his contact sheets retain the indivisibility of the photographer from the tools used to engage the subject, with the car a constitutive tool in the framing of people and space. Moreover, the experience of automobility is folded into the experience of travelling with others; we are afforded a sense of who travels in the car with Wojnarowicz as they arrange themselves in relation to the camera. In a series of contact sheets taken c.1984 in California, Wojnarowicz turns the camera away from the road to focus on the car interior. The camera trails from the road ahead to seated passengers (figure 1.27). He tracks their movements as they clamber on the hood of the car, collapsing inside and outside space through the prismatic spaces of the windshield, side and rear windows. Elsewhere, several contact sheets reveal the artist's experiments with the car's headlights as a light source to illuminate figures at nightfall. The sheets stretch the boundaries of interior and exterior space, pulling between a stationary vehicle and the moving pictures made in transit (figure 1.28).[232] A quiet drama is achieved in progressive shots and counter shots between the overturned car and a solitary figure inside an adjacent car lit by the car's interior light.

On a formal level, the contact sheets demonstrate pacing analogous to Wojnarowicz's films and scripts, many of which were collagist in form. Inculcating tension through the 'I' view of first-hand surveillance, Wojnarowicz uses the car's frame to explore how the divisions of interior and exterior space can be manipulated through certain angles and perspectives. If the subjects of Frank's photography were 'oblivious to the whirligig of a mobile society', Wojnarowicz's passengers tended to move with him, breaking the hermetic interior of the car as a sanctioned space.[233] The anxieties underlying this awareness are given greater focus in the following passage:

[231] Ibid., p. 7. Shore, who made his first cross-country trip in the late 1960s when he was twenty-four, was well aware of how photography was being used by conceptualism in the early 1970s. Shore's postcard-sized photographs drew on the visual ephemera that is stocked by roadside businesses, at one point Shore even roguishly 'exhibited' his images as postcards, replacing commercial stock on store carousels with his own versions.

[232] The phenomenon of the 'moving picture' began with late nineteenth-century moving projections, which, influenced by the aesthetic experience of the railroad, combined manual motorisation with built panoramas to echo the sensation of moving through a landscape. With the commercialisation of the car, Hollywood film sets sought to naturalise the movement of road scenes, typified by a stationary vehicle and a 'rolling' landscape.

[233] Marzio, 'Introduction', p. 6.

> Owning a vehicle, you could drive by and with the pressure of your foot on the accelerator and with your eyes on the road you could pass it quickly—maybe not fast enough to overlook it completely, but fast enough so that the speed of the auto and the fear centres of the brain created a fractured marriage of light and sound. The images of poverty would lift and float and recede quickly […] so that these images were in the past before you came upon them. It was the physical equivalent of the evening news.[234]

The above excerpt anticipates the fracturing of images as a result of the car's speed, in which scenes of poverty 'would lift' and 'recede quickly' into a comfortable distance. By comparing the car to the dissemination of public information – or even a media technology of itself – Wojnarowicz articulates the influence of American telecommunications on the car's affective economy of images. Such reflections signal a shift in thinking about the nexus of the car and camera as a documentary tool of a fractured modernity, one which mutually sharpens rifts in economic circumstances by fact of their prevalence as commodities. When acknowledged as a tool of perception and memory-making, the car has the capacity to shape images as much as the chemical processes used to fix them. If road photographers prior to Wojnarowicz gave the impression of imbibing a modern America bent to the will of the automobile through a 'culture [that] had conformed to its presence with new highways, parking lots, service stations and drive-in parks, restaurants and movies', Wojnarowicz's photographs occupy a different space in the genre by heightening the incongruity not *of* society but between the fractious experience of the car's liberational pleasures and its capacity to evaporate images of spatial injustice.[235] For Wojnarowicz, the scenes he collected from these trips weren't emblematic of landscape but of its *consumption*. The contact sheets demonstrate how road photography may not only survey this alienation but catalyse ways of seeing and being seen.

Where driving at speed elevates an understanding of how space and technology constitute social relations, the artist's interest in the car windshield as an interfacial surface analogous to windows and television screens is notable. Indeed, the question of whether a photograph is a window or a mirror can also be asked of the windshield, which

[234] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 31.
[235] Tucker, 'It's the Misinformation That's Important', in *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia*, pp. 90–100 (p. 95).

allows one to look ahead as well as behind through the rear-view mirror. Backgrounds, as Sara Ahmed contends, are not actual places but a result of visual priority. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'becoming oblique', Ahmed suggests that in bringing what is 'behind' to the front we create a new angle: a 'slantwise'.[236] Where the car is an agent of this prioritisation, the rear-view mirror is an adjustable field of vision that conducts an 'aslant' view on the exterior environment – a mode readable within Wojnarowicz's manipulation of seeing. In the following section, I discuss this as a holding of the surveillant gaze through a mode of inverted or countersurveillance performed by those subjected to scrutiny. In Wojnarowicz's work, this form of looking back takes place through the slowing down or detailed rendering of sequences that would otherwise disappear at the press of the gas pedal.[237]

Road Culture and the American West

To those familiar with the visual rendering of Southwestern states, photographs and contact sheets taken by Wojnarowicz engage the wider environs of the interstate through Arizona, New Mexico and California. Taken from the car, they risk reception as generic images of passing through an 'American West', scantly telling the ways in which Native American territories such as the Navajo Nation, which straddles Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, has borne some of the nation's greatest environmental harms through extraction and pollution.[238] It is important to mention that even as the Wojnarowicz called out conditions of spatial injustice and environmental determinism, his work didn't explicitly engage in what the environmental health scientist Sylvia Hood Washington has called an 'environmental justice history' that looks to fostering socially equitable futures.[239] What I focus on here, however, is how his anger towards the domination of the US settler-colonial enterprise over Indigenous nations and border states influenced his approach to picturing these geographies. In his writing, Wojnarowicz acknowledged the

[236] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 4.
[237] To *render*, as Nicole Fleetwood has written, is a polyvalent term for which its common associations are technological. But rendering also makes 'an explicit reference to subjectivity, […] mean[ing] to make or become somebody'. Its various meanings—to purify, to surrender, to extract, to translate—all offer an account of 'the visual, visible, viewed and viewing black subject'. Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 7.
[238] Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 6–7.
[239] Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865–1954* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 11–12.

violent formation of North America, and the American West by extension, as a specific articulation of colonial power in which resources, lands, as well as identifications of *home* were fundamentally transformed through imperial methods of exploitation and territorial formation.[240] Yet, he also left a prevailing white-settler sentiment of conferring Indigenous life to the past via an 'ancient culture' unchallenged, as the following indicates:

> [I]f I'm making a painting about the American West and I want to talk about the railroad bringing culture—white culture—across the country and exploiting or destroying Indian culture as a result. If I go back into that period of time, since I wasn't around, what I do is—either by travelling through the West or looking at writings from Indians of the past—I see that there's a certain amount of information that is totally ignored in this country. That all of this is built on blood.[241]

As the journalist and historian Nick Estes contends, an overly historical view 'suggests that Indigenous culture or tradition doesn't change over time – that Indigenous people are trapped in the past and thus have no future'. While modes of exploitation have evolved over the course of settler colonialism, 'so too does resistance' to it, Estes observes.[242] As this isn't the only account of the artist connecting his critique of colonial destruction through experiences of travelling in the Southwest, it is worth some reflection. Wojnarowicz also provided a definition for the term 'pre-invented existence' when accounting for such a trip:

> I remember travelling out West and being a hundred miles between cities and stopping in the middle of nowhere – a totally blank landscape – and pulling off to the side of the road. I wanted to walk out across the plain because it was so much space, […] and I got out of the car and there was this little fucking fence completely surrounding this piece of land in the middle of nowhere and by law I

[240] As Ned Blackhawk writes: '[f]rom the use of the U.S. Army to combat and confine Indian peoples, to the state-sanctioned theft of Indian lands and resources, violence both predated and became intrinsic to American expansion. […] . Violence and American nationhood, in short, progressed hand in hand'. See Blackhawk in *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early America West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 9–10.
[241] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 118.
[242] Nick Estes, *Our History Is The Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), p. 21.

> can not step over that fence. […] By virtue of having being born a couple of centuries late, suddenly I can't walk on this land.[243]

The above language evokes the rhetoric of frontier freedom: 'being born a couple of centuries late' would concern the parcelling of Southwest states as a result of the Homestead Act of 1862, which diminished collective treaties and tied land ownership to an eligibility process. Yet, the Thoreauvian frame of 'walking' suggests the restricted liberties of access by the logic of property rather than the desire to access property rights, per se. There is ample evidence that the artist engaged in American civil rights struggles, race politics and Black liberation, including the work of the Black Panthers in the United States. But without an indicated connection with the work or insights of Indigenous resistance movements, such as the American Indian Movement, the project of alliance-building is not fully realised. As such, his critique of land rights is a rhetorical defence. What Wojnarowicz's statements do present, however, is an imagining of the terms of alliance through strategies that are aimed at acknowledging the reproduction of injustice through turning a blind eye.

Wojnarowicz's historicisation of Native struggles may be attributed to shortcomings rather than malice, as the artist's anger towards the destruction of Indigenous cultures by 'This Killing Machine Called America' suggests. Nevertheless, we should note the implications for Indigenous representation by culturally appropriative forms.[244] Although these themes have long been a part of readings of the artist's work, only recently have critics focused on specific examples such as totem sculptures in the artist's work. Of *The Lazaretto: An Installation About the Current Status of the AIDS Crisis* (1990/2019), a work made in collaboration with Paul Marcus and Susan Pyzow, Lou Cornum considers how handwritten text on one wall proposes gay solidarity around a 'shared death space' reciprocal to Indigenous, Latinx and Black experiences (figure 1.29). Such a space, Cornum argues, provides 'a flash of what a world without the killing machine of America and its ideological byproducts would look like if white gays could

[243] Wojnarowicz and Blinderman, 'The Compression of Time', p. 52.
[244] As Lou Cornum contends, the use of totems in the artist's work revolves around a practice of settler appropriation, in which the community-based art forms of the Tlingit, Haida, Kwakwaka 'wakw and Coast Salish peoples are turned into commodified and mass-produced tourist trinkets. See Cornum, David Wojnarowicz's Native American Inspiration and the "Killing Machine Called America"', *Hyperallergic*, 23 August 2018: <https://hyperallergic.com/456909/soon-all-this-will-be-picturesque-ruins-the-installations-of-david-wojnarowicz-ppow/> [accessed 15 September 2021]

reach out to others in the death space with reciprocity'.[245] Reciprocity is the operative word here. In his writing, Wojnarowicz addressed his own shortcomings as a result of the mediation of contemporary Indigenous relations within a white, settler culture, effected by his life in New York City. His stretches of travel in the vicinity of Zuni, Hopi and Navajo reservations would seem to account for his expanding awareness through touristic relations with these regions. Even here, Wojnarowicz doesn't deny his own tourisms, rather he problematises the figure of the tourist as an imperial paradigm of cultural 'discovery', applying pressure on his own interactions through the space of the work.

Comparative examples are useful in understanding self-reflexivity in Wojnarowicz's photographic work as a critical engagement with the camera's ethnographic inheritance. The docufiction *The Desert People* (1974) by the Argentina-born, California-based artist David Lamelas is a stirring example of how colonial knowledge formations embedded in cinematic tropes can be opened out to critical forms of production through the boundaries of its instruments. What begins as a classic road movie in *The Desert People* shapeshifts into a set of documentary-style direct-to-camera interviews with the car's passengers (figure 1.30). Apart from Manny, who is the last to be interviewed in the film, and who is placed as an interlocutor between the purported 'desert people' and the passengers he accompanies, members of the group cannot resist reaching for white-settler and US-centric cultural frames of reference in their ossifying and othering accounts of tribe relations. Revealing their reasons for visiting Tohono O'odham members in the Sonoran Desert – referred to monolithically in the film as 'the Papago Indian' (a colonial Spanish attribution long contested by tribe members) – the group individually detail their reasons for being in Arizona; one is writing up a feature on the 'contemporary Indian woman' for a leading New York cultural magazine. As the film progresses, the group become increasingly forthcoming about their limited interactions with families and individuals, offering educated summations on Tohono O'odham members as a group that are articulated like soundbites or press leads.

When Lamelas juxtaposes these sequences with scenes of the passengers travelling together, the group's curt interactions suggest a breakdown of interpersonal communication that makes their former loquaciousness 'on camera' feel phoney. *The Desert People* is intentionally satirical, yet the group's ethno-scientific analysis is no less comfortable as a viewing experience for at no point is the tension of the conceit

[245] Ibid.

alleviated. The film works on its audience on different levels, exposing a fundamental inability to reckon with a settler-colonial perspective and their methods of extraction. Like Wojnarowicz's road photography, the car serves a key role in connecting people across ethnic, racial, class and cultural backgrounds; yet the car is also the instrument of chaos in the film. While it physically reduces geographic distance between the group and their non-speaking subjects, the car ultimately fails to deliver the group to their destination, as the anticipated zone of understanding across cultural and linguistic differences. Instead, the car is hijacked by prosaic filmic traditions, from the thrill-seeking road movie to the heist, which, by the film's end, sends its passengers over the edge of a cliff to their fate (figure 1.31). With their subjects inadmissible to the body of film, the anthropological project malfunctions under this lack of framing power.

That Wojnarowicz recognised his own shortcomings in contemporary Indigenous relations, while he left unattributed Native American artistic and cultural forms in his critique of white-settler commodification, can be read as intersecting issues that reveal the difficulties of forming political alliances. In *The Desert People*, Manny's relationship to the group is never fully articulated. Seemingly an interlocutor who would ease communications between groups, Manny himself speaks to the camera interchangeably in English, Spanish and Papago, reproducing the creolisation of Native languages over centuries of colonial occupation and movement. English or Spanish-speaking audiences who do not follow Manny's speech must therefore remain where they are without assisted translation. When shooting in Mexico City, Wojnarowicz had reflected on how his images were produced from an external position as an American tourist.[246] This brought him to consider images of vulnerability inadequate as stand-alone artifacts because they interpret rather than affirm a reality. '[D]istance' he wrote, '[is] the same as not being able to speak Spanish and moving through the Mexican culture'.[247]

Wojnarowicz and Lamelas independently deal with the parallel legacies of photography and colonialism that historically encouraged and affirmed the acquisition of cultural artefacts, experiences and rituals across Turtle Island. Neither artist has

[246] Themes of Mexican spirituality and mythology in Wojnarowicz's work, including his exhibition *Mexican Diaries* at Ground Zero in New York in 1986, indicate that he was greatly influenced by his exposure to cultural forms on these visits, as limited as they may have been. The 'history paintings' in this exhibition continued the theme of the destruction of Indigenous cultures found in other parts of the artist's practice. On the attraction of Mexico to many Beat writers including Burroughs, see Jorge García-Robles, *The Stray Bullet: William S. Burroughs in Mexico* (Minneapolis, MI, University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and García-Robles, *At the End of the Road: Jack Kerouac in Mexico*, trans. by Daniel C. Schechter (Minneapolis, MI, University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
[247] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 129.

suggested that their work alone would enact a decolonisation of vision, but the question of position is broached at length within the work itself. Wojnarowicz's approach is more subtle than Lamelas' open satire of the doctrine of discovery but leaning into these considerations allows for a generative examination of how Wojnarowicz more broadly problematised these relations. *Lazaretto: an installation about the current state of the AIDS crisis*, particularly its wall inscription, is worth returning to here:

> We are living in a society that has accelerated to such a point that the person to press the button that releases warheads, the person who determines whether some of us have rights to abortion, the person who determines whether men can love men or women can love women or whether I should have to die of lack of access to health care because I'm Black or Hispanic or poor + white or Native American or that person no longer has to go to the scene of the crime to do their dirty work.

The loose subjectivity of the 'I' in the installation inculcates an accumulative framework for solidarity (figure 1.29). Accentuated by Wojnarowicz's rolling prose, solidarity-as-accumulation has important registrations for the critical function of persona. The relational mode that Wojnarowicz points to conceives of solidarity as a space of affiliation and shared commitment. Rather than seek to *humanise* suffering through a Levinasian model of evidentiary 'witnessing', it relays an anti-imperialist politics united in shared points of struggle. Foregrounded in Wojnarowicz's accumulative text is the institutional abuse of a profit-based healthcare system legitimised by Nixon and expanded through the free market under Ronald Reagan.[248] It is this shared activation of America's 'death spaces' that reaches outward from queer solitary to other freedom struggles.

The expressed difficulty of bridging understanding articulated and dramatised in Wojnarowicz and Lamelas' respective work can be considered starting points for an anti-imperialist visual practice. Scholars that deal with colonial afterlives invite a reimagining of political ecology through visual art, yet as outlined in the introduction I am also

[248] Lauren Berlant has called sentimental politics a 'terribly flawed vehicle' since the implications of this mode are that equitability is harnessed through feeling *better* rather than by addressing the abusive harnessing of emotions. See Berlant, 'The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics' in *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*, ed. by Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil, Maureen McNeil and Beverley Skeggs (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 33–47 (p. 34).

interested in how self-reflexive and reflective positions are realised in moments like Wojnarowicz's accumulative strategy. Here, I wish to distinguish the articulation of shared oppressions from that of calls for shared becoming, one example being James Clifford's notion of 'becoming indigenous' echoed by Demos as that of 'learning to live within a place consciously, paying attention to its specific nature ecologically and politically as much as socially and economically, […] and supporting a local politics of justice and equality'.[249] Inasmuch as these mark significant commitments and hopefully elevate Indigenous defenders on a global political stage, one of the risks of instrumentalising Indigenous perspectives for non-Indigenous principles is its prioritisation of respect for political, spiritual and philosophical connections through 'becoming' or a way of living, over and above holding federal, institutional and corporate agents accountable for genocide and environmental violence. Where Wojnarowicz explicitly names this violence through the multiple, Clifford's framework risks inscribing modes and practices.[250] The dialectics of seeing and being seen in Wojnarowicz's photography are sensitive to these issues, working in and under hegemonic conceptions of spatial belonging. As I consider, Wojnarowicz's reflections on the colonial co-emergence of image-making and tourism are also evolving, revealing a political and aesthetic commitment to challenging representational bias.

The Surveillant Order of the Highway

In Wojnarowicz's *Untitled* (1988), a police officer leans down to a figure in the front seat of a car with a slight curl in his hand as if to tap on the glass with his knuckle (figure 1.9).[251] The car's dark interior is set in darkness with the bright sunlight accentuating the officer's midsection and bouncing off the metal surface of the gun mounted at his hip. From the padded outline of blankets and other possessions, it appears that the car has doubled as makeshift sleeping quarters during a long drive. Here, as before in *Untitled* (1988) (figure 1.11), the window doubles as a framing device, drawing perspective in and

[249] James Clifford, *Returns*: *Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 7–8 & p. 315; T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), p. 271.

[250] The interpolation of Indigeneity in ecological calls to the past, particularly by non-Indigenous educators, scholars and activists, has been critiqued by a number of scholars, see Sandy Grande, 'Red Land, White Power', in *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 63–90.

[251] 1988, I suspect, is indicative of the date in which it was printed. The work is in the collection of the Tate: David Wojnarowicz, 'Untitled' (1988): <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wojnarowicz-untitled-p79864> [accessed: 3 November 2021].

through and inviting us to regard the image as a viewpoint, not just a picture. But with the presence of the officer, multiple interactions of scrutiny can be understood in interaction: the officer's introspective gaze as he scans the contents of the car, the postural stiffness of the driver in front and the person who takes the photograph from the back seat. This inverse mode of watching *back*, or countersurveillance doesn't produce a symmetrical form of monitoring, rather, it is an account of watching the watcher. The photograph is thus also an alibi for the trouble, arrest, death or any other potential outcome of an interaction between the body and the state.

In this section, I assess the relationship between Wojnarowicz's photography and the surveillant conditions he encountered on the road. *Untitled* makes the envelopment of the car by the officer's oversight claustrophobic. The person who takes the photograph, assumed to be Wojnarowicz, is positioned on the back seat, while the officer's body forms a physical barrier against the car door. That we are unable to see the facial expressions of the officer and driver renders this interaction ambiguous. To this effect, the threat is reduced to the authority of the officer's uniform and gun – a faceless yet all-encompassing power that mirrors the artist's expressed disgust 'just at the sight of their markings'. As Wojnarowicz remarked in one audio tape, the 'sense of the police who ride by' was a reminder of what took place in less crowded areas, with the police permitted their judgement of force and arrest, often beyond legal jurisdiction.[252] The anxious undertones of *Untitled* construct his roadway encounters as open to police surveillance on interstates and the domestic militarisation of passing convoys. Crucial to my appraisal is how Wojnarowicz used the car and camera as twin devices to meet this level of surveillance through a mode of countersurveillance.

In his writing, Wojnarowicz connected the threat of roadway surveillance to the amplification of scrutiny towards queer bodies as a result of sex panic in the 1980s and 1990s. Consider the extent of the watchful gaze of the police in Wojnarowicz's account: 'State police get lots of overtime pay lurking around interstate rest stops hoping to catch some hungry queer kissing another in the loneliness of the tiled bathrooms'.[253] Crucially, Wojnarowicz negotiates identificatory pleasures within this surveillant paradigm through one of its roadway figures: the tourist, who 'los[es] themselves in the sky for an afternoon'.[254] The tourist is a figure rooted in colonial legacies of commodified vision; in

[252] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 149.
[253] Ibid., p. 50.
[254] Ibid., p. 55.

Wojnarowicz's writing, this figure emerges as a foil for an afternoon spent otherwise. His essay 'In THE SHADOW OF THE AMERICAN DREAM, Soon All This Will Be Picturesque Ruins' best conveys the conditions of surveillance whereby officers were permitted to discretely film men in restrooms as well as solicit men whilst undercover in order to incriminate men deemed to be engaging in public sex.[255] This describes an abusive method in play through the 1960s until privacy laws involving the use of cameras in restrooms were legally restricted. Despite subsequent changes to the law, Wojnarowicz's journals refer to accounts of profiling male interactions into the 1980s.

William E. Jones's film *Tearoom* (1962/2007), a film comprised of footage shot by the police through a two-way mirror, offers context to this attention to surveillant production. Reclaiming a negated eroticism in material collected for surveillance purposes, *Tearoom* is a striking example of how the persecution of queerness in the 1960s extended through the prosecution of public sex, in which 'evidence' was proactively sought under pretence.[256] In rearticulating this footage, Jones doesn't only bring to light the ways in which queer sexuality has been constructed and circulated through carceral frameworks, he also indicates how this history enters cinematic history through the deceptive tense of the anticipatory crime.[257] While it is necessary to establish key differences between an edited and contained film like *Tearoom* and Wojnarowicz's imagemaking by car, Jones's film exemplifies an extensive network of surveillance measures that were likely embedded in the vernacular of Wojnarowicz's road given the 'lurking' cops of his description.[258] Roadside rest stops thus carry the road's surveillant

[255] In the case of the targeted surveillance, where film was notably excessive and expensive, the material costs often led to legal qualifications. In some cases, officers left footage rolling for days and as a result of having to pick through hours of footage felt compelled to justify the expense by making mass roundups. See Kevin Walby, 'Police Surveillance of Male-with-Male Public Sex in Ontario, 1983–94', in *Surveillance: Power, Problems, and Politics*, ed. by Sean P. Hier and Josh Greenberg (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2009), pp. 46–58.

[256] '*Tearoom* consists of footage shot by the police in the course of a crackdown on public sex in the American Midwest. In the summer of 1962, the Mansfield, Ohio, Police Department photographed men in a restroom under the main square of the city. The cameramen hid in a closet and watched the clandestine activities through a two-way mirror. The film they shot was used in court as evidence against the defendants, all of whom were found guilty of sodomy, which at that time carried a mandatory minimum sentence of one year in the state penitentiary. […] *Tearoom* is a radical example of film presented "as found" for the purpose of circulating historical images that have otherwise been suppressed'. See the artist's website for the full synopsis: <https://www.williamejones.com/portfolio/tearoom> [accessed 3 November 2021].

[257] As Walby argues of several Ontario trials of men charged with gross indecency between 1983 and 1994, data generated from these surveillance practices then passed into public culture through articles such as court documentation. Walby, 'Police Surveillance of Male-with-Male Public Sex in Ontario, 1983–94', pp. 46–58.

[258] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 50.

attention span. It is therefore unsurprising that these encounters are framed anticipatorily, from the silent and unannounced 'glide' of police vehicles to the radar towers that populate the landscape.[259] As Wojnarowicz's work suggests, the liminal geographies that allowed for erotic possibility were still subject to the watchful gaze of the state. It is through this awareness that Wojnarowicz configures the car as a viewing device, honing his attention on minutiae from the flattened bugs that accumulate on the windshield to the turtle that slowly crosses the road in front of him.[260]

There are several implications to figuring Wojnarowicz's erotic description of the car as central to his engagement with what he calls 'the landscape's agenda'.[261] Nonnormative sexual subjectivities are either largely missing from scholarly accounts of twentieth-century American road narratives or heterosexual identity and masculinity are read synonymously. In *Roads of Her Own,* Alexander Ganser draws upon several American road narratives by women. Beyond this largely masculinist history are stories that defy the 'dominant discourses of literary (auto)mobility and gendered space'.[262] But even in this examination, that includes contemporary queer feminist sexual subjectivities and charts important racialized, class and gendered formations, gay subjectivities are absented, leaving the 'masculinist' epistemology of automobility as monolithic as before. Ganser's argument that 'acts of spatial resistance' are 'capable of disturbing and upsetting normative geographies of gendered space' is an invitation I extend here to challenge the cultural paradigm of automobility as exclusive to heterosexual cultures.[263]

At this point it is necessary to attend to the legal terms of the car. Though the car's interior implies a private space that is cocooned from its environs, the car's status was partly settled in the 1920s by a Supreme Court ruling (*Carroll vs. United States,* 267 US 132, 1925), which indicated that automobiles no longer required the warrant required

[259] Ibid., p. 54.
[260] In one account, the bleariness of visibility is relayed in multi-scalar terms of 'entrails or […] body fluids […] illuminated like scratches against the sky when jet planes tear through the night at dusk'. Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 163.
[261] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 40.
[262] Alexandra Ganser, *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Road Narratives, 1970-2000* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 20.
[263] On the car's role in heterosexual courting, see Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1988); a useful discussion of gay cruising cultures can be found in Tim Retzloff, 'Cars and Bars: Assembling Gay Men in Postwar Flint, Michigan', in *Creating a Place For Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. by Genny Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 227–52. There is also Laud Humphreys' much cited *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1970/1975), which details the problematic efforts of its investigator to produce data on gay cruising at public restrooms.

of searches conducted at dwellings. This decision mandated searches on the grounds of 'probable' cause. Thus, in its legal framework, the car as a beacon of safety is a fraught assumption; it is a space open to obtrusion and injunction on the basis of a future potential suspicion or charge.[264] Queer pleasures, however, have creatively and intuitively formed resistance to such oversight. In this regard, Wojnarowicz's contact sheets from southwestern geographies indicate how a queer embodiment may find openings within a nationalised and policed infrastructure.

In a contact sheet taken in Arizona, Wojnarowicz shoots the open sky that surrounds the car through the rear-view mirror. Despite distinctions across the four major deserts of the Great Basin, Mohave, Chihuahuan and Sonoran, this region bears the weight of centuries of projection. From the region's deemed depopulation that provided the catalyst for Edward S. Curtis's ethnographic portraits of Navajo and Hopi subjects between 1907 and 1930 to Jean Baudrillard's notion of the desert's 'ecstatic form of disappearance', prevailing accounts typically strip these localities of their bioregional specificity.[265] The motion blur of images on this sheet indicate that they were taken as the car was moving; we cannot see the landscape without seeing the tools of production too. With scant traffic, the eye moves to its lumbering form of solitary trucks, scattered pylons and industrial structures that indicate an active working environment (figure 1.32).[266] Those shot through the rear-view mirror pull in two directions, cleaving perspective by looking beyond and through. On the fifth row, a shot of graffiti scrawled on a toilet bowl interrupts this continuity, its homophobic message a cruel reminder that anti-gay sentiments in the 1980s weren't confined to 'big-city danger' nor 'small-town safety' as Delany observed (figure 1.33). However, it is not the only graffiti Wojnarowicz's camera notices. Another contact sheet taken during a trip to Death Valley in 1991 includes several exposures of erotic messages that have collected around a glory hole on a bathroom stall (figure 1.34). Wojnarowicz dedicates multiple frames to these inscriptions, closely recording the text so that the penmanship is legible. While a few homophobic messages have been added, notes such as, 'sorry I missed your message, I

[264] In Humphreys' study the rest stop or public toilet at the edge of the park is amenable to fast exits, '[t]he getaway car is just a few steps away'. Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, p. 31.
[265] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), p. 5. On Edward S. Curtis' forty-volume edition of photographs that comprise *The North American Indian*, 1907–1930, see Shannon Egan, '"Yet in a Primitive Condition": Edward S. Curtis's North American Indian', *American Art*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Fall 2006), 56–83.
[266] Industry was often cited as justification for commodification of sacred lands, as Traci Brynne Voyles writes of the Navajo territory, 'military personnel and white settlers often took [it] to be desert, deserted, and agriculturally barren (but potentially rich in minable resources)'. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, p. ix.

really need 10-14 inches' reveal almost formal erotic postscripts to missed connections. These exposures are difficult to place within a tourist schema – the messages would likely be painted over and the glory hole plugged to reinstate privacy. Wojnarowicz's camera attentively renders these temporary geographies of queer contact. Through Pile's account of how layers form in relation to geographies of dominance, it is possible to think of the glory hole as a kind of spatial intervention, one 'drawn through power cartographies' while also 'exceed[ing] these confinements'.[267] Unfolding spaces and sightlines, the glory hole cuts through normative boundaries that enforce the social boundaries of bodies and waste.

Returning to Delany's notion of contact once more, we see how Wojnarowicz's inclusion of these trace encounters eschews touristic vision.[268] By foregoing the purported 'nonplace' of the desert as a highly specific set of overlaid encounters, Wojnarowicz's photography extends an erotic reciprocity across distance and time within vernaculars hostile to but precipitous for queer encounter. For the literary scholar Sarah Ensor, Delany's doubled use of the term 'fallout' is emphatically queer and potently ecological, making the term 'contact' useful for this dispersed sense of connection.[269] Pointing to Delany's description of a sociality as 'dispersed, muted, ambient' that help make liveable an environment otherwise antagonistic to queer sociality, Ensor considers how, in contrast to existing environmental imperatives predicated on restraint and 'lessness', Delany's account of fallout concerns interactions that 'unfurl collaterally' within an environment. Typically used to convey the atomised spread of radioactive contaminants, for Ensor this is exemplary 'not [of] slow violence but [a] slow intimacy'.[270] It is worth noting that these are largely theoretical considerations that extend cruising to a spatial practice of being beyond the confines of social regulation.[271] However, given that fallout also describes a transmissive threat to bodily security, the appropriation of a term that has long been attached to queer publics has powerful implications for the social-ecological relations in Wojnarowicz's attention to queer

[267] Pile, 'Introduction', p. 30.
[268] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue,* p. 142.
[269] The trouble with ethics predicated upon commitment to a 'common good' is that 'common' and 'good' are profoundly subjective. Sarah Ensor has noted that 'queer theory challenges the foundations (and foundational status) of both that "common" and that "good": invested not in chaste restraint but in polymorphous pleasures'. Ensor, 'Queer Fallout', pp. 149–50.
[270] Ibid., p. 163; Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue,* p. 183.
[271] Ensor suggests that through Delany's 'contact' we gain a mode of ethical relationality more realistic in understanding how action 'is only ever going to be provisional, partial, and minor'. Ensor, 'Queer Fallout', p. 164.

itinerant pleasures. These exposures extend the erotic fallout of the rest stop as the accumulative resistance to normativity. Wojnarowicz's attention to these inscriptions registers the protracted intimacies of the road. In doing so, he extends the rebuttal of others before him to spatially determine desert landscapes as a 'nonplace' unmoored in time and place.

Joe Tourist and the Tourist's Gaze

In addition to his memoir *Close to the Knives,* posthumously published audiotapes made during Wojnarowicz's trips of the 1980s and early 1990s contain some of his most significant reflections on the incongruity of his own lived experience with bodily experience organised within a social order.[272] As locations weighted with expectations and directed forms of engagement, tourist vernaculars are given particular attention.[273] Just outside of Meteor Crater, Wojnarowicz describes cruising a man in his parked car by the side of the road. Both men keep their eyes on the rearview mirror tracking 'cops that might come up behind us'; an empty sky is punctuated by radar towers and the 'whine of insects'. The safety net for this encounter is a readiness to 'act[ing] like Joe Tourist just checking out the landscape'.[274] Cruising here uses the foil of recreational capitalism as a cover, the identity of Joe Tourist a straight pretence in a world hostile to same-sex desire. If it seems gratuitous to draw Wojnarowicz's narrative account of diffusing a surveillant apparatus into dialogue with his photography, this engagement is already present in works like *Untitled* (1988) (figure 1.9). In an interview with the artist Nan Goldin, Wojnarowicz outlined the absurd jurisdictions that extended over them in the quiet landscape of the Arizona highway:

> NG: Was that real, the story about meeting that guy at the rest station?
>
> DW: Yeah. We were literally in the middle of nowhere, in a car. You could see hundreds of miles in any direction and not see a soul, and the fact that it was illegal for him to put his dick in my mouth seemed so completely absurd to be at the time, in that landscape. I wrote, "If a cop rolled up while I was lost in orgasm,

[272] See *Weight of the Earth: The Tape Journals of David Wojnarowicz*, ed. by Lisa Darms and David O'Neil (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018).
[273] These tape journals were recorded in 1981, 1982, 1988 and 1989.
[274] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 168.

> and I had a gun, I would have shot him." And been justified. And it all happened down the road from this major tourist trap, where that meteorite, a twenty-seven-ton chunk of metal hit the earth 500,000 years ago, and now some jerk charges five bucks just to look at the hole. It's so perfectly American.[275]

The proximity of the 'tourist trap' of Meteor Crater is more than a coincidental detail in Wojnarowicz's account of cruising: its transformation of the landscape into the preserve of private property and commercial opportunity exemplifies the injustices of criminalised autonomy and access, from the sign that reads '$1,000 FINE FOR DEFACING THE ROCKS' propped up by the rest stop to the alienation effected through the restructuring of cities by the twentieth-century automobile boom.[276] As observances of constructed norms in how society is taught to engage with nature, these experiences are synthesised through Wojnarowicz's accounts of cruising.

The composition of Wojnarowicz's Joe Tourist invites further consideration. Tourism occupies a vexed relationship to the ecologies of urban, rural and liminal sites of interest. Often qualified in nationalist terms of historical significance, its ability to support the interests of local economies, communities and stakeholders is rarely achieved. In Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, the bourgeois tourist is the protected subject for urban developers who ensure that this class of clientele feel safe enough to move freely between the street and their hotel.[277] As a substantial driver of the beautification of American highways in the mid-twentieth century, scenic byways and motorised national parks expanded family access to nature tourism, calling for urban and suburban habitués to be reconnected with the natural world beyond familiar parklands.[278] For this reason, the tourist straddles key conservation debates, what the environmentalist Roderick Nash called the 'chronic preservation vs. enjoyment dilemma', in which pleasure and ethics are diametrically opposed.[279] This framework, as do accounts of a sanctified and normalising mainstream discourse of environmental conditions identified in the introduction, imagine pleasure as incompatible with or even detrimental to spatial

[275] 'David Wojnarowicz interviewed by Nan Goldin', *Aperture*, 137 (Fall 1994), 57–62 (p. 8).
[276] Ibid., p. 169.
[277] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, p. 137.
[278] On a snapshot history of 'modernising' endeavours and conflicts, see Keith Makoto Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 18–19; as well as Timothy Davis, *National Park Roads: A Legacy in the American Landscape* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016); and Jamie M. Allen, *Picturing America's National Parks* (New York: Aperture, 2016).
[279] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 328.

justice. Because of the hostile period in which Wojnarowicz's mode of being is expressed, the artist's critical vision is leveraged on a deep understanding of how space is governed and arranged in favour of maintaining a natural order of bodies, ecologies and reproductive processes.

In a typical world, Joe Tourist arrives with his family or tour group. Though local residents and die-hard nature enthusiasts alike malign this readymade figuration – the 'Joe Bloggs' of the outdoors – this generic identity assumes a character that is both popularist and depersonalised. Echoing the many tirades by the writer and former park ranger Edward Abbey against 'industrial tourism' in the 1970s, 'Joe' is one such 'common' ecological subject identity that has been distanced from figures of *real* nature appreciation.[280] The early wilderness preservationist John Muir had expressed his disdain for visitors who flocked to Yosemite for 'points of interest' before sauntering off to other natural wonders. Following the popularisation of touring in the early twentieth century, the tourist came to represent urban day-trippers whose 'phony' interest in the natural world was revealed in their unsuitable clothing and misunderstanding of the terrain. Much of the disdain for tourists was not only class-based but outwardly racist and dangerously hostile for Black Americans entering these spaces, lest touring them, as Carolyn Finley has insightfully demonstrated of the reproduction of a 'white wilderness'.[281] Against the diminution of the day-tripper or the Sunday driver, the 'traveller' represented a 'higher breed', while the tourist is rejected in favour of a philosophically pure attachment to the natural world.[282]

With authenticity running deep within this context, the implications of appropriating a normative tourist schema are significant. Firstly, recreational capitalism works by consuming sites that make a landscape relevant for culturally historic reasons,

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[280] Edward Abbey, a figure with an ardent support base and pronounced sexist and xenophobic attitudes, chronicled his experiences as a ranger and nature rogue in Arches National Park. He, like many writers before him, sought to distinguish himself from the lowbrow tourist, coining the term 'industrial tourism' to describe the matrix of business owners, oil corporations, road-building contractors, automobile industry and willing 'mechanised tourists' that latched onto the image of wilderness. See Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (London: Robin Clark, 1992).

[281] On the role of America's racist and racialised imaginary of the 'Great Outdoors', particularly the repercussions of a dearth of visual and textual representations of African American subjects in environmental education and popular media, see Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), pp. 67–91.

[282] David M. Wrobel, 'Introduction: Tourists, Tourism, and the Toured Upon', in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, ed. by David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pp. 1–34 (p. 4). Baudrillard too laboured to distinguish travelling from tourism, writing: 'I reject the picturesque tourist round, the sights, even the landscapes […] Nothing is further from pure travelling than tourism or holiday travel'. Baudrillard, *America*, pp. 9–10.

from natural monuments and geological events to military and toxic tourisms. This frames landscapes as historical spectacles without necessarily engaging the reasons that make them part of the country's history. In this, the geographer Shiloh R. Krupar contends that the touristic trade of degraded sites is particularly perilous where it normalises toxic exposure 'as part of everyday life'. For Krupar, the commercialisation of nuclear and military testing sites through 'toxic tours', Cold War-nostalgia museums and decommissioned attractions distracts from ethical reflection on the forms of violence that fall disproportionately on marginalised communities and places.[283] Wojnarowicz's straight camouflage of Joe Tourist activates a secondary layer of experience. Readable within the artist's disdain for the constraints of the 'pre-invented world', Joe Tourist singles out *sight* from *site* as terms that have been consolidated by imperialist forces to legitimise the transformation of space through property and claim. In 'Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View', Rosalind Krauss observed that the 'point of interest' in American landscape photography is established by isolation of 'a natural wonder, a singular phenomenon that comes to occupy this centring of attention'.[284] Though Krauss doesn't explicitly discuss tourism, the logic of isolating 'points of interest' for commercial benefits gives context to Wojnarowicz's narration of multidirectional vision that emerges through necessity as much as desire. Suggestive of how queer embodiments have needed to operate on multiple perceptive levels, multiplying points of interest reveals the discursive framework behind being *taught to look* within touristic schemas; more significantly, it indicates how tourist subjectivity is scripted. While tempting to describe the performative qualities of Joe Tourist as formally queer, more powerful is the enlarged possibility that all profiles for engaging with nature are discursive rather than intrinsic or authentic – profiles that are subject to aesthetic scripts and moral expectation. This posits landscape is a *process* rather than a product.

[283] Shiloh R. Krupar, *Hot Spotter's Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 218.
[284] Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View', *Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Winter 1982), 311–19 (pp. 314–15).

Landscape as Erotic Medium

In *Landscape and Power*, W. J. T. Mitchell influentially proposed that we think of landscape as a medium rather than as a genre. Reimagined as a verb, landscape would then operate as 'an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even as agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human interactions'.[285] Mitchell explains this process as shaped by an ideology that is buried as a discursive absence thus making that landscape seem 'given and inevitable'.[286] As Wojnarowicz's 'Joe Tourist' enmeshes subject and landscape in the coarticulation of citizenship and belonging, it is a narrative form of personhood that is positioned in defiance of the road's surveillant optics and imperative to reify the aesthetic reproduction of nature. If, as Marguerite S. Shaffer contends, 'the tourist's gaze was achieved by the technologisation of a "roving eye", which extended forth in search of the picturesque', then Wojnarowicz's camera ostensibly operated through this visual schema to enact a perceptive and embodied encounter that couldn't be appropriated by a surveillant force.[287] In doing so, he located other looks and returning gazes. Directly evoking this dialogic vision, the following extract uses cinematic language to render the experience and speed of driving:

> [W]hen I see the workers taking a rest break between the hot metal frames of the vehicles, it doesn't matter that they are all actually receding miles behind me on the side of the road. I'm already hooked into the play between vision and memory and recoding the filmic exchange between the two so that I'm without a vehicle and I have my hand flung out in a hitchhiking motion and one of the men has stopped his pickup along the stretch of barren road.[288]

The visual 'play' evoked by Wojnarowicz unsettles the essential attributes that ordinarily 'make sense' of the land as aesthetic formation.[289] Angled at an inclination, the car's windshield avails a 'slantwise' view that offers a different perspective onto the landscape

[285] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 2.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), p. 180.
[288] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, pp. 26–27.
[289] The visual production of 'depopulated' landscapes that served narratives of conquest heavily relied on a singular viewpoint – a 'scaping' which cohered a sense of environmental totality. See John Adams, 'Performative Locations: Wilderness Space and Place in Early Film', in *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, ed. by Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart (Oxford: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2005), pp. 85–101 (p. 98).

outside. This view parses a scene of bodily transportation, in which his optical advantage over the hitchhiker at the whim of passing vehicles is traded, making him hopeful of being picked up by a worker leaving his shift. None of the men eroticised within this scene are part of the vernacular of aesthetic 'scaping'; the workers undertake temporary work on this stretch of road and leave at the end of the day. If the modern aesthetic designation of landscape generally overlooked how lands were (and continue to be) shaped by labour and industry, Wojnarowicz is attentive to personal load and grift, elevating, even idealising, bodies shaped by strenuous labour. Yet while the men are virtually subjected to his gaze, Wojnarowicz imagines a version of events where the workers direct the encounter. An audiotape recorded as the artist drove through Arizona extends this perception as a form of countersurveillance that openly eroticises the power relations of a military presence. Here, his vision becomes atomic, his eyes 'apertures' that exceed human possibility:

> And then out of the middle of nowhere, sometime in the late afternoon I started passing convoys of army trucks, some battalion units, various army vehicles, camouflage coloured, dark green… I could see the silhouettes of the drivers – young guys – the lines of their necks and their crew cuts, and their issued clothing.[290]

As limbic metonyms for capture and captivity, flesh half-revealed and silhouetted, the neck partially covered by a collar is tantamount to the erotic charge of privacy-in-public.[291] If spaces are typically organised around the straight body through, as Gill Valentine puts it, 'repetitive performances of hegemonic asymmetrical gender identities and heterosexual desires [that] congeal over time', Wojnarowicz's atomic rendering of the body extends through space to temporarily arrest the everyday militarisms of convoys.[292] This gives a new meaning to *passing*, reversing the discretionary appearances of undercover cop cars and camouflaged convoys, as well as the good and rightful experience of being in places of nationalised nature. In this way, Wojnarowicz draws remarkable lines between the persona one must use to live and experience fully the

[290] Wojnarowicz, *Weight of the Earth*, p. 163.
[291] Limbic extension also appears in Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 29.
[292] Gill Valentine, 'Lesbian Production of Space', in *The Urban Geography Reader*, ed. by Nicholas R. Fyfe and Judith T. Kenny (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 263–71 (p. 269).

liberations of queer desire and movement and the effort of maintaining a status quo: not the silent hum of police cars nor passing convoys may pass as facts of the landscape under his gaze, nor can the five dollars charged to 'look at the hole'; Wojnarowicz uses the nexus of the car and camera to catch the incongruities of these conditions.

Crucially, the visual information configured in these encounters is not without ambivalence. As he moves through the landscape, the erotic charge of the road both stimulates his imagination and furthers his awareness as an observer and accomplice of economic and racialised inequities. Wojnarowicz discerned landscape as a site of power, yet his interest in popular aesthetic forms such as the postcard demonstrates an interest in standardised forms. During such trips, the artist sent many postcards back to friends in New York (figures 1.35 & 1.36). Wojnarowicz clearly gained gratification from collecting ephemera from these travels. The postcard is perhaps an easy target within the commodification of natural *sites*. Wojnarowicz's writing corroborates these concerns, conveying the postcard with a shiny phoniness. Against reflection of his own bodily vulnerability, he calls out the postcard's 'con' that begets unrealistic expectations and advances blue-sky optimism:

> When I was out west this summer standing in the mountains of a small city in New Mexico I got an intense feeling of range looking at those *postcard-perfect* slopes and clouds. For all I know I was the only person for miles and all alone and *I didn't trust that fucking mountain's serenity*. I mean it was just bullshit, *I couldn't buy the con of nature's beauty*; all I could see was death. The rest of my life is being unwound and seen through a frame of death.[293]

This passage distrusts a universal image that would dare promise the good life, the postcard replacing the view of the mountains with a fixed, 'already over' version of itself. Reflecting on Wojnarowicz's account of these travels, the literary scholar Heather Houser suggests that his writings *somatise* landscape, noting how 'As [Wojnarowicz's] eyes sweep across the range, his fury mounts, and he rejects nature's aesthetic and salutary appeal'.[294] In this refusal, Houser argues that Wojnarowicz reframes the cruelty of what he called the 'con' of nature by expressing land *as a body*, in which 'anatomical

[293] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 113 [emphasis added].
[294] Houser, *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 62.

metaphors such as the hill's "hip" […] set up the promise – if not the fulfilment – of unmediated connection to the land'.[295] While the above passage refutes the aestheticisation of landscape, I am further inclined to push the postcard beyond a visual metaphor to consider how the form catalysed temporal possibilities for articulating experience differently to that of nostalgic remembrance. By reaching their intended recipients, Wojnarowicz's postcards expanded and contracted the durations of aesthetic and bodily experience (figure 1.35). The writer Vince Aletti, for instance, recalls how the postcards 'were like little films, queer road movies, abruptly jump-cut but vividly atmospheric […] sex was always in the air, just out of reach; its possibility lit up the landscape like a match dropped into a pool of gasoline'.[296] Inscriptions on the verso of these postcards often read like scenes from a film. At a rest stop, Wojnarowicz describes being stopped in his tracks when a shirtless 'motorcycle cowboy' walks by. He relays dropping to his knees and making the sign of the cross, signing off the postcard abruptly.[297] Aletti described these sporadic vignettes arriving in the post 'like strobes'.[298]

The slippage between real and fabricated experience fuelled ontological anxieties around the identity of the modern tourist. Appraising the shift from traveller to modern tourist, the historian Daniel Boorstin indicted cinema for setting unrealistic expectations of the sites it used as film locations; while for Zygmunt Bauman, the problem was the tourist itself. Under 'liquid modernity', the identity of the tourist lacked the purpose and spiritual reason of its antecedent, the travelling pilgrim.[299] Bauman considered how the tourist disarticulated experience by occupying a '*continuous present*' within an ahistorical timeframe, 'cut[ting] the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history, [and abolishing] time in any other form but a flat collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments'.[300] Yet it is the '*continuous present'* of the postcard Wojnarowicz uses to break with normative time and enact a queer temporality of travel along its verso. For the artist, the postcard, as a memento between the *here and now* of

[295] Ibid., pp. 62–63. Houser uses sickness as a central framework for reading Wojnarowicz's literary engagements with landscape. While HIV/AIDS greatly informed his work, I take a longer view of how these geographies shaped his practice.
[296] Vince Aletti, 'Postcards from David, 1983–91', in *David Wojnarowicz: Brush Fires in the Social Landscape*, ed. by Melissa Harris (New York: Aperture, 1994), pp. 129–31 (pp. 130–31).
[297] Ibid., p. 131.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Daniel Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Atheneum, 1962). Bauman theorised a transition from 'solid' modernity to 'liquid' forms in contemporary life through a decentralisation of social relations, identities, economics and relationships. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
[300] Bauman, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity', p. 24.

experience and the *back home*, could eek out fleeting encounters. Fusing artmaking and lived experience together, postcards thus allowed thoughts to linger, gather and roll as aesthetic responses to environments that fly in the face of the landscape's 'agenda' through the fantasies they invite.[301] These objects subjectively arrest and animate time, replaying encounters long after physical interactions. The postcard thus has a transformative purpose in Wojnarowicz's hands, extending environmental experience within an erotohistoriographic timeframe. When taken together, the contact sheets and postcards inculcate a queer placemaking between the here and the hereafter.[302]

Perhaps desiring the dramatic effects of a delayed arrival, Wojnarowicz continued to send postcards after he returned home. In the days that followed one trip, he sent a postcard to Peter Hujar from his apartment in New York, writing: 'Dear Peter, it's time to get together'.[303] Postcards, of course, straddle private and public spheres; its narrative erotics accumulate as they pass along a postal network, reaping incongruities of meaning through a coincidental audience. Typically sent without an envelope, their messages risk being read by any number of postal workers. It may be that Wojnarowicz was drawn to this errant readership when he left his epistolary daydreams open to chance encounters. But without a return address, mailing postcards from the road makes such missives effectively untraceable to their author (though not their receiver), temporarily liberating this mode of expression within the hostile climate of the late 1980s. Postcards, then, refuse the supposition that queer lives remain private.

The postcards only deepen the understanding of automobility in Wojnarowicz's work as a critical tool through which partial sightlines within the scopic ordering of the highway could be extended. When articulated through one another, the car and camera challenge how the artist's movements are hierarchically organised in space and the environmental encounter that is in turn directed by prominent cultural discourses of the late twentieth century. Beyond the imposition surveillance places on discrete individuals, Wojnarowicz factors his observations and imagemaking as part of an intensified experience of social oppression which involves harnessing the built environment through the economic, racialised and sexual zoning of space. The expanded view of the artist's photographic vision I have taken reveals how Wojnarowicz's *privacy-in-public* takes

[301] Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, p. 40.
[302] On the philosophy of the postcard, see Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[303] Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, p. 297.

place across his contact sheets and postcards rather than being attributable to any single artwork. This has ecocritical implications in that environmental experience, as a directed set of perceptual cues within natural environments, is thoroughly challenged by the artist. Moreover, that Wojnarowicz's doubling of 'points of interest' doesn't slot simply into extant narratives of ecological art, requires a reworking of what constitutes environmental experience in art history. If the aesthetic transformation of land into landscape obscures complex social and environmental histories has been well observed in art history, Wojnarowicz shows us how the separation of nature pristine or as 'refuge' from urban space is ideologically produced. Not only does Wojnarowicz complicate these divisions, but the watchwords of ecological art such as 'balance' and 'restoration' are also impractical here as targets for enacting environmental justice.[304] In demonstrating how Wojnarowicz navigated the social encoding of nature within geographies beyond New York – from conjugating the 'ruin' of Caven Point's to New York City to the persona of 'Joe Tourist' and the messages carefully photographed at rest stops in Arizona and New Mexico – the significance of these experiences can be traced across his wider practice, enriching scholarship on the artist's oeuvre. That these encounters are transported rather than faithfully rendered provides a conditional map of coalitional politics and placemaking, always in possibility.

[304] BJB, 'Review: Fragile Ecologies: FRAGILE ECOLOGIES: ARTISTS' INTERPRETATIONS AND SOLUTIONS by Barbara C. Matilsky', *Landscape Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 223–26.

Chapter Two: Loser Environmentalism: Humourlessness and the Hero's Bluff in Eleanor Antin's *The King of Solana Beach*

> Solana Beach is a small kingdom but a natural kingdom for no kingdom should extend any further than its king can comfortably walk on any given day. My kingdom is the right side for my short legs. But then Solana Beach fell upon hard times.[305]
>
> But can you really win? Have you ever seen a revolution that didn't swallow itself? Isn't defeat built into the world, as basic as carbon? Aren't we all doomed? We go out in the morning, and we're going to be defeated at night. If we have really bad luck, we'll be defeated at night.[306]

Time Travelling through Quixotic Kingdoms

On an old couch dumped in front of a row of weatherboard houses sits a bearded figure with shoulder-length hair (figure. 2.1). For 1974, the ruffled shirt beneath their cape is a dandyism just shy of the New Romantic trend; but from their scuffed leather boots to the creased chapeau on their lap, their clothing is visibly worn. The figure in question is the King, an early example of Eleanor Antin's performance personae enacted in a range of theatrical and live settings between 1972 and 1981. In the photograph *Men,* which forms part of Antin's *The King of Solana Beach* (1974–75), this setting is close to home: Solana Beach in San Diego County, where the artist moved in 1968. As Antin's reference to 'natural' kingdoms incites, the King is also a time-traveller, evocatively summoning the likeness of the seventeenth-century British King, Charles I. The King's wearied appearance and junk-filled 'royal grounds' are far from the historical largesse suggested by royal portraits of Charles (figure 2.2). And yet the King appears resolute; his body is upright, and he holds the camera's gaze firmly. The revolution may be doomed, its men 'defeated at night' as the epigraph describes, but Kings must carry on. This guarded profile of the King introduces the project's affective dimensions. Antin's King, I argue, temporalises *what comes after* failures of governance and when its leaders blindly plough on regardless.

Born in the Bronx in New York City in 1935, Antin developed several performance personae after moving from New York to Solana Beach with her husband, the poet and art critic David Antin and their one-year-old son. David had been offered a

[305] Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series VIII. Photographs, 1965–2007, box 39, folder 10, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[306] Howard N. Fox, *Eleanor Antin* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art Catalogue, 1999), p. 219.

position in the visual arts department at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and as director of the University's Mandeville Art Gallery. Eleanor too commenced teaching in the department, but also pertinent was the desire for new scenery; as she put it, 'We were street brats, New York brats, and it was getting boring'.[307] Southern California was a departure from the easterly bias of the American art market during the 1960s and 1970s, a city enthralled by currents in pop art, minimalism and the Judson Dance Theater that had taken seed within the city. While conceptualism offered a potent site of intermedia investigation in this period, there was limited scope for women artists in the institutional embrace of conceptual practices; indeed as Lucy Lippard later admitted when reflecting on the first of her 'numbers' shows, *Number 7* in May 1969 at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York: 'I am ashamed to say that there were only four and a half women in *Number 7*: Christine Kozlov, Rosemarie Castoro, Hanne Darboven, Adrian Piper, and Ingrid Baxter (who was half of the NE Thing Co.)'.[308] This proved a source of frustration for Eleanor, who had begun using her physical body as a medium to explore art historical traditions of the body and form, as well as feminist politics, drawing on performance strategies of juxtaposition to complicate how identity is formed through cultural institutions such as the museum. As a mode of performative surrogacy developed from the theatrical traditions of masking and mime, personae provided a vehicle for Antin's critical interests in the experiential and material exploration of selfhood and identity formation, a realm in which to develop her so-called 'selves' that encompassed different genders, ages, races and historical periods.[309]

Antin was part of a generation leading the conceptual development of subjectivity and identity through performance personae.[310] Several of her peers, including Lynn

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[307] 'Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin, 2009 May 8-9', Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C: <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-eleanor-antin-15792> [accessed 10 October 2021].

[308] *Number 7* featured the work of thirty-nine artists, four of which were women. As Lippard continued: 'I can only mutter in my defence that I had not yet seen the light. I became a feminist a year later'. Lucy R. Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', *Tate Papers*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009): <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers> [accessed 10 November 2021]. Antin: 'I remember being somewhat pissed about [*c.7,500*] because I knew there were earlier [Lucy] Lippard numbers shows that didn't include me and I was very sensitive in those days about being excluded from the "boys' club"'. Antin recalls how she then remembered that Lippard had included her work in *2,972,453*, an earlier exhibition at Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC), Buenos Aires in 1970. 'Excerpt of email from Eleanor Antin to Alexandra Schwartz', in *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74*, ed. by Cornelia Butler et al. (London: Afterall Books, 2012), pp. 264–65.

[309] Antin's photographic series *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972), in which the artist shot with typological exactitude the daily results of losing ten pounds in 36 days.

[310] The word persona derives from the Latin *per* ('through') and *sonare* ('to sound', 'sounding out').

Hershman Leeson and Adrian Piper, had turned to the body as an object and communicatory vehicle, conceiving of 'alter egos' whose existence in the world accumulated through visual and administrative ephemera from photographs to social security letters and bank accounts. These documents then constituted a material trace, but were far more complex than the flash word 'autobiography' that was often used to thematise these explorations;[311] as Hershman Leeson marvelled of *Roberta Breitmore* (1974–78), a character she developed over seven years, 'she had more relevance and authenticity than I did'.[312] In constructing composite characters based on stereotypical markers of 'otherness' in terms of gender, sex and race, *Roberta Breitmore*, Piper's *The Mythic Being* (1973–75) and Antin's King unpack the ideological and material structures concerning the instrumentation of the self within the political imaginary at the time.[313] Like Piper and Hershman Leeson, Antin's interest in transformation was bound up in the process of mediation. These artists used a range of materials to construct their personae including photographic self-portraits, video performances, diary entries, forged administrative records and writings produced in first-person; that several of these elements appropriated federal mechanisms developed to produce civil profiles, from voting records to consumer habits, framed personae as a conversation with how a life was written *into* history.

Art institutions and museums also shaped the ways in which opportunities for artists echoed a Euro-American avant-garde and the white male profile favoured by art history, linking artistic merit to certain signifiers of race, gender, class and sexuality.[314] In creating new realities that exceeded such limitations in life and work, the question of testimony was placed front and centre. Personae drew video media and photography into

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[311] Antin recalls thematic exhibitions organised around 'new fashionable buzz words, like "autobiography"' in 'Excerpt of email from Eleanor Antin to Alexandra Schwartz', p. 264; Nizan Shaked also complicates a straightforward account of autobiography in conceptual personae from the early 1970s. See Nizan Shaked, *The Synthetic Proposition: Conceptualism and the Political Referent in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 61 & 67.

[312] Given that *Roberta Breitmore* was trialled in a sonic sculpture as a young Black woman, Hershman Leeson's comments around her character's authenticity confer the problematic use of Blackness. It's worth noting that these comments were made in relation to the character's development as a stereotypical 'all American' white woman with blond hair and who wears 'a lot of makeup'. Authenticity here concerns acquisition: 'She could get credit cards and I couldn't'. See Vicki Callahan, 'The Future of the Archive: An Interview with Lynn Hershman Leeson', in *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*, ed. by Callahan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), pp. 418–430 (p. 422).

[313] Many cultural and scholarly institutions within California came under then-Governor Ronald Reagan's jurisdiction, leading to violent, militarised clashes with civil-rights, union and student protests across 1968–1969 and a mass campaign of infiltration into the lives of political dissidents.

[314] For a discussion on some of directed prejudices in the curatorial outlooks of Southern California art institutions in the 1970s, see C. Ondine Chavoya, 'Pseudographic Cinema: Asco's No-Movies', *Performance Research*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1998), 1–14.

the process of identifying bias, using the document's presentation of empirical 'truth' to undermine the biological accordance of identity categories as natural orders. The use of the body as a medium projected through a range of media contexts encouraged audiences to engage in the circulation of the subject as a construct or case study; as Nizan Shaked has observed of Piper's work, this approach set up analytical possibilities 'on the terms of its making' rather than 'the subject position of its maker'.[315]

In personae, Antin found a 'mythological machine', one capable of undermining attributes expected of white, middle-class women in the United States in the 1970s. 'I am interested in defining the limits of myself' she wrote. 'I consider the usual aids to self-definition – sex, age, talent, time and space – as tyrannical limitations upon my freedom of choice'.[316] Steadily cultivated around behavioural and circumstantial affinities with the historical personage of Charles I, the artist's 'King' persona would constitute her most 'political self'.[317] To Antin, Charles symbolised 'a failure in politics. [Who] lost his kingdom, poor thing' – a remark that summarises the insurgency Charles attempted and ultimately failed to accomplish.[318] With Charles, Antin alighted on a potent image of eroded sovereignty, with inflections of the artist's own wilfulness ('tyrannical limitations') promising an evocative pairing. In European history, the second Stuart King is notorious for having ruled without recourse to parliament, claiming the 'divine right' under the real prerogative granted, but to a lesser extent practiced, by the English monarchy. Known as the 'personal rule', his kingship ballooned to eleven troubled years in fiscal and national governance between 1629 and 1640. Following several dismissals of parliament, a badly managed incursion into Spain and civil wars in England, Charles was tried for treason and executed in 1649.

Charles does not, then, provide a totem for rewarded autonomy or heroic gallantry, but rather, exemplifies a form of dogged rule. Antin described the impetus for the King persona – one she would spend nearly a decade crafting and performing – in similar terms, 'I always felt like a loser, politically, as all progressive people do in this country'.[319] For Antin, the King's loss was weighted by her own sense of impotence under the national 'crisis of confidence' that a series of public failings in the early 1970s

[315] Shaked, *The Synthetic Proposition*, p. 61.
[316] Eleanor Antin, 'Notes on Transformation', *Flash Art*, 44/45 (March–April 1974), 69.
[317] Eleanor Antin, 'Dialogue with a Medium', *Art-Rite*, no. 7 (Autumn 1974), 23–24.
[318] Suzanne Lacy and Jennifer Flores Sternad, 'Voices, Variations, and Deviations: from the LACE archive of southern California performance art', in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970–1983*, ed. by Peggy Phelan (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 61–114 (p. 67).
[319] Ibid.

helped catalyse. While these failings helped set the stage for this despair, I argue that a series of problematics closer to home provide the work's foundations.

With focus on the affective composition of Antin's King and parallels between Charles' despotic personage, this chapter poses a critical rereading of a central work in the artist's archive. I present an alternative context for situating the work that grapples with the affects borne of this portrait of desperation and the implications of claiming likeness. The King has largely attracted attention in the attributes of gender the work performs visually.[320] My analysis integrates a discussion of gender yet uses an intersectional framework to take the work beyond a conventional feminist critique to the affective defensiveness at the heart of Antin's portrayal. By extension, I set up the opportunity for reflection on the capacity of personae to enact critique through exaggerated and hyperbolic representations. By drawing out the environmental contexts behind the King's dilemma and demonstrating how stereotyping crucially interacts with the performance of losing, my analysis works interconnectedly to tease out a persona that implicates the artist in the character's humiliation. Where critics tend to treat the King as a 'benevolent ruler', I read Antin's dramatisation of failed leadership as a performance of comic humourlessness that remonstrates singular rule by satirising it from the inside out.[321]

That Antin revived a figure spatially and temporally exterior to the cultural contexts of the 1970s finds particular significance across its varied forms as a live and mediated performance. Not only does this chronic disruption accentuate Antin's sense of being out of joint with social affairs – as divisional politics can often feel like – the King persona also amplifies the legitimacy of power in the lived context of a particular locale. The effects are twofold: engaging in debates about property ownership and development across a residential area, as well as issues of land use in California through terms of proprietorship. Antin often worked on several personae simultaneously, conceiving through the 1970s four core personae: the Ballerina, the King, the Black Movie Star and the Nurse. Although the King is the primary target of this study, it is not beneficial to draw a ring around each persona. Antin frequently traded traits and descriptors between characters. As I proceed to consider in greater depth, Antin problematically used blackface for her short-lived Black Movie Star (1974), extending racist stereotypes again

[320] Ibid., p. 68.
[321] Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, pp. 60–61.

to her portrait of Eleanora Antinova, conceived by the artist as an African American prima ballerina and 1920s star of Diaghilev's Ballet Russes.[322] There were also two Nurses, each with their own narrative conceit: *The Adventures of a Nurse* (1976) modelled a Nightingale-esque profile of white female naivety and foolish innocence, while the disaster spoof *The Nurse and Hijackers* (1977) revolved around a plane hijacking. Associated personae were performed but not sustained to the same degree.[323]

As Antin's first 'male self', the King embodied a historical and geographic elsewhere to the coastal town of Solana Beach where the artist and her family had not long moved. The King was staged across multiple registers which allowed for the stylisation of different experiences; for this, Antin used a combination of stills photography, video, drawing, theatrical performance and 'life performance', which described an improvised mode of performance inhabited for extended periods. Where scholarship has often been tickled by King's period-crossed eccentricities – a pitiful figure from seventeenth-century England attempting to assert rule in twentieth-century San Diego – I argue that Antin's interest in Charles I, a figure deliriously convinced of his own mastery, presents a far more complex portrait of so-called benevolent power relations.[324] I reveal how Charles and Antin's King interlock in several ways through a set of local environmental occurrences in Solana Beach's built development. These contexts brushed against social, economic and ecological exigencies in local governance, providing various forms of power for Antin to dramatise. Antin's King responds to the events at Solana Beach as a matter of naturalised duty, yet his actions fail to gain traction. In the end, the King is defeated, and the 'interlopers' prevail.

Scholars have expressed little interest in the actual threat the King reacts to, seeing his waging of war on developers at Solana Beach as a metonym for wider disenchantment with the status quo. For Emily Liebert, the King is a surrogate for 'the

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[322] This work culminated in the five-character ensemble piece, *Recollections of my Life with Diaghilev* (1977–78). This work is often characterised as a nostalgic record of lively twentieth-century life. Photographs depict Antinova in the five ballets she herself choreographed for the Ballet Russes: *L'Esclave, Pocahontas, Prisoner of Persia, The Hebrews* and *Before the Revolution*. The last ballet was revived in 1979 by the Ronald Feldman Gallery and The Kitchen Center for Video and Music.

[323] Emily Liebert reads the short-lived legacy of the 'Black Movie Star' as a precursor to Antinova, 'Although Antin had originally intended her black movie star to be a stand alone self, she soon determined, "black is a color" and not a complete character in and of itself'. Liebert reads Antin's phrase 'black is a color' alongside the title of Raymond Saunders' 1967 pamphlet, *Black is a Color,* in which the author presents an argument against art that emphasises the race of the artist above other attributes. Emily Liebert, 'A King, a Ballerina, and a Nurse: The Act of Looking in Eleanor Antin's Early Selves', in *Multiple Occupancy*, pp. 12–25 (p. 13).

[324] According to Howard Fox, Antin created a: 'benevolent ruler: a caregiver, something of a political moralist, and, alas, a loser'. Fox, *Eleanor Antin,* p. 61.

average American subject, powerless against a government by which she feels betrayed'.[325] This observation has merit: in 1974, many were still reeling from America's drawn-out war on Vietnam, a conflict brought home when returning troops in 1973 faced the realities of inadequate support and economic security rather than a hero's welcome. Against the backdrop of a six-month oil embargo, the dramatic secrecy of the Watergate scandal fuelled a growing distrust in government. The rise of cable network helped this drama along. As televised hearings relayed the results in scopic detail, the law-abiding good of media to distinguish reality from fiction, reportage from political masquerade was put to the test, setting the tone for Ronald Regan's conservative presidency as an ex-actor. As the photographer and critic Allan Sekula surmised, anyone could be a leader, you just had to act the part.[326] This catalogue of public errors and disingenuous leadership configures the social and political climate in which Antin's King was developed. The despondency Antin points to in the chapter's epigraph emanates from these public failings, but it also emerges from and in relation to conceptual explorations of failure as a critical aesthetic sketched out here. This sense of failure skirts Kierkegaardian despair, where, having acknowledged one's despair, the subject then enters a fuelled cycle of despair over their inability to overcome it by independent means.[327] To read this despair fully, my analysis hews closely to context across the different iterations of the King which individually provide key insights into the uses of persona for environmental topics.

With an emphasis on location, my reading presents *The King of Solana Beach* as a form of critical ambulation: an anti-heroic recalcitrance against blind faith in maximum growth. I examine how the King embodies the tenuous relationship between individual agency and political revolution within an environmental context. By examining how Solana Beach functions as the narrative and geographic axis for the performance, this chapter demonstrates how Antin's figure of thwarted revolution exposes the emotional and affective losses of Charles' failed imperium and what may be parsed in calling up this legacy. I argue that the work's driving sentiments of powerlessness and betrayal are not straightforward affects, but rather couched in individualised scripts of utopian possibility that adjoin personal and political responsibility in discomforting ways. For

[325] Liebert, 'A King, a Ballerina, and a Nurse', p. 23.
[326] Allan Sekula's description of his 1993 *Fish Story: Loaves and Fishes (Chapter 2),* in Marie Muracciole, 'Allan Sekula: Photography, A Wonderfully Inadequate Medium' [exhibition pamphlet], 2019, n.p.
[327] For further elaboration, see Judith Butler, 'Kierkegaard's Speculative Despair', in *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 112–148.

example, where prints and negatives from the live performance of the King document a growing town under construction, the wearied portrait of *Men* (figure 2.1) deliberately sends up a frayed aesthetic, marrying the twin degradation of landscape and subject. Behind the King lie discarded items that mark the unit perimeters of properties, while patches of grass acquiesce to asphalt driveways. The King's furrowed brow colludes with dark curtains of hair to produce a sinking dejection, while deep grooves in his leather boots attest to his daily walks through his so-called Kingdom. That Antin's character embodies this departed providence is revealing, signalling the demotion of ennobled status to mere country folk, the subtitle 'Men' underscoring the nature of this humiliation. If, as discussed in the introduction, American environmentalism has long relied on affective appeals to present responsibility as a question of moral or ethical duty, the King's failings are profoundly subjective, a personal dereliction in which shortcomings are both felt and exposing.[328]

The King persona would occupy Antin for nearly a decade, demonstrating an enduring attachment to the particularities of this character. For the King persona, various iterations refer to the same namesake at times making it difficult to distinguish its various registers. For clarity, I track the span of different media used to slowly develop the constellations of the King over a decade. My analysis begins with the black-and-white, fifty-two-minute video *The King* (1972) (figure 2.3), where Antin grappled with the emergence of the King in real-time as if preparing backstage for a theatrical performance. On actualisation, however, Antin can be seen holding the pose as if waiting for a shutter to close on the scene and the videotape abruptly ends. From this I move to the extended life performances of *The King of Solana Beach* (1974–75) (figures 2.4 & 2.5) and follow with the theatrical revue *Battle of the Bluffs* (1978–81) which was conceived for an audience (figure 2.6). For *The King of Solana Beach*, a bearded King played by Antin, took to the streets and local businesses of Solana Beach, conversing with subjects and undertaking humdrum tasks such as grocery shopping and banking. While *The King of Solana Beach* photographs were shot by Antin's collaborator Phillip (Phel) Steinmetz, Antin devised each scenario, in her own words 'like a movie director'.[329] *Battle*, a 'half-improvisation, half-scripted' work performed eighteen times between 1975 and 1982 extended the performance's improv, incorporating a full 'cast', including a mock Cavalry

[328] Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, p. 137.
[329] Response to author by email, 9 June 2021.

and Infantry of 'the very old carrying shuffleboard sticks and […] the very young on skateboards' each of whom were played by Antin.[330] Indeed, 'desperate problems require desperate solutions!'[331]

As the culmination of the King's pursuits, *Battle* elaborated the most extensive indictment of dispossession fuelled by the post-1960s housing boom in the United States. That Antin conceived of *Battle* as a one-woman show heightens the spectacle of desperation. Here, the 'have-nots' led by the King make a last-ditch rally against 'the haves' and 'almost wi[n]'.[332] As events go, the King initially defeats the property developers in a fencing duel, forcing through a truce that would see the Independent Order of Foresters torn down and its land transformed into an organic garden. Yet the King is betrayed when the developers return the next day with enforcement. Although intended for different audiences, what joins the various registers of the King is a caustic scenario in need of regional governance.[333] Each example of the King deals in some way with the self-appointed task of rule, which the artist approaches by getting into character: 'When I comb out my beard and put on my cape I'm the King. […] Solana Beach is a small kingdom with lots of problems. It needs a King and the people are glad to have one'.[334] Unlike Charles I, the King is spared at the expense of his power, escaping 'alone […] to tell the tale. In exile'.[335] The results of the fencing showdown mirror actual events, adding the cherry to this humourless cake: the office of the Independent Order of Foresters was built on deforested ground.[336]

Getting the Picture

In addition to bearing multiple components, Antin also presented the King for different audiences, across exhibition, live theatre, as well as pedestrian contexts. The 'life performance' of *The King of Solana Beach* was extensively photographed with selections

[330] *Battle of the Bluffs*, Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series III. Projects, circa 1965–2009, box 17, folders 17–18.
[331] Ibid.
[332] 'Battle of the Bluffs, a performance by Eleanor Antin', Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series III. Projects, circa 1965–2009, box 17, folder 17–18.
[333] This work avails more of the classic theatre descriptors, such as a seated audience and use of a stage. See Ronald Feldman Gallery's biography for Eleanor Antin, for a full venue list for *Battle of the Bluffs*: https://feldmangallery.com/assets/pdfs/Antin_bio_letterhead_new.pdf.
[334] Press release for 'Eleanor Antin: Battle of the Bluffs', Thursday, 31 January 1980, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, n.p., Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series III. Projects, circa 1965–2009, box 17, folders 17–18.
[335] Ibid.
[336] *Battle of the Bluffs*, Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series III. Projects, circa 1965–2009, box 17, folders 17–18.

presented in constellations of horizontal tiles incorporating singular 6 x 9 prints to gridded formations that develop language play between image and text (figure 2.7). Serialised watercolour and pastel drawings in the form of journal entries also exist under the title *The King's Meditations* (1974–75) (figure 2.5). As indicated by their date, the drawings are artworks, rather than preparatory sketches; their quasi-seventeenth-century script reveals the King's inner thoughts in illustrated passages with roughly hewn paper edges simulating parchment. I point to these formats briefly here to outline the contours of the King in their most fulsome sense, which in its vastness suggests a certain resistance to closure. Antin's range here also exemplifies her critical interest in responding to the reception of her work and expectations stretched from traditional art forms into new media. When asked if she felt that a live performance piece was more demanding than a video work, Antin rebuffed: 'I don't understand what you're implying in the last few questions. You seem to want the audience to work or something. Why? They're not getting paid for it'.[337] Given the intermedial language of the King, it is important to note that these decisions were accorded by the distinct function and feel of a particular medium rather than a speculated commercial value. When asked whether she felt certain media held primacy she responded, 'See, I don't think anything is appropriate. I'm not a rule follower. […] I think you use a medium for what it is: use the medium that will do what you want to do'.[338] When pressed in a separate interview on the possibilities of video, Antin waved away diehard experimentation with the repartee: 'When you need something, a skill, say, you'd better acquire it. Who has time to experiment? That's for amateurs'.[339] For the artist, video was malleable, it could fit around the demands of life, just as it could be used to sketch out ironic commentary on the representational politics of women and gender in contemporary media.[340]

[337] See Mary Stofflet, 'Eleanor Antin: An Interview by Mail', in *Give Them the Picture: An Anthology of La Mamelle and ART COM, 1975–1984*, ed. by Liz Glass, Susannah Magers and Julian Myers (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2011), pp. 21–24 (p. 22). Originally published in *La Mamelle*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Winter 1976), pp. 22–23 (p. 22).
[338] Catherine Taft, 'Artists: Eleanor Antin', in *California Video: Artists and Histories* ed. by Glenn Phillips (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), pp. 22–25 (p. 24).
[339] Stofflet, 'Eleanor Antin: An Interview by Mail', pp. 22–23.
[340] A fitting example of this is *Representational Painting* (1971). Constance M. Llewallen describes Antin's performance as 'treat[ing] the camera like a dressing-table mirror'; the work uses irony to parse a feminist critique on painting traditions. See Constance M. Lewallen, 'A Larger Stage', in *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970*, ed. by Lewallen and Karen Moss (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 8–119 (p. 56). Martha Rosler has describes the early significance of video to the women's movement as 'a very important tool […] because it was new, provisional, cheap, simple, time-based, and speaking'. 'Martha Rosler', in *California Video*, pp. 198–201 (p. 200).

Antin's comments wryly dismiss some of early debates around video as it began its steady integration within performance and installation art from the early 1970s onwards, refusing the heralding of video as the 'art of the future'.[341] Video technology arose in the mid-1960s as a relatively cheap medium that artists could put to diverse use, whether as a theatrical stage in and of itself or by extending the time and space of the performance setting and environment. But while it emerged as a medium relatively ungripped by the cinematic overtures that avant-garde and experimental film had inherited, critics surmised how a discourse had by 1974, 'already arisen to greet it'; and to its short gallery life of five years, came thematic symposia, panels and magazines.[342] Indeed, for Martha Rosler, this institutionalisation reduced the critical faculties of video and its initial hopes as a 'boundless' medium.[343]

While mediation is central to Antin's interest in narrative personae, she resisted the framing of documentation as secondary to the performance event, declaring the 'document [as] the art' when it came to performances for video, such as *Representational Painting* (1971) and *The King* (1972). When the event 'goes away, [the video is] all you've got' she reasoned.[344] Antin's comments connect to her term of preference: *narrative* – a device she defended, not unsurprisingly, given that critics had singled the artist out from her conceptual peers over her use of narrative tropes and historical imagery.[345] This meant that aspects of Antin's projects, such as stills photography, were known to be shaved off in order to emphasise video as a nascent phenomenon, as Antin found in the case of exhibiting *Caught in the Act* (1973), a work conceived of as a

[341] On the zeitgeist of video as the 'art of the future' for artists working with performance art in the mid-1970s, see Susannah Magers, 'The Mediated Performance', in *Give Them the Picture*, pp. 11–14; Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration Between Science, Technology and Art* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1973); and the exhibition, *TV as a Creative Medium* (New York: Howard Wise Gallery, 1969). On the early influence of videotaping technology for artists working with live forms such as happenings, performance art and dance, see John S. Margolies, 'TV: The Next Medium According to Andy Warhol', *Art in America* (September 1969), 48–55.

[342] David Antin, 'Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium', *Video Art*, ed. by Suzanne Delahanty (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1975), pp. 57–74. On an early comparison of video art to film, see Hollis Frampton, 'The Withering Away of the State of the Art', first delivered at the conference 'Open Circuits: The Future of Television', The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 23–25 January 1974, later published in *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 4 (December 1974), pp. 50–54. Frampton concluded that the medium was still 'too young' to discern influence.

[343] Martha Rosler, 'Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment', in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1990), pp. 30–50 (p. 31). On what Rosler calls the 'museumization' of video art and its transgressive potential, see pp. 49–50.

[344] Stofflet, 'Eleanor Antin: An Interview by Mail', p. 22.

[345] In her interview with Glenn Phillips, Antin maintains that the art world shunned her for decades due to the narrative devices and aesthetics her work utilised. Antin and Phillips, 'Eleanor Antin', in *California Video*, pp. 22–25 (p. 25).

videotape and photographs that would reveal different truths 'of the moving camera […] and of the still camera' when shown together.[346] Antin's defence of multi-media projects became increasingly important as curators made decisions about the aesthetic and technologic primacy of specific artworks on her behalf.

This justification is significant as it signals how the different registers of the King were designed to be read in tandem and without hierarchical appraisal. As Glenn Phillips queried Antin on the apparent rifts between video and photography, Antin responded that she 'accept[ed] both truths'.[347] Indeed, while Antin used video around performances of the King, care should be taken to avoid viewing its role as purely documentative. As Antin conceded, bar *The Angel of Mercy* (a performance filmed c.1982–83), '[the live performances have] never been on tape. My tapes were created for tape'.[348] Antin's subtle distinction, *for* rather than *on*, sees the wider possibilities of video for her project without losing sight of the aesthetic experience for a different audience; one, she imagines, that would watch the work on a small television screen, 'probably in a dark, or semi-dark room, hopefully sprawling comfortably on the floor or on pillows'.[349] As Philip Auslander has described, artists working with performance soon became dependent on documentation to 'attain symbolic status within the realm of culture'.[350] Others still saw video as switching up the dynamics of live performance conducted in gallery spaces against a growing audience 'boredom'.[351] In historical accounts of artists moving towards video as a technical tool, Antin's use of video departs from several of her peers, many of whom, such as Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and Joan Jonas, made work for video with an audience present or even integral to the materialisation of a concept.[352]

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[346] Antin intended for the photographic and video components of *Caught in the Act* to be shown alongside one another. The conceit of the video is a photoshoot in which Antin performs a series of ballet positions for camera. Crucially, it shows the 'other' truth of Antin's performance as she efforts to achieve the requisite balletic flexibility and poise. Ibid.
[347] Ibid.
[348] 'Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin'.
[349] Stofflet, 'Eleanor Antin', p. 23.
[350] Building on Amelia Jones' work on the mutual dependence of performance and its document, Philip Auslander outlines two categories of the performance document: documentary and theatrical. The documentary represents the means by which performance art is conceived, providing a record of an event that occurred. In the second category, the theatrical, Auslander places examples of 'performed photography' as examples of performances that are staged for camera and have 'no meaningful prior existence' as live events presented to audiences.
[351] Magers, 'The Mediated Performance', pp. 11–12, fn4.
[352] Ibid., p. 11. For Jonas' *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), a video and performance of the same name, the artist used a closed-circuit camera, monitor and projection to both record and interact with the virtual image of her persona Organic Honey. See Pamela M. Lee, 'Double Takes: The Art of Joan Jonas', *Artforum*, vol. 53, no. 10 (Summer 2015), 308–15.

Antin's thoughts on using the medium 'that will do what you want to do' dovetails with influential outlines of conceptualism, as in Lucy Lippard's 1973 account of the dematerialisation of art, where 'the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary'.[353] But even as the conceptual strokes of the King are primary, video presented a specific functionality, engendering the near-instantaneous receival of the image on its monitor. This quality was widely acknowledged in the early take up in video art in the United States; as Nam June Paik, an artist who had purchased his first device in October 1965 commented, 'In my videotaped electrovision […] you see your picture instantaneously'.[354] Yet, part of its charge was how the proximity of video to other forms of mediation came to absorb many of its expectations; for Lynda Benglis, video allowed for the presentation of 'certain ideas that had occurred in film' but in a 'more self-revealing way'.[355] As a representational form, Antin found it a perfect medium for witnessing the transformation process for her characters.[356] But its mirror-like quality could also engender uncanny effects.[357] In her first video piece *Representational Painting* (1971), Antin uses the monitor like a mirror to apply make up to her face, a conceit that lasts nearly forty minutes (figure 2.8). As video doesn't reverse the image in the way that mirrors do, Antin described the process of filming as 'extremely invasive' and as having 'dictat[ed] all sorts of feelings and behavior on my part'. Where she had imagined the scene in straightforward terms, the unanticipated effect was a nervousness or angst that 'permeated the whole tape'.[358] For this reason, Antin called video 'an interrogation medium', insofar as its captured image absorbed the unfurling temporality of her personae as well as confronted the strange results that happened along the way.

Using a similar conceit, Antin made *The King* (1972) the following year. This character would be established through a similar feedback loop of enactment and adjustment over the course of its mediation and reception. As the catalyst for her 'male

[353] Lippard, *Six Years*, vii.
[354] Nam June Paik, *Videa 'n' Videology, 1959–1973* (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1997), n.p; see also William Kaizen, 'Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate', in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing/Afterall, 2008), pp. 258–72.
[355] Lynda Benglis, 'The Question', *Art Rite*, no. 7 (1974), 11–17 (p. 12).
[356] Antin and Phillips, 'Eleanor Antin', p. 24.
[357] As Antin described of her early approach: 'I began to use the video image as a kind of trap for myself […] you know, like bumping into yourself in the mirror of a friend's lobby or a cigarette machine. You get caught unawares'. Antin, 'Eleanor Antin: Interview by Mail', p. 21.
[358] In the filming of the work Antin describes taking the eyebrow pencil to her left eyebrow yet 'the damned thing would end up over here [pointing to left eyebrow], which is extremely freaky and very disorienting, so I had to work out a way to survive with this malevolent monitor'. Ibid., p. 24.

self', Antin asks herself what kind of man she would be. Interestingly, Antin describes the emergent likeness of Charles I as a kind of 'calling':

> I went through these different characterizations. I think at one point I looked like Jesus, which is very romantic— […] Then I started cutting and trimming the beard, because I didn't think Jesus was the character that was calling me. Then there's a sort of explorer look, which was ridiculous with my small face. I looked like an imposter, and at one time, I looked like, […] the Smiths Brothers. […] I certainly didn't think that was the best I could do, and I continued trimming it. It was almost like I was putting on makeup again, and then I saw in the monitor that with my small face and long, straight hair, I was a courtier. […] Soon after, I realized I looked like Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I. I started reading about King Charlie and I realized that we were very much alike.[359]

Antin's likeness goes beyond a visual likeness, rather they are 'very much alike'. This claim made in the early stages of realising the King for video sets up the conditions for scrutinising the personal and public dimensions of the King persona. In the following, I focus on the self-deprecating figure of the loser, as a central affective vehicle within the project that positions Antin as a laughing stock within the verité setting of Solana Beach and reinforces the King's humourless presence.

Loser Environmentalism: A 'Politics of Desperation'

> I want to save the world. My king is always trying to lead armies to the promised land. And he always loses. Maybe that's why people don't like him very much. He's a loser. They think he's stupid. Who is this hippie king coming on like a ham actor in a third-rate stock company? So how else would they save the world? Do they have a better way?[360]

Before proceeding it is necessary to give a greater sense of the socioeconomic and ecological factors that anchor the King's 'politics of desperation'.[361] As indicated, the

[359] Ibid.
[360] Antin qtd. in Linda M. Montano, *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 234–35.
[361] Antin used the phrase 'politics of desperation' in an undated description of *Battle of the Bluffs*. Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series III, Projects, circa 1965–2009, box 17, folders 17–18.

performance's desperation parallels changes that were happening in Solana Beach, yet Antin also suspends the work's relationship to reality in several ways. A sovereign figure protecting its citizens from developers wasn't exactly compatible with the community's interest in independent administration, making the feudal romanticism of Antin's performance further incongruous with the wishes of 'the people'. Echoing this, sociohistorical accounts of *The King of Solana Beach* describe the performance's eccentric rather than compelling rhetorical composition.[362]

A growing coastal community, post-war Solana Beach caught its share of growth debates sweeping across the agora of Southern California in the 1970s and early 1980s. A thorn in the side of these debates was the Lakewood Plan. According to the historian and writer Mike Davis, the plan unofficially operated as an anti-welfare policy, benefiting affluent, middle-class homeowners through an 'exit privilege', while also encouraging white flight from Los Angeles to suburbs, red-tile communities (described as such for their colonial Spanish architecture) and smaller cities outside of Los Angeles County. As part of Lakewood-style plans, public services could be locally tailored, rather than service a range of incomes and social needs. This seismic shift widened gaps in class and racial housing demographics already burdened by California's Alien land laws and restrictive covenants which had stayed on the books years after the 1950 repeal.[363] Even as homeownership dropped nationally in the 1960s and early 1970s, California coastal communities saw property values soar, particularly those associated with Lakewood-style plans.[364]

When Eleanor and David Antin moved to Solana Beach in the late 1960s, it was undergoing marketisation as a luxury coastal town – 'tennis by the sea' as one ad touted – accommodating growing tourism and industry that had been brought into the area between 1950 and 1960 through the Bill Jack Plant, a company that manufactured aviation equipment and reconnaissance apparatus. As a departure from New York, the Antins marvelled at the beach and its open space, though they shared some trepidation towards the political leanings of the local populace.[365] Aided in part by the completion of

[362] Matthew Thompson and Hilary White, *Images of America: Solana Beach* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), p. 98.
[363] Davis notes how even with the US Supreme Court ruling against restrictive covenants in 1948 and the 1952 invalidation of the California Alien Land Law of 1913, developers still wilfully excluded Black, Chicano and Asian American populations. See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 2018), pp. 147–151.
[364] Gary Miller, *Cities by Contract: The Politics of Municipal Incorporation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), p. 159.
[365] See the artist's anecdotes in the transcript for 'Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin'.

the six-lane Interstate 5 (I-5) in 1966 which had opened access to the bluff tops, Solana Beach continued to urbanise through the 1970s at pace with surrounding areas, concentrating condominium developments along its unstable bluffs. The Interstate introduced significant mobility. Prior to its realisation the number of houses along the bluffs could be counted on one hand, but as one former resident put it, shrewd developers 'quickly gobbled up the buildable land'.[366] One company alone constructed in the town over four hundred premium homes between 1969 and 1977.[367] The changing makeup of the town only complicated matters, as an older generation of single-use homeowners was pitted against newer multi-use developments to feed a growing tourist trade. Some residents were reluctant to see Solana Beach being 'built out' especially where developers failed to assess the risks of erosion to its sandstone bluffs.[368] Rising factions between local stakeholders, such as when plans for a large oceanfront hotel was backed by county authorities that lived in the town, stoked significant inter-community tensions.

As the housing boom continued through the 1970s, land use in Solana Beach cut a divisive topic among homeowner associations, community organisers *and* developers. From this, the idea of incorporation was floated. With cityhood status, permit-granting powers could be wrestled away from San Diego County.[369] Acquiring cityhood was popular among proponents of slow growth as it meant the future of Solana Beach could reassert its 'small-town feeling' through a temporary moratorium on new development; as one resident put it, "[n]ow we can control our own destiny'.[370] In neighbouring county areas grassroots initiatives by 'Ruralists' favouring steady growth (describing a proto-typical environmentalism of a rural populace against urbanisation) reported successful efforts. In Alpine, such Ruralists assembled to ward off developers. In Ocean Beach,

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[366] Ira Spector, *Sammy, Where Are You?: An Unconventional Memoir… Sort Of* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), pp. 130–31. Spector was involved in establishing the first homeowner's association in Solana Beach.

[367] Figures related to Tech-Bilt, the company of Paul Tchang, a San Diego builder. According to the California Homebuilding Association: 'Under Paul's guidance, Tech-Bilt has built or developed nearly 15,000 homes and lots from modest entry-level dwellings to lavish showcases, giving people from all walks of life their own personal version of the American Dream'.

[368] 'By the early 1970s […] environmental regulation of land use had become a potent, sometimes explosive, issue in the archipelago of 'redtile' communities' from Coronado and Point Loma in San Diego up to Santa Barbara. 'These old-money resorts and retirement centres, […] all determined to see that disruptive development went somewhere else'. Davis, *City of Quartz*, p. 154.

[369] Kristina Houck, 'Solana Beach celebrates 30 years as city', *Del Mar Times*, 6 July 2016: <https://www.delmartimes.net/news/sddmt-solana-beach-2016jul06-story.html> [accessed 3 December 2021].

[370] Jenifer Warren, 'Seaside Ceremony: Solana Beach Takes Avidly to Life in the City', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1986: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-07-02-me-311-story.html> [accessed 10 October 2021].

residents fought back against the monopoly of condominium complexes on 'small slivers' of coastline; unabashed signs went up in 1974, 'Developers Out of O.B' and 'Revolt!'[371] Greater efforts were reported in Del Mar, which had incorporated on 15 July 1959. The *Del Mar Times* reported how residents successfully raised $900,000 to purchase 197 acres protecting the bluffs through the Torrey Pines Reserve Extension, an addendum to the 1,750-acre Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve.[372]

Successes in neighbouring towns echoed sorely then, when objections in Solana Beach fell on 'totally deaf ears'.[373] Developers continued to concentrate properties on the cliff edge, which proved extremely costly for homeowners then faced with bills for plugging sea caves and building sea defences below their properties. Photographs, contact sheets and negatives produced in the context of *The King of Solana Beach* parse these developments by figuring the town not by pride of its landmarks, but by its impediments, with the King emphasising various blockades and warnings through his ambulatory movement – in figure 2.9 a large 'DO NOT ENTER' sign shouts up from the asphalt.[374] The contact sheets show a sea of construction across the town. One sheet (figure 2.10) shows a heap of timber frames in the dirt awaiting service, the next touting a billboard for model villas at the Santa Helena Park Golf Course. The exposures trace the road that limns the perimeter of the town, highlighting how its rolling design frames the landscape. There are also tell-tale signs of roadside foliage enacting rebellion against the asphalt, creeping back over concrete thresholds.

Much like the relationship of Wojnarowicz's contact sheets to his photographic work, these also form a vital accompaniment to the published photographic images of *The King of Solana Beach*, providing a deeper sense of how Antin considered land use and real estate development in the town when conceiving the work, and finding a metafictional place for it within the work's narrative. Individual frames move from one

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[371] Jerry Leverentz, 'Beaches: Popular Ones', *San Diego Reader*, 8 August 1974: <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/1974/aug/08/cover-beaches-popular-ones/> [accessed 10 November 2021]; and Jim Cohen, 'Alpine – City of One Million? Ruralists Fight Off County Board of Supervisors', *San Diego Reader*, 8 November 1973: <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/1973/nov/08/cover-alpine-city-of-one-million/> [accessed 10 November 2021].

[372] Maryruth Cox and Jennifer Crittenden, 'Del Mar Terrace celebrates its 100th birthday', *Del Mar Times*, 24 January 2013: <https://www.delmartimes.net/sddmt-del-mar-terrace-celebrates-its-100th-birthday-2013jan24-story.html> [accessed 10 November 2021].

[373] Eric Mattson, 'Solana Beach Keeps Trying to Prop Up Its Eroding Bluffs', *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 1987: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-08-03-me-461-story.html> [accessed 10 November 2021].

[374] In the artist's papers some of the negatives from the performance are titled *Battle of the Bluffs*. Given that the artist used the title *The King of Solana Beach* for exhibited prints, I follow this usage.

half-completed development to the next, signalling where one can and cannot pass due to land ordinances. Temporary blockades threaten prosecution in case of trespass and temporary roadblocks on main thoroughfares reveal a town remapping itself through changing hands. The consecutive effect of the contact sheets is one of propertied expedience: scaffolded dreams rise up from the dirt at the snap of one's fingers. Solana Beach wouldn't gain cityhood status until 3 June 1986, a decade after Antin's project, by then the third time in twelve years the idea had been floated. During previous waves of community mobilisation, local realtors and developers had financed a widely distributed 'Vote No on City' campaign, playing no small part in its opposition. The contact sheets witness this war on land prior to gaining administrative status, showing the town besieged by building work at a time when pressure was mounting on local councillors to resist leisure development from absorbing the town.

Another contact sheet (figure 2.11) also unveils the shiny new office of the Independent Order of Foresters standing proudly at an intersection. Federal flags have been hoisted high into the air and a row of landscaped trees line its frontage. Located in the top left-hand corner of the contact print is a person's torso wearing a 'Fuck the Centennial' t-shirt as if to counteractively intuit the proceeding patriotism of the office's flag-bearing. The tragic irony of deforestation to make way for a Foresters' office not only catalysed the King, it also proved prescient. By 1986, the town was declared '94% built out' by its planning director, while its mayor ruled that the County Board of Supervisors had acted irresponsibly in approving bluff-edge developments. Antin's King staged a rejection of these socioeconomic equations as an affront, not simply to morals, but to the subject's capacity to imagine his future. Even prior to being 'built out', the King suspects the gravity of the situation based on past misfortunes, 'I'm afraid most of my people are not winners' writes Antin, addressing readers as the King: 'We're losing every day and there's little we can do about it. […] I give advice. Encouragement. Who could do more?'[375]

According to his avatar's personal and political losses, Charles I casts an emphatic 'loser' for Antin's King insofar as the British King's dogged self-belief soberly ended with his execution. While Antin's King doesn't meet this fate, the historical analogy articulates failure as an affective site of self-narration. Losers are typically those

[375] Note the use of first-person in the press release for *Eleanor Antin: The Battle of the Bluffs,* Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, 31 January 1980.

who wear their losses, skirting accountability in favour of defeatism. Those that 'lose out' find themselves with the wrong outcome or side-lined by the success of others who take their place.[376] This transposition of usurpation was particular to political wagering of the seventeenth century. As Hannah Arendt argued of European revolutions in this period, authority was often spatially determined through its redefinition of 'the freedom of movement; the borders of national territory or the walls of the city-state [that] comprehended and protected a space in which men could move freely'.[377] Losing in the pursuit or expectation of revolution thus locates figures within or 'outside' of an existing framework – dovetailing with the spatial and temporal conditions of Antin's anachronistic King. Losing stages the subjective orientations of political work insofar as personal stakes tellingly surface.[378] Awareness of the changing governance of Solana Beach allows us to consider how an interest in keeping something *as it was* actually harbours complex personal interests.[379] On the precipice of the town's bid for autonomy, the King stages the limits that fringe human mastery and hubris. This has repercussions for the thesis at large in terms of problematising an inherited environmental discourse of heroic sacrifice in ecocritical art. Antin's King illuminates the relationship of these conditions to the absolute conviction in one's ability to lead without recognising what can be learnt from voices around you saying otherwise.

With the work's affects of *losing* in focus, I argue that Antin's deployment of historical personage to navigate localised terms of environmental justice has crucial ramifications for public sentiments, citizenship and performance channelling historical forms of political agency. I consider how the attention on Solana Beach provides key insights into the affective mechanics of environmental action proposed by performance. This focus stages a vital intervention into the rhetorics of hope and optimism with which environmentally minded art has typically invested. It also considers how the performance utilises video to mediate environmental affects and not simply bear witness or claim to

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[376] Antin qtd. in Suzanne Lacy and Jennifer Flores Sternad, 'Voices, Variations, and Deviations: from the LACE archive of southern California performance art', in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970–1983*, ed. by Peggy Phelan (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 61–114 (p. 67).
[377] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 275.
[378] Speaking on revolt in a regicidal framework, Foucault suggested that: 'Since the man who revolts is, thus, "outside of history" as well as in it, and since life and death are at stake, we can understand why revolts have easily been able to find their expression and their mode of performance in religious themes'. Michel Foucault, 'Useless to Revolt?', in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 3: Power*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 449–53 (p. 450). First published in *Le Monde* in May 1979.
[379] Warren, 'Seaside Ceremony'.

represent. I call Antin's performance a form of 'loser environmentalism' to describe an embodied politics that articulates limitations around being well-adjusted in normative terms. I think here about the effects of dwelling in, even hyperbolising the King's melancholy performance, as opposed to providing a moral genesis of action. Reading the King's spatialisation as intimately connected to land use, I insist that Antin's decision to dramatise the relationship to power, offers a vital engagement with the lived qualities of environmental disenfranchisement and resistance to majoritarian regimes.

My reading of the work contributes on multiple fronts to debates in feminist and ecocritical art history and theory about the critical function of personae in topics that have often called for sincerity. This complex work also makes other provocations, such as how certain subjectivities are constructed as worthwhile or good environmental positions, while more incongruous positions are framed as frivolous, irrelevant or threatening to the task at hand. Loser environmentalism contributes to core discussions in ecocritical art history about the homogenisation of 'nature' with which we speak, isolating a set of circumstances around economic debates, local policies and environmental factors to examine the role subjective responses play there. It urges us to scrutinise the contextual conditions of environmental action and what forces underlie this work. As a prerequisite of environmental mandates, action is barely contemplated as a pedagogical and affective site at all, rather it is a site of anticipated competency. In *The King of Solana Beach*, impotence is a central object refracting the disappointment and rejection encountered in the King's political cause. But in how Antin casts the King's despair, it is his self-conscious image of his own abilities that is front and centre. Within this, Antin's humourlessness has a crucial function.

Several of my related motivations can be described as such: where the seams of affect and political life have been robustly analysed by the affective turn in queer scholarship, they are rarely reflected upon in ecocritical art history, making this interstice all the more urgent to the question of *how to act*. Importantly, constructing a theoretical framework around the 'loser' is not to flirt with failure as scholars of disability and crip studies such as Cynthia Barounis have cautioned,[380] it is to consider failure as a performance genre accorded by a set of traditions and tributaries in figures such as the

[380] On the romanticising of failure as queer transgression, see Cynthia Barounis, 'Witches, Terrorists and the Biopolitics of Camp', *GLQ*, vol. 24, nos. 2–3 (2018), 213–38. On critical trends that 'flirt cheerfully with precarity', see Merri Lisa Johnson, 'Bad Romance: A Crip Feminist Critique of Queer Failure', *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Winter 2015), 251–67 (p. 253).

Rabelaisian fool in folk humour and the sorrowful clown Pierrot, performed from the sixteenth century onwards, to politicised enactments of failure through modernism and postmodernism that frame anti-capitalism struggles.[381] These are historical figures that in their own ways have sought to disturb a social order or status quo by embodying incongruous positions of the agitator, the joker and the anti-assimilationist. Thinking with the loser in environmental artworks is to reflect on the emotional dynamics of political life and allow this reflection to enlarge social understandings of agency. If performance is key to registering political claims in the public realm, then an ecocritical history of performance art must attend to how and for whom such claims are made.[382]

Becoming 'Charlie': Gender and Postconceptual Personae

Over the fifty-two-minutes of *The King*, Antin materialises the first example of the King with a mounted video camera, the length charting the duration needed to build up the King's facial hair and moustache, which are applied using old-fashioned theatrical methods of layering and gluing pieces of hair before trimming to shape (figure 2.3). Rather than use the video monitor as a mirror as she had done previously, Antin uses a vanity mirror propped against a stack of books. This means that we do not receive an image of the monitor negotiated as a mirror, but the depiction of Antin 'getting ready' one degree removed. The use of video here emphasises the incremental results of actualisation over revelation, while the experience of time is made explicit through its medium, building in the requirement for sustained viewing as necessary to observe its full effects. Closed-circuit video here tantalisingly undercuts the modernist ideals that undergird the image. We cannot be sure of the result to come and when it does it is abruptly presented to us. This presentation releases disruptive effects upon the aesthetics of revelation such a transformation promises, forcing its audience to reflect on their own visual expectations in turn.[383]

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[381] On the evolutions of Pierrot, see Robert F. Storey, 'Origins and Birth', in *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 3–34; on Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) remains one of the most incisive. For Halberstam, failure 'goes hand in hand with capitalism' because [a] market economy must have winners and losers'. His sense of failure narrating 'an anticapitalist, queer struggle' transforms its negative value into a queer sensibility that 'in losing […] imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being'. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 88.

[382] For commentary on how performances constitute political claims in the public sphere, see Warner, *Acts of Gaiety*, p. 108.

[383] Antin remarked that the image of Charles arrived through its likeness, that 'its similarity to the Van Dyke portrait of Charles I was noticed by everybody'. Antin, 'Eleanor Antin: Dialogue with a Medium', p. 24.

Throughout *The King*, we catch glimmers of Antin's approval at seeing the King steadily realised as something that is both stylised on and apart from her body. At no point does Antin appear cautious of time pressures; she periodically sits back to admire her work and leisurely smokes a cigarette, suggesting that the transformation will be complete when she intuits it so. Where *The King of Solana Beach* has anxious overtones – what Sianne Ngai has elsewhere called 'dysphoric' feelings that include suspicion and paranoia – *The King* is a confident exercise in initiation, a *coming to* that emphasises the skills and duration of constructing the body into a socially legitimate artifice (figure 2.12).[384] The artist's decision to use video stages the King's sovereignty within the mechanics of what Butler would term 'becoming stylized', as the process of self-realisation through which the subject becomes culturally intelligible to a 'public'.[385] Butler's theorisation of gender as instituted through this bodily stylisation builds on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body is 'an historical idea' rather than 'a natural species' as well as de Beauvoir's understanding of the body as an abiding product of cultural and historical factors, where 'one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman'.[386] Of relevance to the mechanics of Antin's King is how Butler's early theorisations on gender performativity make use of theatrical conceits of the *script* that is *rehearsed* by its actors. Gendered modes of stylisation are temporally conducted through repetition just as the script 'survives the particular actors who make use of it' to be 'actualized and reproduced as reality once again'.[387]

Antin's early appearance of the King both anticipates and converses with Piper's persona of the *Mythic Being* (1973–74), a construct of Black masculinity Piper developed through street performances, portraits, photocollages and journal entries. Together these works form a critical bridge between foundational philosophical concepts of gender in the late 1940s and postmodernist critiques of the 1980s. In Peter Kennedy's documentary film *Other Than Art's Sake* (1974), we find Piper in front of the mirror fashioning her male identity for public consumption by getting into the 'garb' she has designed for the character, including a shapely moustache, tinted shades and an Afro wig.[388] 'When I put

[384] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 1.
[385] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 526.
[386] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 301.
[387] Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 526.
[388] For an astute discussion of iconography and stereotypy in Piper's *Mythic Being*, see Cherise Smith, '"The Politics of my Position" Adrian Piper and Mythic Being', in *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 27–77. Smith observes that while Piper's repeated use of 'sign' and 'iconography' in her writings demonstrate her understanding of the stereotypical markers of Black masculinity in the work,

on the garb it somehow transforms the nature of the experiences I'm thinking about' Piper can be heard saying in the film (figure 2.13).[389] But this 'putting on' extends beyond spaces in which performance is anticipated; in interior and street scenes that show Piper rehearsing a 'mantra' and psyching herself up for her outing into the street as the Mythic Being, she is already *in* character in dress and gait for her appearance in the documentary. Antin's King, like Piper's *Mythic Being* blurs expectations about where the stylised enactment of identity begins and ends.

The relaxed air of *The King* presents this construction affirmatively, the absence of an audience is notable given that company might respond differently. At various points in the performance, an intermittent smile registers the artist's satisfaction with the King's development as 'performative accomplishment' (figure 2.14).[390] But even with this signposting, it is difficult to distinguish where Antin's image recedes and the King persona emerges. Antin here builds *up* the persona, without removing items worn in her stage entrance. This additive process means that details take precedence as the King character comes into view, such as the stark juxtaposition of a laced shirtsleeve against Antin's utilitarian jacket. In this way, Antin's layering of conventional masculine and feminine signifiers refutes the presentation of 'discretionary sexes' for complex identities that overlap as they shift.[391] Likewise, in *The King of Solana Beach,* the King wears facial hair and sports a mid-length beard, while maintaining attributes that would mark him as a cisgendered woman. These effects combine to prioritise emergence over ruse, embodiment over disguise, and multiplicity over essentialised traits. This emphasis on becoming admits Antin to inhabit the 'multiple selves' of her personae not as polar opposites, but as extensions of self through interrelated realities. 'Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*', posed Stuart Hall in his foundational essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (1996).[392] In Hall's formulation, identity is always *positioned* but rather 'always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation'.[393] Indeed,

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there is also 'evidence of a profound misrecognition that the iconographic fictions of race, gender, and class that are accessed in the *Mythic Being* works refer back to black men and the actual historical, social, economic, and political circumstances of their lives' (p. 51).

[389] 'The idea was very much to see what would happen if there was a being who had exactly my history only had a completely different experience to the rest of society' says Piper in *Other Than Art's Sake.*

[390] Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 520.

[391] Ibid., p. 524.

[392] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–37 (p. 222).

[393] Ibid, p. 222.

if gender in *The King* is found to be far from stable, the elision of a *before* and *after* renders identity a part of the video 'production'. This indicates a proto-constructivist view of gender that challenges the biological determinations of institutionally reinforced identity 'scripts'.

The introduction of crisis into determined categories also plays out spatially in the work, dislocating the organisation of a 'backstage' (as sited at the rear of the stage) from stage conventions. Although Antin's energies are focused on her work at the table, she looks off into the distance at various points, giving the performance a live, rather than preparatory air. In these moments her expression changes, her chin and eyebrows rise to confer a lofty disposition, her shoulders stiffen and chest puffs outward. These actions complicate the conceit whereby character realisation would reflect the 'real time' of an actor preparing 'backstage' in advance of a theatrical performance. Sure enough, the opening sequence shows Antin leaving the stage for a backstage. As Antin enters this space, however, she steps up onto a raised platform, effectively another stage, on which the table, chair and mirror are located. If stages, as José Esteban Muñoz wrote, denote physical and temporal interruptions that are projected as being 'at odds' with an *a priori* course of development, the video's elision of a delineated 'private' backstage from a 'public' stage refuses the chronology of transformation, merely presenting us with another stage.[394] The gesture undermines the singular track of social development that would otherwise propel the individual forward through time and space, from adolescence to adulthood. Liebert contends that Antin's focus on process 'pu[ts] spectatorship on view'.[395] But we should also consider how Antin's intervention into ideological machines of identity, space and power draws closer 'real' and 'bluffed' representations so that we may question the foundations of their distinction. I read this effect as querying how certain actions are allowed to ripple out from the self and manifest in the world, while others are cloistered as personal failures without dialectical use.

Certain expectations – personal as well as creative – play into these failures. Allan Kaprow, a long-term friend of Antin's and later peer at UCSD when Antin joined the visual arts department in 1975, was disparaging about video as a new-fangled medium, commenting that 'the hardware is new, to art at least, but the conceptual

[394] On stages, see José Esteban Muñoz, 'Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative', in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 97–113.
[395] Liebert, 'A King, a Ballerina, and a Nurse', p. 14.

framework and aesthetic attitudes around most video as an art are quite tame'; he concluded that, 'Until video is used as indifferently as the telephone, it will remain a pretentious curiosity'.[396] Not long after Kaprow's remarks, Rosalind Krauss would propose her Lacanian reading of video's self-reflexivity. Krauss felt it inappropriate to speak of video as a medium, since common understanding of media relays 'the concept of an object-state, separate from the artist's own being'; comparatively, 1970s' video operated through 'narcissistic enclosure', ensnaring its viewer in a psychological game through its 'mirror-reflection of absolute feedback' that impaired the audience's capacity to separate subject and object.[397] While scholars such as Anne M. Wagner have contested Krauss' reading of video's narcissism, others have convincingly extended key concepts of the ego, self and narcissism in Lacanian thought to aspects of Antin's performative engagement with identity formation and self-historicisation.[398] Reading Antin's wrestling with white privilege in *Being Antinova,* Huey Copeland considers how narcissism enables the possibility of 'an ethical engagement in an antiblack world' in which the ownership of histories and images cannot be assumed.[399] Even as Antin's early videos can be seen to resonate with a Lacanian reading of self-intelligibility, my own reading explores how video functions within Antin's affective portrait of hubris rather than the psychoanalytic emphasis of prior readings. I do, however, hold onto the ethical possibilities of presenting images whose ownership *cannot be assumed*. 'The act that gender is, […] is clearly not one's act alone', Butler has argued. Rather, identity is accorded by certain 'sanctions and proscriptions' that exist on the scene *before one arrived*.[400]

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[396] Allan Kaprow, 'Video Art: Old Wine, New Bottle' (1974), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993), originally published in *Artforum*, vol. 12, no. 10 (June 1974), 150–53; see also Darryl Sapien, 'Video Art and the Ultimate Cliché', *La Mamelle*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Winter 1976), 19–20. Sapien found the medium to be the 'biggest cliché of our time' (p. 19).

[397] Rosalind Krauss, 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', *October*, vol. 1 (Spring 1976), 50–64 (pp. 52, 57 & 64). Lacan's 'mirror stage', as the moment of self-recognition marked by the awareness of being seen by others, lays down an influential developmental theory of the self. As Jane Gallop contends, 'The mirror stage is a decisive moment. Not only does the self issue from it, but so does "the body in bits and pieces"'. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 80.

[398] Anchoring Krauss' theorisation of video as a narcissistic medium is her reading of Vito Acconci's *Centers*. Where Krauss says that the artist gazes back at himself through the monitor, Wagner suggests that other forms of seeing are being forged in this moment of 'self-absorption'. For Wagner, Acconci establishes a 'coercive–posture toward the viewer' through which 'a new awareness and mode of vision might be urged'. Anne M. Wagner, 'Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence', *October*, vol. 91 (Winter 2000), 59–80 (p. 79). William Kaizen also makes the point that in looking to the centre of the camera lens, '[Acconci] points not at himself, but at the viewer and so at televisual liveness'. Kaizen, 'Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate', p. 271n58.

[399] Huey Copeland, 'Some Ways of Playing Antinova', in Liebert, *Multiple Occupancy*, pp. 30–40 (p. 38).

[400] Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 526 [emphasis added].

The ownership at stake here pulls on the ethical dimensions of Antin's personae, calling forth the material, physical and social attributes that are problematised by inhabiting identifications of gender, ethnicity, race and class different from one's own. The video's stress on 'self-making' is further significant for the broader orientations of the chapter, as it underscores conviction rather than authenticity as central to the constitution of the King persona. These attributes aren't always crystalline but reproduced with an ambivalence that often gives them a contrary appearance. This ambivalence, I argue, supports thematic attributes of the performance regarding perseverance and humourlessness, given that a comic 'bit' requires one to also play it straight, that is, to play it sincerely. As we will see, the explicit use of tragicomedy in *Battle* – the culmination of the King – reveals as much.

In the closing sequence of *The King*, Antin exits the setting with the table and enters a room at stage right, this time wearing a cloak and chapeau, much like in the opening image of *Men*. A small, raised platform is vertically lit, drenching it in chiaroscuro. The artist's circling of the stage suggests the motions of regaining one's way in the world, as if wearing in a new haircut. Antin draws the cloak around her person, setting a heeled foot on a floor block – a pose she holds for almost thirty seconds. Careful adjustments taken here confer a stoic readying as if all prior activity were in preparation for this moment. I read this aesthetic self-styling as exemplary of the performance's central drive: self-idealisation as a response to the failures of the body to appear and be disposed in certain ways. Of the commissioned portraits of Charles by the Flemish painter Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), *Charles I at the Hunt* (*Le Roi à la chasse*) (c.1636) draws the strongest parallel with this paranoid position. The King's body is in profile, his face is turned toward the frontal section, and his tipped chapeau and outstretched limbs are directed downward (figure 2.15). In the portrait, Charles rebuffs crown and armour for courtier dress, while his feet make direct contact with the grass, lending him an earthen sensibility. For all its apparent casualness, however, the Van Dyck portrait works overtime to illustrate naturalistic sovereignty: from the pastoral harmony of men, animals and land to Charles' satin doublet and red breeches much too luxurious for hunting. Several details expose the anxieties beneath this relaxed self-assurance. The first is the inclusion of a Latin inscription on a rock in the lower right-hand corner ('Carolus.I.REX Magnae Britanniae'). As an assertion of royal patrimony etched into the surface of the earth, the gesture is superior to any message sent by material accoutrements. The second is the angle by which Charles is presented. The

portrait compensates for Charles' well-known sensitivity concerning his height by placing its viewer at a low angle and selecting a grassy hilltop, whereupon the King's gaze moves downwards over the fields and sea below.

Following Lauren Berlant's description of sovereignty as 'a fantasy of self-ratifying control' over a scenario or space, *Charles I at the Hunt* can be interpreted as presenting the sovereign subject defensively, attempting to convince its audience of patriotic devotion at a time when the king's rule was deeply unpopular.[401] In this way the painting overcompensates for the King's shrinking autonomy, an action recalling Antin's comment ('poor Charlie') to the realm of what Berlant calls the 'possible fates of mistaking control over form for a form of life'.[402] This is more than vanity, constituting a refusal to adapt to anything other than one's methods of stylisation. Berlant reads this abjection as a comedy of humourlessness, a sensibility I take up here, 'with which one eats the effects of ordinary absurdity and injury'.[403] It is an insistence on form that manifests as a 'victory over existing', motivated by the desire to 'move toward and away from [oneself] in the world' by both reifying ambition and preserving prior attachments.[404] In the same way that Berlant underlines the incongruence of aspiration and insistence in humourless comedy, I draw Charles' stark commitment to fantasy into Antin's King. Whether *The King* may be described as 'funny' or comedic is beside the point. Comedy for Berlant is a technical term outlining scenarios in which tension or discomfort is produced, rather than a method for making one feel good through release. Berlant finds the qualities of humourlessness delicate, because the 'aspirational sovereign' can express ambivalence in several ways, including passive aggression, seriousness and bitter mirth. Humourlessness also depends on a revelation of some sort. Where for Bergson, comedy involved an exposure of the mechanic rigidity of the comic through the impression of 'being a thing', Berlant suggests that humourless comedy threatens to expose the failings of sovereignty and confusion over agency. This kind of comedy is not necessarily cathartic, but exposes the 'ordinariness of a desperately desired, feared, and failed sovereignty machine'.[405]

[401] Lauren Berlant, 'Humorlessness (Three Monologues and a Hairpiece)', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2017), 305–40 (p. 308).
[402] Ibid., p. 340.
[403] Ibid., p. 306.
[404] Ibid., pp. 306–7.
[405] Ibid., pp. 308–9.

In challenging this desperation through the historicity of 'Charlie', Antin's King distinguishes the characteristics of ordinariness from the profile of the 'average American subject'. These qualities are not commensurate. As Antin works on her appearance in the mirror, the video records the repetitive call-and-response of realising and consolidating an identity affirmatively modelled on Charles. If Antin's control over form depends on the earnest effort of applying hair, such increments toward a state of being are strategically built under the viewer's gaze. We see the artist take or otherwise feign pleasure at realising their desired object as Charles/the King, but as soon as this transformation becomes legible, it may also be nixed, as Antin does so by ending the tape unexpectedly. This works against the social directives of televised media, in which tools of immediacy, narration and naturalistic editing cooperate to 'continually force the issue of "truth" to the centre of attention'.[406] Under such logic, video would consolidate a 'truth' by forcing a separation between its representational and mechanical characteristics. Yet by exaggerating the televised similitude of reality and representation, Antin conveys this truth as a process of stylisation, an act/ing constituted through accordance to a script. It is a commitment to form that turns on desperation for it must constantly be reinforced.

Like *Charles I at the Hunt*, the video performance is characterised by a dogged insistence on form and centred by the idealising action of self-ratifying identity as a cushion against one's own failings. If video ensnares us in 'mirror-reflection of absolute feedback' as Krauss had argued, *The King* does so deliberately to exacerbate its character's desperation and vanity. In this sense, the performance can be both hubristic and painfully aware of how that hubris is destructive in its idealism. The performance's self-reflexivity may then serve another goal: that of underlining the maladjustment of subjects as they grapple with their hold on reason. *The King* poses this paradox, with its character painstakingly convinced of himself while aware of his own incongruence with the way of life he claims to defend. I mark this sentiment as critically salient for loser environmentalism, toeing the line of tragedy and comedy by hyperbolising prior anguish over failed sovereignty and ceded action. This articulation can even be newly affirmative, as Antin suggests:

[406] [David] Antin, 'Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium', p. 62.

> He was also a small guy and a hopeful romantic. He was a loser, like me. Nobody I ever voted for got elected, we couldn't stop the war, they wouldn't stop bombing Cambodia or napalming people. […] What could the king of a tiny little beach kingdom do? How could I stop it? With my walking stick? Nothing's changed. Today it's the Iraq war.[407]

The King's practice of freedom suggestively evokes Foucault's observation that we perform 'a critical ontology of ourselves' in the aim of fostering 'an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them'.[408] The video introduces a spectrum of affects that collectively put together the world in different ways. This not only resituates the disenfranchisement of the political left in the early 1970s but explores how art may recuperate pathologised affects such as anxiety and despair to push against normative structures of action, temporality and feeling. The above extract also highlights the contrary origins of the project, and the process of subject reorientation within a world that has denied a place for her. As the King, Antin admits defeat ('How could I stop it?') yet stages a dramatic confrontation anyway, rebuffing the perception of despair as easy retreat.[409] My reading of humourlessness in Antin's personae follows critical reevaluations of pathologised feelings by Ann Cvetkovich and others who have turned their attention to negative affects for what they tell us about the cultural memory and public cultures of histories of trauma. Under the proviso of this chapter, such political sentiments are not without risk of deleterious effects, whether by 'not doing enough' to dent political norms or by exasperating the critical limits of irony to topple presiding power formations. In the following, I consider how holding onto difficult feelings can also reinforce derogative narratives of difference.

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[407] Taft, *Artists: Eleanor Antin*, p. 24.
[408] Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' (1984), trans. by Catherine Porter from an unpublished French original, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 50.
[409] See the writer Rebecca Solnit's caution that 'despair is easy, or at least low cost' in Astra Taylor, 'Rebecca Solnit', *Bomb*, 1 October 2009: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/rebecca-solnit/> [accessed 13 November 2021].

The Mantle of Entitlement: Anti-Assimilation and the 'might-have-beens'

San Diego was both many miles in distance and creative milieu from Antin's East Coast. Starting afresh meant that Antin had relatively few connections in Southern California in the early 1970s; however, friendships with artists Miriam Schapiro, who had moved to nearby La Jolla in 1967, as well as Martha Rosler, Suzanne Lacy, Linda Montano and the composer and experimental musician Pauline Oliveros, introduced her to a network of artists whose work embraced feminist issues.[410] Many of these artists were instrumental in developing experimental pedagogy informed by feminist thought. It was through the Feminist Art Program (FAP), initially developed by the artist Judy Chicago at Fresno State College and later re-established at CalArts with Schapiro and others, that Antin was invited to contribute to *Anonymous was a Woman* (1974), a project that incorporated seventy-one letters from women artists addressed to a generation of students entering the arts. The absence of women from art history served as a critical prompt for the project. Inspired by the intergenerational transmission of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, the students sought advice with the view to building solidarity across groups and ages, explaining '[y]our letter would be an invaluable contribution in our efforts to build a strong identity for women'.[411] Antin's letter strikes a different tone to the other contributors in the publication; though she supported the goals of FAP, her comments resist the optimistic timbre of peer empowerment given by the other contributors. She suggests that competition between women is a lesser-discussed danger, and that advice is never meant to serve as a one-fits-all. There is no 'easy way to proceed' she advised, not because the artists wouldn't have worked hard enough, but because unrealistic expectations placed on women artists by systemic misogyny 'means you have to defend your right to be there'.[412]

Critics have fallen into divisive camps when interpreting Antin's relationship to feminist issues and marginal subjectivities for the racial stereotypes present in several of her personae projects. Lisa Bloom reads Antin's departure from the optimistic tone of the FAP project as modelling a critical response to the mishandling by feminist groups of the

[410] Antin and Rosler were friends from New York. Rosler also lived in Solana Beach for around six to eight months when she first moved to San Diego in September 1968.
[411] Feminist Art Program, *Anonymous Was a Woman: A Documentation of the Women's Art Festival*: *A Collection of Letters to Young Women Artists* (Valencia, CA: California Institute of the Arts, 1974), p. 53. See also Lisa Gail Collins, 'The Art of Transformation: Parallels in the Black Arts and Feminist Art Movements', in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. by Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. 273–96 (p. 284).
[412]Eleanor Antin, 'Letter to a Young Woman Artist', *Anonymous Was a Woman*, pp. 58–59.

specific oppressions faced by Jewish women.[413] Bloom argues that critics tend to overlook Antin's Jewishness, failing to take into account the heritage the artist draws and plays upon, including Yiddish linguistic and cultural idioms, as well as her own Jewish identity as a second-generation immigrant woman of Eastern European descent.[414] As such, Bloom reads Antin's letter as an anti-assimilationist gesture that parlays with the dislocation of Jewish ethnicity from the artist's work – a reading that recalls an extended history of Jewish representation as it developed through the twentieth century from its recognition as a racial group to its contemporary register in the United States as an ethnic, cultural and religious identity.[415] This attention on personal experience offers important insight, especially for an archive like Antin's, which is offered as exemplary of feminist critique without explicating the contours of solidarity on which it relies. Bloom uses this lens to revaluate Antin's archive, for example, by looking at how *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) – a work widely celebrated for its commentary on the beauty industry's role in women's oppression – performs ethnic and gendered reclamation in tandem via 'a willful failure to assimilate as a generic subject' that stands outside of white femininity established via patriarchal ideals.[416] Even if we are to read Antin's critique of binary thinking through the King as consistent with second-wave feminism – the plight of the individual undermined by an imperial 'right to rule' – the means of derivation differ from formulated strategies against gendered oppression. As we have seen, Antin's King embodies a narrative of diminutive entitlement in which traits of inflexibility and incompetence expose his failings as both self-aware and self-fulfilling. Before considering how the character mirrors the setting in which it was produced, it is first necessary to consider the aspects of the King persona that are concentrated upon, and in particular, aspects of the King's performance that have been received uncritically.

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[413] For further reading on this point, see Letty Cottin Pogrebin, 'Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement', in *Ms*., June 1982, 45–72; Pogrebin writes: 'Will feminism be our movement only so long as we agree not to make our Jewishness an issue? (p. 46).

[414] Lisa E. Bloom, 'Contests for Meaning in Body Politics and Feminist Art Discourses of the 1970s: The work of Eleanor Antin', in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 153–69.

[415] Michael Rogin extends this argument in his book, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Focusing on the phenomenon of Jewish men using blackface in early twentieth-century performance as a means to perform signs of ethnicity and race from Jewish identity, he considers how the walling off of Jewishness as an ethnicity rather than race enabled the conditions for the assimilation of Jews into white American society.

[416] Lisa E. Bloom, 'Rewriting the Script: Eleanor Antin's Feminist Art', in *Eleanor Antin*, ed. by Howard Fox (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1999), p. 169.

The methods Antin uses stand out for their anti-assimilation. As women artists extended feminist principles in this period through ecological and environmental consciousness, the body was often disposed to counteract patriarchal imperialism over land and its ecosystems. When Antin's work is paired with this aesthetic directly the result is striking. In 1977, Antin was included in *Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content*, an exhibition of paintings, sculpture, drawings and videotape by twenty-nine women artists. Organised by Joan Semmel, the exhibition sought to celebrate devalued subject matter and media traditionally considered the realm of women's art, alongside 'anthropomorphic or nature forms'.[417] The collective result of these themes served to 'develop a unique iconography' including several nature-based performance works by Mary Beth Edelson and Judy Chicago, two artists that had drawn on goddess imagery and signifiers of cisgendered femininity for their staged photographs and performances in North Carolina and in California respectively. Chicago's *Atmospheres* (1968–74), for instance, used pyrotechnics and coloured smoke to introduce 'a feminine impulse into the environment' through the medium's 'softening' and 'transformative' détournement of sites historically parcelled and built upon by men.[418] For the time, Antin's King displays unorthodox methods against hegemonic notions of space, using her character's likeness to Charles to enlarge the humiliations of the audacious colonist who had attempted to extend his entitlements over land in America at a critical point in the expansion of the British colonial apparatus.[419]

The implications of Antin's staged entitlements over the future of his kingdom is more complex than has been fully explored. If we follow the logic of Bloom's claim that Antin's use of blackface articulates shared histories of discrimination by Jewish and Black people, this leaves unaccounted the figure of Charles that Antin so identified with.[420] Because whiteness is a racial construct that, despite its supremacist history as a

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[417] 'Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content', Brooklyn Museum Art School, 1–27 October 1977, Brooklyn Museum, New York: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/2365> [accessed 12 November 2021].
[418] Judy Chicago, description of '*Atmospheres*/Fireworks/Dry Ice' on the artist's personal website: <http://www.judychicago.com/gallery/atmospheresfireworks/artwork/> [accessed 12 November 2021].
[419] Charles I issued a charter to the first Lord Baltimore (George Calvert), a trusted advisor to the King, to take control of Maryland in June 1632. As part of this arrangement, the King reserved one-fifth of the gold and silver in the province and a 'yearly tribute of two Indian arrows'. Maryland was named in honour of Queen Henrietta Maria (Terra Maria), who was of course Charles' wife. James McSherry, *History of Maryland: From its First Settlement in 1634, to the Year 1848* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1849), p. 24.
[420] Bloom, 'Rewriting the Script', p. 76. In Bloom's words: 'Antin dresses up in blackface to point out that the Jewish stereotypes and discrimination against Eastern European Jews prevalent earlier in the century are ideologically akin to such treatment of blacks'.

means of control and exclusion, is often passed off as absent or neutral, the King's whiteness requires scrutiny particularly in the context of the work's absence of attention to the settler colonial dispossession of Indigenous communities in San Diego – its colonial name given by Spain's King Phillip III. It is telling that the dispossessions highlighted in the performance are attributed to its contemporaneous residents without concern for the unceded ancestral lands of the Tribal Nations of San Diego County: the Kumeyaay/Diegueño, San Luiseño, Cahuilla and Cupeño, which predate the existence of the State of California and the United States.[421] As we have seen, Antin deliberately raced her characters using racialised markers and stereotypes, 'coloring' her characters with the Black Movie Star and Eleanora Antinova as extensions of her own identity.[422] Antin's King, as developed in relation to disputes at Solana Beach, was formulated as white, and curiously of her personae is the only non-minority character upon which struggles over power are enacted.[423] That Antin settled on Charles I is striking given that it is also the century in which whiteness took on meaning as a racial taxonomy, replacing Christianity 'as the primary indicator of freedom and mastery'.[424] If Antin derived signifiers from popular gender archetypes and racial typecasting as a means of unseating the fixed categorisation of identity, it is possible to read both intended and unintended results as part of this characterisation of racial privilege and entitlement.[425]

Against a 'post-black' refrain, Cherise Smith has argued that focus on the artist's figurative ventriloquism as an 'existential center' of Antin's work – as one which 'slips'

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[421] For a community outline of the Kumeyaay Indian Nation, see: <http://viejasbandofkumeyaay.org/viejas-community/kumeyaay-history/ [accessed 14 November 2021].

[422] On the use of minstrelsy and blackface by non-Black performers in the United States in the early twentieth century, see David Gillota, 'The New Jewish Blackface: Ethnic Anxiety in Contemporary Jewish Humor', in *Ethnic Humor in Multiethnic America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), pp. 48–75; for a broader view of Blackness performed across and outwith African American culture, see E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[423] In years to follow, Antin would devise *El Desdichado* (1983) [the unfortunate] as a 'black gypsy king', demonstrating her interest in racialising avatars of masculine power. She describes the narrative of this work as revolving around a king who leads 'a crusade of the old, the blind, the maimed, the poor, the despised to the white city, a kind of paradise, a Utopia in a sense. I wear a large ship made out of this packing material, a kind of layered cardboard. It's like a belt around my waist that's filled with medieval characters. A ship of fools really, because in the end, we find our way there to the white city and it turns out to be a city of blood and ashes and death. My dark side obviously'. See 'Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin'.

[424] Katharine Gerbner, 'From Christian to White', in *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 74–90 (p. 75).

[425] On the capacity for performance to introduce 'category crisis' into identity, see Marjorie Garber's work on cross-dressing in Garber, *Vested Interests, Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 2011). Garber's notion of 'category crisis' is provocative, concerning how a 'failure of definitional distinction' permits the conditions for a permeable 'border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another'. (p. 16)

on signs of Blackness and African American culture to emphasise discrimination faced by Jewish and African American people – obscures core issues around the artist's availing of Blackness.[426] Antin indicated her intentions with Eleanora Antinova and the Black Movie Star as modelling a rarefied and glamorous femininity elevated by a burgeoning television media, yet this ambition caricatured markers of ethnicity. Categories of race were also performed self-assuredly, even when those phenotypical signifiers are absent. Antin's claim to Blackness, in both figurative ventriloquism and blacking up, presents a serious quandary for the limits of persona-play and the attendant privileges of 'acting out' stereotypes without recourse to the harm such presentations are liable to cause. As a scholar committed to an anti-racist, queer feminist work, I take this charge seriously. As a result, I am less compelled to take forward Antin's avatar of Black identity as 'otherness' in its conduit for difference analogous to second-generational experiences of Jewish identity, culture and history – even as the harm caused to Jewish people within the United States and around the world cannot be dismissed.

How marginalised identities are deemed available proved uncomfortable to many of Antin's peers and audiences at the time.[427] While some critics and historians were reluctant to address Antin's use of blackface in Eleanora Antinova, others openly rebuked the appropriation of Black identity against the backdrop of critical debates and protests around the platforming and funding of racist artworks by white artists.[428] When the feminist journal *Chrysalis* featured a video still of Antin's Black Movie Star, the writer and activist Michelle Cliff hailed it 'downright racist', while the performance critic Sally Banes dubbed Antin's life performance as Antinova, in which Antin lived in full character for twenty days, 'a bad racist joke'.[429] Others, such as Copeland, have resisted

[426] Smith, *Enacting Others*, pp. 110–14. On the term and cultural underpinnings of 'post-black', see Thelma Golden, *Freestyle* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001).
[427] See 'issues of' cultural difference broached in Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, p. 72.
[428] See, for instance, anger over the decision by the nonprofit New York gallery Artists Space to exhibit *The N***** Drawings* by the artist Donald (Donald Newman) in 1976, in Grace Glueck, '"Racism" Protest Slated Over Title of Art Show', *New York Times*, 14 April 1979: <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/04/14/archives/racism-protest-slated-over-title-of-art-show-controversy-began-in.html> [accessed 14 November 2021]; and 'Action Against Racism in the Arts', *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics*, vol. 2, no. 4, issue 8 (1979), 108–11. For a critical revisitation see Aruna D'Souza, *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018).
[429] Michelle Cliff, letter to the editor, *Chrysalis*, no. 10 (1980), 6–7; Sally Banes, 'The Squirming Point (Eleanor Antin)', originally published in *Soho Weekly News*, 8 March 1979 and reprinted in Sally Banes, *Subversive Expectations: Performance Art and Paratheater in New York, 1976–85* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 69–70 (p. 70). On the audience response to Eleanora Antinova, Antin reported that Black and white 'liberals get uptight when they hear about it […] but after seeing a performance they're on my side. Besides, Antinova is a survivor, a very positive and heroic image'. See Grace Glueck, 'Roguish Gallery: One Aging Black Ballerina', *New York Times*, 12 May 1989:

condemnation, finding Antin's racialised performances to limn the 'lived economies of dispossession she can momentarily approximate but never entirely assume'.[430] For Copeland, however, the performance revealed a great deal about the white liberal position, one that Antin seems to set at a remove from her Jewishness.[431] Indeed, Antin's response to Cliff, a Jamaica-born poet and writer, was to label her a 'true white liberal', with the artist embodying the position of the dispossessed when articulating how 'we' are perceived in the world; that 'we blacks do not experience ourselves as "other," as we women do not experience ourselves as "the other," as we artists do not experience ourselves as "the other"'.[432] This first-person account of possession and dispossession prompts Copeland and Smith to challenge the methods by which Antin throws off her whiteness to articulate her sense of Jewishness.[433] The possessive holding of Blackness is particularly troublesome because it mingles a seeming empathy with those targeted by antiblackness with a claim *on* Blackness; this entitlement, Smith writes, echoes the formation of whiteness itself: 'blackness *belongs* to Antin because she is white and privileged'.[434] As 'a bad racist joke' the performance's mechanics work violently here, unthinking of the material effects of cultural irony on the identities implicated, and blindsided when valorised as art-world critique. As Smith notes, when irony does explicitly appear in Antin's personae, it works cruelly, making mockery of racial paranoia even when its primary target is supposedly white liberal feminism.[435] The double irony of this position, whether or not intended by the artist, is a return to the ugliness of white entitlement. 'On producing blackness as a mask under which human subjects are essentially the same', Copeland contends, Antin enacts 'the white liberal position *par excellence*'.[436] And in fact the artist Lorraine O'Grady would charge the

<https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/12/movies/in-a-roguish-gallery-one-aging-black-ballerina.html> [accessed 12 November 2021].

[430] Copeland, 'Some Ways of Playing Antinova', p. 32.

[431] On this point, Ann Pellegrini's essay on the performer Sandra Bernhard's use of blackface is worth reviewing. Pellegrini argues that Bernhard's *YOU MAKE ME FEEL (MIGHTY REAL)* (1994) theatricalised authenticity to the point of self-ridicule to 'denaturali[ze] "black-Jewish solidarity", an alliance which has never been inevitable or finally achieved'. (p. 52) See Ann Pellegrini, 'YOU MAKE ME FEEL (MIGHTY REAL): Sandra Bernhard's Whiteface', in *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*, ed. by Lisa E. Bloom (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 237–50. This argument regretfully doesn't consider Black Jewish audiences.

[432] Antin's fluid use of 'we' for positions of the dispossessed and claims of racial prejudice while appearing in blackface is difficult to comprehend.

[433] Antin made a comment to this effect when discusses her inability to 'get into character, or more precisely, [she] couldn't throw off [her own]'. Eleanor Antin, *Being Antinova*, pp. 7–9.

[434] Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 98.

[435] Ibid., pp. 130–31.

[436] Copeland, 'Some Ways of Playing Antinova', pp. 34–5.

ugliness of this entitlement – not only to the use of racial stereotypes in Eleanora Antinova but the use of persona full stop – in her first public performance persona *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–83) (figure 2.16). O'Grady's performance was staged in several locations including during the opening of the New Museum's exhibition *Persona* (1981), of which Antin was a part. Protesting its all-white exhibition roster, O'Grady wouldn't allow the art world's racism to be swept under the rug; her name for the *Persona* exhibition was the 'Nine White Personae' show.[437]

With O'Grady's formative intervention in mind, I turn to the King's mechanics of power afforded by his whiteness and how this identity supports Antin's performance of humiliation at Solana Beach. The King's racial identity fits with sustained efforts to produce whiteness as unraced. As the film historian Richard Dyer contends, the ideology of whiteness works diffusely to normalise and neutralise white entitlement and disempowerment at the expense of people of colour. White power, according to Dyer's assessment, 'seems to fall apart in your hands as soon as you begin' yet its mechanisms secure its dominance by 'seeming not to be anything in particular'.[438] Or as Smith calls it, 'like blackness, whiteness is an ideologically and culturally constructed trope that is endowed with real world consequences'.[439] These considerations amplify core difficulties in venturing into 'other' identities in fiction, risking the reproduction of harmful stereotyping and codes. To stress, my revisitation of the work is not a reparative reading of racist and racialised tropes in Antin's work nor do I isolate the King from Antin's catalogue of raced performances, as we have seen in the ways that the performance demonstrates how whiteness can be both present and unseeming as 'nothing at all'. Rather, to name the mechanics of whiteness is to read the 'burying [of] its particular racial ingredients' in its mingling with *Americanness*, as the writer and literary scholar

[437] As *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*, O'Grady wore a gown and cape made from 180 pairs of white gloves carrying a white whip studded with white chrysanthemums. Her first outing was at Linda Goode Bryant's gallery Just Above Midtown in 1980 for the opening of *Outlaw Aesthetics*. O'Grady cited Antin's performance in her rebuke of how a segregated art world oppressed Black artistry: 'I'd gone to see Eleanor Antin, whose *100 Boots* I adored. I had no idea what to expect. As it turned out, she was doing a performance of Eleanora Antinova, her black ballerina character who had danced with Diaghilev in Paris after World War 1. I liked the concept, it made me think of my mother, Lena, of what might have happened had she emigrated from Jamaica to Paris as an eighteen-year-old instead of to Boston at exactly that time. But my mother was tall and willowy, the black ballerina type. And neither this short, plump white woman in blackface nor her out-of-kilter vision of the black character's experience could compute for me. That was the moment I decided I had to speak for myself'. Lorraine O'Grady, 'This Will Have Been: My 1980s', *Art Journal*, vol. 71, no. 2 (2012), 6–17 (p. 10). For an extended account of the project, see Lorraine O'Grady, *Writing in Space, 1973–2019*, ed. by Aruna D'Souza (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
[438] Richard Dyer, 'White', *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1988), 44–64 (p. 44).
[439] Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 113.

Toni Morrison keenly observed of American literature's mythologisation of an 'Africanist' presence to establish racial differences within modernity.[440] Morrison's words animate the gap between what is perceived and performatively claimed by Antin's personae in subtle yet conscious ways.

That the King would arrive on the precipice of progressive discourses led by women of colour is significant to the political contexts in which Antin worked but did not necessarily connect with.[441] This era marked a period of strategic splintering in community groups to focus on specific needs that weren't being met. As claims of biological essentialism and dominance by white middle-class feminists flared within the women's movement, the path-breaking work of the Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian socialist organisation founded in Boston by the writer Barbara Smith, as well as Chicana feminist scholars and writers such as Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, gained momentum. The harm of reproducing the structures of white patriarchy within feminism was highlighted in their work. In her 1979 essay 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', the writer and poet Audre Lorde wrote 'They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change'. Lorde called on white feminists to interrogate the 'tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought'.[442] Such a sentiment queries the longevity of Antin's methods, whether revolutionary change can be ironically located in hegemonic self-stylisation, or if appropriating tools that have historically fuelled oppression simply 'do enough' to avoid 'tragic repetition'.

Indeed, for some audiences, the King may fail to explicate 'the difference between "expressing" the values that are the objects of critique and miming them'.[443] As such, we may speculate on the aesthetics of imperial sovereignty – failed or otherwise – to extend a critical strategy. What exactly is new about an image of territorial inscription,

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[440] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 47. For Morrison, 'Africanist' and 'Africanism' describe a form of blackness conceived and projected within a Eurocentric tradition. I also include here Morrison's forceful point about marginality: 'The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination' (p. 5).
[441] Key literature includes *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. by Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga first published in 1981. For critical surveys of feminisms as they developed within this period, see bell hooks, 'Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women', in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), pp. 43–65.
[442] Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), pp. 110–14, first delivered on the 'Personal and Political' Panel, Second Sex Conference, 29 October 1979.
[443] Phillip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 26.

especially one that is seemingly sympathetic ('poor thing') to Charles' plight? But then, Antin's King is a constructed persona and not an endorsement of character. This may seem obvious, but it is important to reiterate given the propensity for similitude. My analysis responds affirmatively to Antin's histrionics of failure, but not resolutely. I see the King as mounting a critical strategy that performs accordingly to what Auslander has cited as a critical difference between conceptualising representations that 'reflect hegemonic ideology versus representing the hegemonic representations of that ideology'.[444] Where persona typically allows for the exploration of identity through semiotic, social and psychological attributes, Antin's King is assembled from sullied signs of nobility and wealth: he is no effective patriarch.

The role of narrative in relation to the fragility of power is an important one, described by the artist as 'a kind of exorcism, a trying-on of the "might-have-beens", the discards, the losers. You let them in for a while and they stop haunting you. Maybe…'[445] This passage indicates that Antin's interest in 'losers' uses character as a means of intervention, so that it might *stop haunting you*. The artist's apprehension here – nearly retracting this statement in the same breath (*maybe*), registers this action as incongruous, discerning an attachment to the loser without immediate rehabilitation. Elsewhere, deferred identification onto traditional figures of mastery is affirmative, 'When I go to the movies, I empathize with the male hero' Antin once remarked. 'The woman is usually a wife, a mother, a whore, or a loser. We take part in American culture by coming in from the outside, by making the most delicate adjustments'.[446] This comment arrives at a critical juncture: taking up 'delicate adjustment' as a matter of embodied identification with denigrated or abject social profiles. Antin, as we know, is no stranger to this as a method of irony. In *Encounter 1* (1972) she satirised the codes and conventions of white bourgeois feminism and the tonal politeness of 'sisterly' idealism. But while wryly humorous in its conceptual mimicry, deeper resonances belie its comic delivery.[447] For the King, as a character embodied durationally, 'coming in from the outside' proposes a mode of self-reflexive engagement with this adjustment process.

Crucial to this interpretation is how Antin's likeness of Charles dogmatically revives a historical period wherein the concept of 'revolution' began to take on its

[444] Ibid.
[445] Stofflet, 'Eleanor Antin', pp. 189–90.
[446] Antin interviewed by Bloom, p. 217.
[447] Lisa E. Bloom, 'Ethnic Notions and Feminist Strategies', in *Jewish Identity in Modern Art,* ed. by Catherine M. Soussloff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 155.

modern meaning as liberation that did not 'reproduce an inheritance'.[448] For centuries prior to the 1500s, revolution referred to astronomical cycles.[449] During the upheavals in Britain between 1640 and 1688, revolution conferred political rebellion, yet retained its origins of cycling back to a resettled order, keeping the mantle of power intact. After years of unsettlement following Charles' execution and the removal of the Stuarts from power, the command of monarchical authority was re-established with the return of Charles II in what is known as the Restoration (1660–1685). The revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thus paradoxically describe an uprising against a figurehead of authority for the purposes of restoring a former power to its glory, while the association of revolution as liberation from an established order is in fact attributed to later historical revolutions.[450] The embattled status of the Stuart monarchy through cyclical insistence relays the interests for which Charles' rule stood were not for the benefit of public happiness, but sought in terms of the naturalised rights as a 'born ruler'. What does this mean for Antin's dogged revolutionary? In one sense, Antin's identification with Charles manifests jovially by emulating the slapstick indignation of thwarted rule by divine right. However, as I discuss in the following section, the project is driven by complex relations to place and property. I see the characterisation of despotic rule as staging the complicity and hubris of white supremacy, as reproduced in the gentrification of 1970s' Solana Beach. However, I also see Antin's King as providing new tactics for reading the outlines of the King's revolution in performance by drawing attention to how, as Sara Ahmed has put it, whiteness becomes spatialised as 'worldly'.[451] This stress on *spatialising* is critical to the chapter's wider engagement with the place of affect in environmentalism, as it models a self-critical approach that queries how social norms and expectations shape calls to action.

To return to the rendering of whiteness in Antin's King, we can observe how it is coded by Antin as benign or nothing 'in particular'. When Antin exposes the King to Solana Beach residents for *The King of Solana Beach*, the photographs show the King's subjects as primarily white, while all his social interaction is ostensibly homosocial. And

[448] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 197.
[449] See Hannah Arendt's elaboration on the historical origins of revolution. 'In this scientific usage it retained its precise Latin meaning, designating the regular, lawfully revolving motion of the stars, which, since it was known to be beyond the influence of man and hence irresistible, was certainly characterised neither by newness nor by violence. On the contrary, the word clearly indicates a recurring, cyclical movement'. Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 42.
[450] Ibid.
[451] Sara Ahmed, 'Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2007), 149–68 (p. 150).

yet, these shared attributes do not offer comfort. Whether drinking Budweiser on a park bench with four surfer-types at Fletcher's Point or greeting an elderly gentleman in a long trench coat (figures 2.17 & 2.18), the King's subjects sport bored expressions or otherwise appear uninterested, rendering him a laughing stock. Where the presence of the surfer-types exploits tropes of white masculinity as easy-going, they also pass wry comment on the King's outdatedness as he attempts to insert himself into the fold of a clichéd Southern California cultural group.[452] It is further striking then, that the King passes into scholarship as unraced. Meiling Cheng, for instance, salutes the King's 'old world charm and soft approachability' as injecting levity into graver issues of political disillusionment and class inequity.[453] Fox ascribes the King with a failed morality, his power weakened by his exile.[454] Rather than tallying the King's eccentricity as a portrait of harmlessness, I read the performance as elaborating the despotic and self-involved qualities Charles I was historically characterised as owning. This is not to belabour historical facticity over the work's metafictional composition, but rather, following Copeland's observations on the mechanics of white liberalism as revealed by their negation, to offer a more complex account of the implications of summoning the figure of Charles I to 1970s' San Diego than has been demonstrated.

By now it is no secret that *The King of Solana Beach* theatricalises a contrarian disposition: displaced from monarchic rule he attempts to assemble a militia that invariably expedites his exile. He refuses to adapt to a modernising town, travelling by foot or bicycle as residents scoot past him in cars. These details parallel Antin's own experiences of place, in which she has described a lost community spirit as a result of vast development. Antin didn't drive, considering it 'horrifying', but she hitched 'in [the] days you could hitch'.[455] Antin would take and collect her son from school in the next town this way with few problems. A few years later, however, she noticed that 'the cars were bigger, they were newer, and the people behind the wheel were older'. For the artist, this meant one thing: 'Development had come to California. It happened. I hadn't even noticed, but everything had changed'.[456] The language around 'change' is charged,

[452] Paul Schimmel notes a standard image of Los Angeles as: 'a sunny mecca of hedonism, populated by various vacuous characters: beach bunnies and surfers, wannabe actors and actresses, movie moguls, struggling screenwriters'. See Schimmel, 'Into the Maelstrom: L.A. Art at the End of the Century', in *Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s*, ed. by Catherine Gudis (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), pp. 19–22 (p. 19).
[453] Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art*, p. 41.
[454] Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, p. 60.
[455] Taft, *California Video*, p. 23.
[456] Ibid.

implying something that has happened after the artist's arrived, while ignoring longer narratives pertinent to California of economic development under settler colonialism and westward expansion. Change also confers something has been lost, renewing its former appearance as a site of cherishment or nostalgia. The King's actions press the changes in Solana Beach as something indefensible. And yet the King's avatar of Charles was far from dutiful to his people, indicating a more duplicitous picture of kingly intention.

Although Charles ascended the throne through familial entitlement, he famously struggled through his reign to overcome a fiscal debt inherited in the midst of the economic crisis of 1640 from the previous reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. Hardboiled schemes, including a levy imposed on towns to enlarge the navy, his commission of forest fines and knighthood fees, thus accentuated his legacy as a 'feudal overlord' on the brink of a new order: capitalism, which at its core, signalled a shift in which power would pass into the hands of a new class-based system of ownership, production and distribution.[457] As part of his legacy of forest fines, Charles disputed the boundaries of royal forests within which private landowners had been allowed to build parks and villages allowed to grow. While the initial impetus for the revival of forest laws may have been spurred by a desire to prevent the decay of woods, these efforts served more pressing issues, as Pauline Gregg points out, calling his fiscal motives 'undoubtable in Charles' precarious economic condition'.[458] This means that even in cases where Charles' reforestation has been suggested as proto-conservationist, the driving motivations for Charles were self-interest, retaining benefits for the few. The crown duly collected these measures of taxation.[459] And indeed, individual exemptions made by Charles were only granted to certain landowners and close friends henceforth licenced to 'depark'. This caused outrage among forest-dwellers and roamers: according to Gregg, so incensed that their ancient rights of common were at risk, dwellers 'pulled down the fences as fast as they went up'.[460] Charles' profitable return through forest fines casts a

[457] For Charles' feudalism, see Charles Carlton and Christopher Durston, *Charles I* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 228.
[458] Pauline Gregg, *King Charles I* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), pp. 119–18.
[459] Gregg elaborates: 'The suggestion now was that royal forests should be restored to their ancient boundaries and that transgressors should be fined for their encroachment or for infringing forest law within that enlarged area. In this way practices that had come to be considered normal would be penalised, whole villages – there were seventeen of them in the forest of dean alone – would be subject to penalty for breaking forest law, and even those who farmed the [forest] verges would be fined. Though much of this would be small-scale penalisation, and not intended to be carried out, the amount of discontent which the very idea would generate was bound to be considerable. It was, however, the big encroaching landlords who were the real target'. Ibid., p. 225.
[460] Ibid., p. 226.

self-actualising portrait of English feudalism as an empire reliant on entrepreneurial methods.[461]

Charles' forest fines have contemporary relevance. In 1970s America, the term NIMBYISM (not in my backyard) – as the opposition to something unwanted being constructed or cleared near to one's home – was yet to reach common usage, yet as campaigners became exposed to the personal, economic and environmental cost of pollution, so the slow-growth movement came to directly connect economic and environmental issues. Concerning Solana Beach and its surrounding areas were claims that unregulated growth increased runoff, exacerbating the issue of cliff erosion. Yet, while calls for environmental protection and conservation seem honest work, the 'common interests' of homeowners' associations in Southern California have a long and vexed history rooted in racial and class segregation. Mike Davis has discussed how environmentalism provided a convenient 'congenial discourse' that could be exploited 'to the extent that it is congruent with a vision of eternally rising property values in secure bastions of white privilege'. Explicating the historical formations of white, middle-class homeownership, he argues that the 'master discourse […] is homestead exclusivism, whether the immediate issue is apartment construction, commercial encroachment, school busing, taxes or simply community designation'.[462] As such, a careful account of the King's claims to protection in the project would take stock of the personal motivations undergirding this persona. I read the complications animated by Antin's namesake as challenging the straightforward presentation of environmental issues that parallel but also fictionalise the likeness between 'Charlie' and the King as Antin's male persona as a matter of complicity. If taken as both her 'male self' and her 'most political self', Antin's own security as a homeowner rather than the 'have nots' she defends declines a simple portrait of insurgency against the ruling class. Rather than attribute reverse irony to the work – a disqualifying process sketched out in the introduction – I see Antin's King as modelling a self-reflexive critique that rejects the presumptive role of the artist as a pedagogical influencer. I read this presentation as valuably expanding for its audience what environmentalism looks and *feels* like, regardless of how efficacious or ethical these feelings may be. I argue that the King

[461] Royal attempts at woodland conservation in the medieval period, as in the Acts of 1483, 1543 and 1559, and again in the 1580s, weren't conceived within Charles' lifetime.
[462] Davis, *City of Quartz*, pp. 142–43. Presenting several case studies within the Southern California slow-growth rebellion, Davis argues that the movement had strong echoes of the monopoly by wealthy homeowners in previous decades on race, class and 'home values' (pp. 134–36).

invites us to spend time with these failures across the personal and political, and to recognise that transformations of both do not come easily.

Ambulation as Critical Geography

Alongside the King, Antin was working on *100 Boots* (1971–73), a photoconceptual photographic work which used the postcard format to cinematically adapt the format of the adventure serial. This simultaneity compliments the analysis of space in this chapter, drawing ambulation and material geography into the centre of Antin's early work. To produce *100 Boots*, Antin again worked with Phel Steinmetz on its fifty-one photographs featuring one hundred pairs of black rubber boots she had staged in various California locations.[463] Boots snake around bends in the road in adroit lines, others embark on riverboats or adventure across empty ranches; they stand alongside traffic cones at highway patrol stops, their triangular form comparable to the marshalling officers in the near distance. The boots line up behind a van, waiting their turn for approval at a checkpoint (figure 2.19) or crowd the parking lot of a small office touting 'RURAL MANPOWER' along a sign that is the length of the building itself (figure 2.20). With only two cars in the lot, the congregational circles of the boots appear versed on the joke: such a service has little demand. Human absence in the image is heavily expectant on a MIA machismo, and with the Vietnam War not yet over, it is a joke of bleak temperament.

Periodically mailed out to some 1,000 friends, colleagues and associates over two-and-a-half years, the project culminated in an exhibition at MoMA in New York in May 1973 with the final missives delivered from New York, when Antin returned to install the show.[464] At MoMA, *100 Boots* spread out across an entire gallery that had been transformed into a 'crash pad' complete with mattresses, sleeping bags, radio and a lockable front door to deter theft. During these early years of relocation, Antin admits her own frustrations at having to schlep back to New York City to install artworks in non-commercial galleries and 'alternative' spaces that still echoed commercial constraints. She lamented the need for 'blank white walls' in order to attract an audience: 'Why not

[463] Antin would later identify her work as postconceptual, but at the time of *100 Boots* considered herself as a conceptual artist.

[464] As the demands of the project grew, Antin enlisted the writer Kathy Acker to send out two instalments of *100 Boots*. Antin recompensed them in kind with access to the mailing list. According to Antin, Acker mailed out the instalments of her first novel, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* and 'became the darling of the art world'. Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots* (Philadelphia: Running Press Books, 1999), p. 5.

the mail?' she asked, 'Hadn't the great novels of Dickens and Dostoyevsky been presented first in serial form?'[465] Antin quickly routed out the potential of *100 Boots* to a project that would require its audience to commit to the intermittency of mail and waggishly 'sold [herself] the movie rights'.[466] Antin's presentation of the complete postcards at MoMA suggests retaliation against the spatial and temporal impositions of the gallery as it shut out the world beyond its walls. If the outsider of Antin's epic narrative had to be contained by the institution, it would do so as a lark.

In the first chapter I examined how postcards sent from the road by Wojnarowicz constructed a montage of gay sociality and desire through textual vignettes and drawings that overlay the postcard's original form. Like Wojnarowicz's road movie, Antin's *100 Boots* drew recipients into a narrative through a rearticulated temporality that was permeable. Although conceived as a serial – a defining marker of photoconceptualism – absent are its systemised lexicon of grids and equations. Instead, the boots, again like Wojnarowicz's postcards, tease out new formal possibilities from tired representations of place, constructing alternative impressions of sites determined or due to be determined by their material transformation. In this way, *100 Boots* used critical ambulation to stage a subjective geography – a set of impressions that shift according to the artist's familiarity with Southern California over this two-and-a-half-year adventure. Distributing the work by mail also exposed *100 Boots* to chance encounters and accidental losses, using the longevity of the work's 'epic' tradition to tell the fast-tracked story of coastal gentrification.

For the artist, these early encounters with the San Diego landscape presented a creative opportunity, with the promise of discovery turning Antin into 'a greedy location scout'.[467] Indeed, several of the postcards feature sites earmarked for demolition, sometimes unbeknown to the artist until after they had been razed. As such, the fifty-one photographs chart an initial feeling of optimism that gradually recedes as she becomes more acquainted with the landscape and its complexities, as Antin recalled: 'Artistically, it was fascinating to come [to San Diego] because it was totally open […] It was still

[465] Ibid., p. 3.
[466] The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, '100 Boots Heads East', press release no. 41, May 30, 1973: <https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326846.pdf?_ga=2.161629308.1567231788.1638455990-143707825.1634063840> [accessed 2 December 2021].
[467] Antin, *100 Boots*, p. 5.

gorgeous and beautiful – not like now. Not "development land"'.[468] Like the King, Antin also fictionalised a lead male character, portrayed in absentia, who provides a perspective for the work: 'I had to determine my star's spatial distance from the area and where he would sit in the frame'.[469]

Critics have indeed jumped on the work's personification, cooking up allegorical narratives for the boots in lieu of a directed action. According to Henry Sayre, 'when [the boots] trespass on private property on May 17, 1971, they join thousands of their fellow Americans who had themselves been arrested in the preceding weeks in anti-Vietnam war demonstrations around the country'.[470] In reference to the March on Washington on the 24th of April, Sayre reads the work as a gesture of solidarity with the 'Chicago Seven' (originally Chicago Eight), who were arrested on charges of conspiracy and incitement to riot in relation to protests of the anti-war movement. That the boots can be seen to gather outside federal buildings and press against wire fences makes the image of assembly difficult to deny. Location is paramount in this framing, just as the visual demonstration of site-specific movement protest in the form of walkouts, marches and demos holds primacy. The political valence of walking in or as part of protest reiterates the notion of public assembly around terms of arrival, departure, or occupancy, for example as sit-ins. Such forms depend on a range of adjectival modes in relation to a contested site, as *100 Boots* does here. In more philosophical terms, the action of walking was transformed through the twentieth century by a number of movements and sensibilities from the surrealists to Fluxus and the Situationist International, highlighting 'what could be walked to and from, or on something else entirely'.[471] While the trope of the philosophical journey as a means to process despair and 're-enchant' life holds further relevance.[472] Across these contexts, ambulation proved a key method in revolutionising everyday life for it encouraged journeys without a destination or end point; *100 Boots*

[468] Antin and Phillips, 'Eleanor Antin', p. 23. The view that San Diego was 'open' prior to its development in the 1970s can be contested given its historical formation in settler-colonial consciousness.
[469] Antin, *100 Boots*, p. 5.
[470] Sayre, 'Introduction', in *100 Boots*, p. 1.
[471] Related is the influence of psychogeography coined by the French Marxist theorist Guy Debord in 1955. Debord's influential notion of the derivé described a technique of 'transient passage through varied ambiances', see Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', in *Les Lèvres Nues*, trans. by Ken Knabb. #9 (November 1956), reprint: Internationale Situationniste #2 (December 1958).
[472] For example, John Kaag examines what the walk was to Nietzsche's refrain: 'become who you are'. See John Kaag, *Hiking with Nietzsche: On Becoming Who You Are* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

keys into these possibilities of chance encounters, using elliptical and playful juxtaposition to outline the boundaries of private property and land allocation.[473]

But why this elaborate having-on? Who is the 'male lead' and why does this persona – unlike the King – refuse to appear before the lens? I read Antin's use of male pronouns as doing two things: wryly reacting to 'the aura of detachment' that haunts the serial image's construction of truth, while using her lead's campy absence to theatricalise claims to land as a personal right or extension of character.[474] By narrating the work in personified terms, I insist here that *100 Boots* deepens Antin's ecocritical sensibility by querying the advent of landscape prior to our meddling in it and probing landscape as a form of character edification. That Antin would experiment with an absent 'hero' around the same time as developing the King is not coincidental. *100 Boots* demonstrates a mode of narrative continuity around placemaking, a formative mode that is key to the semi-improvised peregrinations of *The King of Solana Beach*. By locating her MIA 'hero' within typically masculine-centred narratives of the cross-country journey, Antin teased recipients with dozens of elliptical dispatches that underscore marked spatial boundaries rather than the freewheeling passage of Beat road narratives that sought to surpass them.

Though the line formations in *100 Boots* are a form of markmaking on the land, their impermanence has the effect of emphasising the semiotic structures of land use, rather than instructing them. Looking further afield we can observe the relevance of this work as an intervention into conceptual art's claim on lands at a crucial point in its outdoor history. To take Michael Heizer's blasted double 'cut' piece *Double/Negative* (1969) into the sandstone top of Mormon Mesa near Overton, Nevada as a clear example from the land art movement, *100 Boots* comparatively illuminates how borders, state or otherwise precede artistic declarations over space, indicating where pedestrians cannot go or pass.[475] (figure 2.21) The boots' adventures thus consolidate the subject in the dirt and asphalt of California lands, couching these critical effects in the mutual implications of

[473] For Fluxus, this meant exposing the purview of art to everyday motions and gestures, so that something like walking could be thought of performed action structured by written scores that could be differently interpreted. 'Fluxtours' were developed by George Maciunas, John Lennon and others in New York and Willen de Ridder in California, see Lori Waxman, *Keep Walking Intently: The Ambulatory Art of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, and Fluxus* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).
[474] Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 87.
[475] *Double/Negative* entered the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 1985 as a remotely accessible site in Moapa Valley. Heizer's long-term project *City* in the Nevada desert (1972–), however, remains inaccessible to the public; a 'mile-and-a-half-long sculpture that almost no one has seen'. See Dana Goodyear, 'A Monument to Outlast Humanity', *New Yorker*, 22 August 2016: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/29/michael-heizers-city**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**> [accessed 10 October 2021].

photography and property, both of which proved integral to promoting the California dream in the early twentieth century.

Likewise, the King's diminishing powers register spatially in the 'kingdom' he presides over. If dominion relies on the visual attainment of geographic span and scale, the King's placemaking is deliberately inscribed as outmoded. 'Sometimes, they ignore me, sometimes they're in a hurry, occasionally they laugh at me, a few look scared', Antin recalled of the community's reactions.[476] Photographs from the King's solitary walks emphasise the incongruity of the King in spatial terms through his attachments to walking made increasingly impractical in a growing town. His refusal to keep up, then, reveals his powers as practically and ideologically *out of place*, producing a critical ambulation that holds these complexities without dissipating their charge.

Crucially, the King's 'marking out' of Solana Beach's topography by this critical ambulation occurs in two ways, circumnavigating the changing contours of the town that underpin the King's jurisdiction. Moreover, as the King marks key amenities and points of interest through his interactions at locations such as the town's gas station, grocery store and bank (figure 2.22), Antin uses the mixed reactions to the King as evidence of the King's ebbing grasp on reality. As the King visits establishments around the town, he is largely ignored or slighted. Gone is the doting servitude of men and animal in Van Dyck's *Charles I at the Hunt*; the King must wait at the checkout like anyone else and conduct his grocery shopping without assistance from his court. When interacting with his subjects, his acquaintances appear similarly nonplussed by his elaborate greetings and gestures (figure 2.17). Solana Beach's material environment shapes the performance in distinct ways. Given that the King moves by foot or bicycle, access is always qualified on the basis of what is available to the pedestrian. Antin also doesn't shield her character to avoid social confrontation or awkwardness, as she could have done were she to move by car – a shielding greatly emphasised in Wojnarowicz's reflections on automobility. Rather she conducts the performances within the town centre and insists on moving around on foot. In so doing, Antin uses the performance to mark out the changing land use and access terms through the town's social infrastructure, within which the King (and by association Antin) receive no special treatment (figure 2.23).

Public reactions to the King around Solana Beach place the King's grandiose claims of subject empowerment in perspective, revealing a performance reality

[476] Response to author by email, 9 June 2021.

profoundly at odds with the King's sense of self. The King's dogged conviction concerning his abilities to defeat the developers is a fantasy. It also doesn't take much to see how this loser figure must then overcompensate by fabricating an entire militia for *Battle*. Remarkably, the King doesn't appear browbeat nor seem to 'get the joke' that his idealisation of greatness is laughable, a result which minimises the presentation of self-deprecating humour as a means *of getting there first*. As the maxim goes, the person who doesn't get the joke *becomes* the joke. In this logic, humour is turned in on itself to deflect the anticipation of criticism – a dynamic deemed crucial within theories of humour including Freud's understanding of the tendentious joke, as a form deployed to inoculate persecuted or stereotyped groups from external harm.[477] The lack of humorous spirit here enacts a kind of comic humourlessness without a psychic barrier, insisting, against our inclinations, that we continue to take its subject seriously. If humour challenges 'business as usual' by revealing how disjunctive experiences take on the appearance of the ordinary or harmless, humourlessness here marks the refusal to set distance between what is real and what is fantasy.[478] This means that where seventeenth-century scripts of revolution prioritised uplift and restoration, Antin's playing of the King's as unawares of his own irrelevance gets at the difficulty of exteriority. This is the kind of incongruity Antin's King projects: one who despairs about the future yet is convinced of his part to play.

The photographic mediation of *The King of Solana Beach* echoes this maladjustment, demonstrating how Antin imbued different media with lateral realities that produce tension within the inevitability of change at Solana Beach. The photographs from the performance help draw abjection into view, constructing a primary (the life performance) and secondary (gallery audience for the photographs) audience for the King's humiliation. Like Antin's *Caught in the Act* (1973), in which Antin played a ballerina attempting to perform a series of elegant poses for the camera over and over, the photographs parse the King's fragility in full view, catching him cold in the process

[477] In his influential work on humour, Freud distinguished between two types of jokes: non-tendentious, which concerns witty puns that give voice to repressed emotions and urges into playful and socially acceptable forms; and tendentious jokes, which are closer to self-deprecating humour. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, Volume VIII*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001).
[478] On the critical faculties of levity in conceptual art, see Heather Diack, 'The Gravity of Levity: Humor as Conceptual Criticism', *RACAR: Canadian Art Review / Canadian Art Review*, vol. 37 (2012), 75–86.

of rejection. The idiom of being 'painfully aware' here sets up a self-conscious as well as complicit relationality within the work's economy of witnessed failure.[479]

Persona is central to this economy of affect and to what the work achieves in the dramatisation of failed leadership. That we can speak about humourlessness does not evacuate the work's comic dimensions but accentuates the thin membrane between them. Writing on stand-up comedy in relation to the exigencies of American life, John Limon uses abjection to signal the aspects of oneself that cannot be 'sloughed off': 'When you feel abject, you feel as if there were something miring your life […] some role […] that has become *your only* character. Abjection is self-typecasting'.[480] Building on Kristeva's sense of abjection as representing a revolt against this self-threatening condition of existence, Limon's remarks consider the experience of self-incoherence as a state of being within stand-up comedy, except for Limon the revolt against the besetment of abjection confers comic possibilities of 'uprightness', where one negotiates the histrionics of casting abjection objectively while locating performativity therein.[481] Limon raises a crucial point for Antin's loser environmentalism, as one of *acting* out abjection by inhabiting abject experience, given that it is after all a performance of humour*lessness*, as the prohibition rather than absence of humour. By portraying the King as unaware of himself 'becoming joke' and failing to read cues from his subjects who do not 'get' him, the performance's incongruousness structurally cements the fantasy's extremes in the artwork itself, as form. Antin thus prohibits the 'sloughing off' that Limon identifies, stitching into the conceptual fabric of the artwork the mistake of control *over form* for control over life itself.[482]

I have already pointed to the various presentations of the photographs from *The King of Solana Beach* as horizontal arrangements that accentuate narrative continuity to groupings of individual prints. For the photomontage *Here?* (1974), a mode of presentation that has been exhibited horizontally elsewhere, Antin used a treatment of image and text, splicing a set of six gelatin silver prints with three text panels (figure 2.24); '*Here? Here! …and Here!'* they pithily exclaim. Most immediate is the interrobang of interrogative and exclamation marks that evoke the form and idiom of

[479] On this point, Robyn Wiegman's notion of failure as 'the unavoidable consequence of imagining political transformation' is useful, see Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (Fall 1999), 107–36.
[480] John Limon, *Stand-up Comedy in Theory, Or, Abjection in America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 4.
[481] Ibid., pp. 72–77.
[482] Berlant, 'Humorlessness', p. 340.

intertitles used for silent movies (figures 2.25 i-iii). Prior to the development of synchronised recorded sound ('talkies') in 1927, silent films relied on the use of intertitles to convey plot development and dialogue, as well as compress time.[483] Given Antin's keen interest in narrative form, early twentieth-century cinema may seem an obvious cultural reference, which makes it more striking that critics alight on commercial television rather than the theatrics of early cinema. When posed the question of video as passive spectatorship, Antin tellingly responded 'What's passive about the narrative experience? Is it passive to sit still and read a book? Or sit in a dark movie theater and watch the screen?'[484] In this interview, it is as though the advent of video, as a genre thought 'unimpeded' by cinematic history, clouded such opportunity for bilateral readings of video and film. Antin's use of intertitles is significant to her stylisation of humourlessness. Despite wide usage in early cinema, intertitles posed a reminder of the failures of the filmic image to instruct the 'universal language' cinema claimed.[485] As Kamilla Elliot points out, intertitles were the scapegoat, considered detachable from cinematic narratives because they often had to be translated for international distribution. For critics, this confirmed that their 'uncinematic' nature was aesthetically unfit for the medium.[486] But while stylistically maligned, intertitles were crucial for setting up twists and turns to plot in early cinema, particularly the more elaborate cinching of jokes and pratfalls that did not always play fairly with the relationship of text to image but located comedy in the gradient of subtext.

This point opens up an instrumental paradigm for the penultimate section of this chapter. In what follows, I examine how the King's insistence on form operates through slapstick's environmental staging of humourlessness, discussing how performance – both mediated and live – is uniquely positioned to needle these affective mechanics. The development of slapstick, as refined in relation to material conditions and location, makes the genre a valuable analogue for examination of the King's affective disposition. Firstly, the struggle of individual subjects against encompassing megastructures is an emblematic principle of slapstick comedy. Acknowledging the distinctive influence of place on subjectivity, much literature on slapstick has paid close attention to the ways in

[483] Silent movies weren't strictly without sound; many were shown with a live accompaniment of orchestral or improvised sound. Sometimes, a person would narrate intertitles for the audience.
[484] Stofflet, 'Eleanor Antin', pp. 22–23.
[485] Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 88.
[486] James Card, for instance, called intertitles 'an aesthetic weakness of the medium', qtd. in Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, p. 87.

which the politics and practices of land use affect human movements. Some of its most significant sequences, such as the comic chase, illuminate sensations of alienation through a physically animated tour of the modern city.[487] In this sense, slapstick is replete with regional lineages that approach location through careful editing to draw period-specific industrialisation and topographic changes into its story. This comic influence is discernible in the artist's work, even explicitly so in Antin's choice of the term 'Chaplinesque' to describe the King's early likeness.[488] This leads me to reflect on the uses of California slapstick as a physical theatre rooted in animated violence. In the following, I contend that slapstick provides a conceptual touchstone for Antin's interests in fictionalising environmental issues close to home because its self-reflexive techniques of character humiliation place the subject in the line of fire. For the imperial figure Antin summons, this denigration has significant implications.[489]

'My Kingdom is the Right Size': California's Environmental Slapstick

In California slapstick, a subgenre rooted in 1920s physical comedy and chiefly advertised by the likes of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, the earnest intentions of the protagonist who moves about his day are repeatedly foiled.[490] A 'comic fatigue' ensues through the accumulative effect of misadventures that counteract 'the seriousness of the one-time failure'.[491] This sense of fatigue shadows the King's movements in *Here?.* The first two frames show the King traipsing from left to right with a small dog in tow to the march of '*here?* The following three frames then show the King circling back as an affirmative action: *'here!*'. Yet the final intertitle: '*and…. Here!?*' frustrates these affirmations with another question mark. The wide-angle zoom of the camera readies this effect, cultivating a defamiliarising optic that makes the King a sought-out speck against a sea of concrete and palm trees. These frustrations are structural to the actions the King undertakes in *The King of Solana Beach,* from walking to queuing and waiting, wherein

[487] See, for instance, Charles Wolfe, 'From Venice to the Valley: California Slapstick and the Keaton Comedy Short', in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, ed. by John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 3–30.
[488] 'I pasted a beard and a mustache on my face and I sort of looked like a *Chaplinesque* version of Charles I'. Glueck, 'In a Roguish Gallery'.
[489] The term 'Slapstick' takes its meaning from the 'battacio' (an oversized castanet or paddle) that would be used by one performer to strike another. The instrument produced a loud sound with apparent minimal discomfort.
[490] For further reading on 'California Slapstick' see Charles Wolfe, 'California Slapstick Revisited', in *California Slapstick*, ed. by Tom Paulus and Rob King (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 169–89. Keaton notoriously included blackface in several of his short films including *Neighbors* (1920) and *College* (1927).
[491] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 261.

time is pointedly protracted. This presentation isn't an isolated account: visual documentation of *The King of Solana Beach* installed at Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in 1976 corroborates these intentions at an early staging of the project (figure 2.7). At the centre of the arrangement are three prints that temporalise the King's gradual progression along a sidewalk. In these examples the audience is repeatedly returned to the action of tracking the King's physical scaling of distance within a modernising town. From the expectation of discovery mounted by *Here?* To the completion of the walk itself, time is structured anticipatorily. The King can *always* be found walking, building an exhaustive repertoire.

Highlighting the incongruous experiences of the individual against the machinations of social life, slapstick focuses attention on the durative experience of adversity that typically fall through 'big picture' gaps of dramatised breakdown. Antin's performance of loser environmentalism helps us understand in affective terms how life's shifting criteria doesn't always provide a model of action but may usefully parse the complexities of engaging with environmental stressors. The approach I've taken to the King persona in this chapter thus significantly animates a different set of associations around the dispossessed subjecthood critics have made of Antin's claim that: 'I've always felt like an outsider'.[492] And indeed, in *The King of Solana Beach*, the enduring figure of the Wandering Jew makes for an evocative avatar.[493] Here and beyond, Antin's work can be connected to Jewish humour and satire, as well as Yiddish theatrical traditions across musical comedy, masquerade and melodrama, which had a significant influence on the artist's performances into the 1980s and 1990s.[494] Yet, that exile in the work is transposed through seventeenth-century England, a period in which, as Bakhtin

[492] Antin has variously stated this in different interviews but perhaps the most recent is included in Noelle Bodick, 'Artist Eleanor Antin on Performance Art, Facebook, and the Possibility That a "Contemporary Self Does Not Exist"', *Artspace*, 27 March 2014: <https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/qa/interview_eleanor_antin-52156> [accessed 12 November 2021].

[493] Antin's ambulating figure evokes the Wandering Jew, a figure imagined by medieval Christians to reinforce the 'condemned' perception of an 'ever-moving' Jewish diaspora in the expulsion of Jews from their homelands across the twelfth century. See Bob Mills, *Derek Jarman's Medieval Modern* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018), pp. 137–38.

[494] As Antin has elaborated: 'I deal with tragic issues and I think there is an aspect of me that comes out of the Yiddish theater tradition. This melodramatic tradition in which the world is like a black joke'. To which she is asked: 'Would you call it Jewish humor in some way?' Antin responds: 'I guess it is, though Jewish humor is known for a kind of lowdown vulgarity, which can be part of it, but I've never been that way. That wasn't my mother's theatre either. With me the world is a basic existential black joke, the hole at the center of the world. It's a more existential vision, not that the Jewish humor, even the popular kind, isn't existential. It is, but what interests me is the pathos of knowing that as a human being you're in a no-win situation. That's the tragic-comic aspect to my work'. 'Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin'.

described, *humour was degraded* by 'absolute monarchy', offers a potent set of juxtapositions with specific focus on the dogged figure of imperial violence.[495]

Melodrama, however, does provide a good match for the King as a genre that typically engages the struggle of victory over incoherence, while Antin's tragicomic anxieties are not ultimately dissipated by an 'eventual victory of virtue'.[496] As such, in the absence of 'virtue', the channelling of these influences into the work's photoconceptual use of photography resist a sense of closure. When asked separately about the levity of humour, Antin responded: 'I may be ironical, I may be funny, but I'm not kidding'.[497] This sentiment is evocatively captured in further displays of the King's egomania. In *The King's Meditations*, the King's entries reveal a figure wracked by insecurity. In one meditation, the king complains, 'I saw the Newes today. My enemies have done it againe. They don't mention me!'[498] The tonality of these inscriptions is their comic earnestness. The King cannot adapt, insofar as he shows himself incapable of rising above his circumstances with grace or humility. That Charles' lack of humour is enlarged by Antin brings this project full circle to the question of likeness, as Michael B. Young has suggested: 'There was a deadly earnestness about [Charles]; […] Given a bad situation, he usually managed to make it worse. This was not a matter of stupidity; it was a function of his temperament'.[499]

The double entendre of *Battle of the Bluff*'s title extends the conceit of the King's characteristic defensiveness as central to his downfall. 'Bluff' of course describes both a deceitful ploy as well as the broad, high banks along a shoreline like those at Solana Beach. While the nautical origins of 'bluff' underscore a colonial etymology through themes of fortification and incursion, a bluff is also a 'good' joke delivered frankly – a 'rough sense of good humour' (from 1808). These meanings straddle a defensive relation, from a hoodwinking (from the Dutch *bluffen*, 'brag') to maintaining poker face. Across the different registers of the King, Antin casts this insecurity spatially, even when

[495] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 101.
[496] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 20.
[497] Vicki Goldberg, 'ART/ARCHITECTURE; As a Feminist, a King; as a Ballerina, a Klutz', *New York Times*, 8 August 1999: <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/08/arts/art-architecture-as-a-feminist-a-king-as-a-ballerina-a-klutz.html> [accessed 14 November 2021].
[498] Antin, 'Persona', in *Persona*, ed. by Lynn Gumpert and Ned Rifkin (New York: New Museum, 1981), pp. 5–33 (p. 10).
[499] Michael B. Young interprets Charles as quick to anger, difficult to advise and humourless, noting that: 'critics were more disturbed by the king's apparent inability to see how his own actions were incongruent with the high principle he claimed to respect'. Michael B. Young, *Charles I* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 176–77.

the King's connection to the environment in which he revolted has been broken. *Battle* is perhaps the greatest example of this, modelling the difficulties of authenticity when it comes to representation. In its theatrical revues, Antin relied on the imperfect methods of the body rather than an elaborate set design to enchant a connection to place, knowing that its methods will draw greater attention to bodily comportment as its sole actor leapt between roles (figure 2.6).[500] Antin's use of her body as a medium echoes the King's problems of adjustment: the audience must imagine the empire he claims to be protecting, producing a fully insufficient image comparable to the King's lack of traction in the 'real world'. While initially a catalyst for comedy (palpable in the tinkering of audience laughter that can be heard in an audio recording from a 1975 performance), the slapstick ultimately comes to bear on the work through the king's melancholy insistence on dragging his acquaintances, as he complains of his lover:

> Even my lover is a weight on me. Like a sack of potatoes. Just because he's gentle and kind and tries to help. His accommodating-ness oppresses me… forces me to be polite… to hide my ungratefulness and bad nature. He continues to soothe me when all I want is for him to go away. He makes suggestions, looks sympathetic, actually thinks making love will help. Sure, I enjoy making love with him, he is after all a wonderful lover, but what does that have to do with anything? They after all are real problems, hardly to be solved by the pressure of skins.[501]

In *Battle*, the King's litanies also include his sister ('she was very melancholy and very depressed and paranoid as usual') and the most typical of all: the weather ('today the sun came out, and what's that to me? Absolutely nothing'). That he cannot be entertained by any of his friends or lovers suggestively marks the King's sexuality as an extension of his capriciousness. For Berlant, sovereignty outlines the fantasy of total governance. The project's comedy of humourlessness evinces the 'problems of adjustment' at force in

[500] My observations here rely on images produced from live performances of *Battle of the Bluffs* at Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco and Fine Arts Gallery, San Diego, both in 1975; Venice Biennale in 1976; National Women's Caucus for Art, College Art Association, New Orleans, Louisiana in 1980; and Western Front, Vancouver in 1981. These are representative but not conclusive of its complete dramaturgy.
[501] *The King in Solana Beach*, 1975 March, sound cassette. Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, series IX. Audiovisual and digital materials, 1953-2010, box 54, item c6. Transcription by author.

Antin's call to 'Charlie', particularly in what perpetual insistences on 'good' character serve to hide.

Moreover, the King's flimsy attachment to life poses a challenge to assumptions about his harmlessness. Where harmlessness confers the absence of deception, Antin's different iterations of the King – from *The King* (1972) to performing *Battle* in 1981 – positions persona as a commitment to keeping up appearances. That her character comes to rely on mobility aids, such as walking sticks, ages the avatar of Charles beyond his years, accelerating the King's impotence as anything but revolutionary. Though the heroic offers a source of identification for Antin, it is ultimately a proxy for critiquing a blind conviction in self-mastery. As a result, Antin's commitment to a form in which her own personhood is implicated in her character's social embarrassment, can be read as a resistance to the violence of whiteness as 'nothing at all'. This, I argue, makes a valuable argument for modes of dramatic address within ecocritical art history as a performance of morality that takes a surprisingly non-moralist stance on agency. Where the King claims to protect the members and environs of his Kingdom, *Battle* and *The King of Solana Beach* tell the opposite: the King adds to this confusion with his actions perplexing those around him. These comic dynamics cannot simply be described as levity: Antin's King invites us to consider duplicity of the subject in those who claim to act on behalf of the dispossessed. Where close reading reveals the King as one such opportunist who shares more with Charles I than Antin perhaps had planned, this chapter has ultimately reflected on the life of the work beyond the artist's original conceptual intentions. Though persona engages with autobiography it is not synonymous with its performer. This reminder has provided a useful perspective on both the problematics Antin performs and the decolonial potential stimulated in the work's dramatised failure of imperial power. In staging these incongruous dynamics, the King makes a compelling claim for how performativity can pedagogically confront prevailing power dynamics within environmental debates through embodied positions.

Performing Action or Action as Performance

In this closing section I consider the wider implications of staking an ecocritical rebellion – failed or otherwise – in performance art. For its audience, the humourlessness of the King's failures brings into view the value processes in which artworks are considered germane to environmentalism. It also raises the stability of terms like 'politically radical'

by turning on the contradictions of an apparent 'ethical leadership'.[502] To arrive at this point is to smooth over the duplicity on which the character of Charles I is crafted. Having regarded critical commentaries on gender and race in relation to how Antin's layering of gendered and racialised traits edify power, I carefully articulated the King's relationship to land use as an instrument of the British colonial apparatus and its naturalisation within settler-colonial entitlements to land and property. Even as extant readings of the work recognise the King's investments in intervening in environmental destruction, scholarship on Antin's King does not connect the performance to an ecocritical framework as I have done here. To do so is to bring to light Antin's negotiation of systematic biases and their affective norms embedded in environmental aesthetic, cultural debates and attitudes. This lens has proved generative, amplifying the contexts of failure the King persona emerged in relation to, such as how grassroots opposition in neighbouring areas had limited traction, while drawing a more complex picture of environment action through Antin's hyperbolic characterisation of despotic power.

An ecocritical framework also provides new insights into Antin's contribution to conceptualism and postconceptual photography and performance by proposing that *action* is more nuanced within these forms than historically appreciated. As a core mandate of environmentalism, action connotes a desired result or outcome accorded by forms such as protest, direct action or legal recourse. For performance art, the association evokes a lineage of 'action-oriented' artworks from the 1950s and 1960s, from the Viennese actionists and the experimental community of Fluxus, to Allen Kaprow's 'happenings' that served to demonstrate how distinctions between reality and representation, life and work were more densely related than modernism dictated. While for those turning to issues of ecology and land use in the late 1960s, body-centric actions remained favourable, with 'action' brought together in the mediatised staging of activist gestures with the bodily comportments of infrastructural, maintenance and cleaning work. Such mediated actions underscored a need for structural reappraisal and can be found in the gesture of the artist shaking hands with sanitation department workers (Mierle Ukeles Laderman's *Touch Sanitation Performance* (1977–80), artists turning over compost (Helen and Newton Harrison's *Making Earth*, 1970) and the aggregation of urban detritus and discarded building material on the artist's back (Buster Simpson's

[502] Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, p. 60.

Woodman, 1974) (figures 2.26, 2.27 & 2.28). In these works, the body is instrumental to the task of materialising systems relations and redistributing their load.

That these and other related works rely on the image object to perform 'visionary' actions indicates an interest in the mediatory power of the visual to reach a wider audience beyond the realm of art.[503] In their effort to reach beyond, a pragmatism often haunts environmental performance, so much so that critics are not content to simply assess the aesthetic merits of artistic responses to environmental concerns, but are prompted to ask, as Eleanor Heartney does so of the Harrisons' work, 'how feasible are the changes advocated [by the artists]?'[504] For Olafur Eliasson, the question is more directed: 'How can it be that even though we have this tremendous knowledge, we have not yet acted?', he ventures, '[w]hen Adam took that bite of the apple, he gained knowledge, but he also lost his innocence'.[505] This moral instruction is relatively unique to environmental art and performance, asking that art not only engage environmental issues but have an agenda in doing so. These artworks serve to 'remind us that we are masters of our fate' Heartney concludes of the Harrisons – a comment that eerily echoes the reclaimed 'destiny' of residents at Solana Beach as well as the fate of the King – doing little to trouble the root of anthropocentric thought.[506]

Though the King repeatedly blows his own trumpet, Antin's embodied character humiliations present individual leadership as a flawed vehicle that risks irrelevance when refusing to listen to or fairly represent a community. Duplicity within Antin's persona – where an interest in ceasing development reveals other self-interests at stake – actually underscores ecocritical art history in unrecognised ways, practicing inclusivity of what Braddock and Irmscher refer to as '[works] apparently indifferent, or even hostile, to [ecological] concerns'; or indeed, to echo Cvetkovich, by refusing to demarcate 'good' from 'bad' feelings.[507] The work's 'tarry[ing] with the negative' without *feeling bad* about this negativity instead asks the question of 'how to live a better life by embracing rather than glossing over bad feelings'.[508] We encounter the King in all his flaws, rather than witness his transformation into something more marketable like optimism. Where

[503] Eleanor Heartney, 'Mapping a Better World', *Art in America*, vol. 91, no. 10 (October 2003), 114–19 (pp. 118–19).
[504] Ibid.
[505] Eliasson and Rosing, 'Ice, Art and Being Human', (2015), first published in *Politiken*, 26 October, 2014 and archived at: <https://olafureliasson.net/archive/read/MDA117967/ice-art-and-being-human> [accessed 10 November 2021].
[506] Heartney, 'Mapping a Better World', p. 119.
[507] Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, p. 3; and Cvetkovich, *Depression*, p. 3.
[508] Cvetkovich, *Depression*, p. 3.

failure is often visualised as a block or impasse, *tarrying* offers crucial insight into our relationship to action in times of crisis. This has significant implications for the question of how art, past and present, engages with environmental issues, as it queries the rationale that incongruous forms are pedagogically toothless if they do not spur us or win over potential partisans. I consider Antin's performance of loser environmentalism persuasive because it touches on a central motivation of the thesis in addressing how environmental action and address have long been simplified as a case of good or bad engagement. If, 'green identity is not an essence' as the sociologist Dave Horton contends, but 'owes its appearance of solidity to the regular, routine performance of green cultural practice', environmentalism also figures as a set of social practices shaped to desired effects. Eliasson's configuring of action as a moral duty and inaction as an ethical failure demonstrates how shame rather than solidarity often drives action within this scripting.[509] In transposing the terms of inheritance that grant the King his natural leadership, Antin's King expresses a different kind of cultural commentary, using humourless performance to interrogate how politics are mapped onto performance and to what degree the dramatisation of bad behaviour might function as a critical intervention.

[509] Dave Horton, 'Green distinctions: the performance of identity among environmental activists', in *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance*, ed. by Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim and Claire Waterton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 63–77 (p. 75); and Eliasson and Rosing, 'Ice, Art and Being Human', n.p.

Chapter Three: Goofing on the Margins: Screwball Survivalism in the Videos of Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn

> 'My "characters" are resilient. They continue to form jokes and travel across the land when their exteriors are symbolizing the broken, the yucky and injured. They signify damage, but in that state they almost become free. And through a relentless joking, there's another machine that's running'.[510]

Discomfort with the World

In the opening frames of Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn's nine-minute video *Nature Demo* (2008), Dodge identifies a dry thicket as a 'whole dead glob' (figure 3.1). He is building a shelter, but first a suitable location must be found. The pair debate the risks of sharing a home with unidentified arachnids and the best method of tick removal, but a lack of consensus eschews the demonstration of expertise. The video hovers between instructive 'demo' and skit, moving between a car ride through a Los Angeles neighbourhood and the building of a shelter in the culvert of the Los Angeles River. Dodge and Kahn spend the majority of the video exploring the flora and fauna of this setting – one that has proved vital to operationally managing Southern California's susceptibility to drought and flooding.[511] The Los Angeles River has long been treated by cultural historians of California as un-river-like in formation; in the 1950s the historian Carey McWilliams dubbed it 'one of the most improbable rivers in America'; while, more recently the historian Blake Gumprecht suggested that, 'ironically, […] the city owes [the river] its life'.[512] In the concrete culvert of the river, these ironies of appearance and function abound in *Nature Demo*. For Dodge, it is a testing ground for a survival 'what if', an anticipatory scenario that does not come to pass.

Presented in the framework of a 'demo' video, the pair's ostensible lack of expertise draws attention to survivalist practices as a form of roleplay. Given that Los Angeles has faced some of the costliest national disasters and extreme weather events in

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[510] Stanya Kahn, 'Stanya Kahn and Llyn Foulkes: Interview by Catherine Taft', in *Two Schools of Cool*, ed. by Sarah Bancroft (Newport Beach, CA: Orange County Museum of Art, 2011), pp. 32–43 (p. 36).
[511] On the politics of suburban growth and water conveyancing to Southern California from elsewhere in the state, see Mike Davis, 'Water Pirates and the Infinite Suburb', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 1996), 81–84.
[512] Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 289; and Blake Gumprecht, 'Who Killed the Los Angeles River?', in *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*, ed. by William Deverell and Greg Hise (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), pp. 115–34 (p. 115).

American history, its residents are no strangers to preparedness. Mike Davis influentially characterised the city's disaster consciousness as an 'ecology of fear' in which 'cataclysm [is] virtually routine'.[513] A sublimated level of threat underpins *Nature Demo*, engaging tensions between intuitive knowledge systems and pedagogical dogma concerning the outdoor environment. So normalised are these conditions that its characters do not even mention the need for preparedness. Connoting the cultivation of a technique into a skill, the mode of the 'demo' offers a subtle contrast to the video's combination of offscreen direction and on-camera improvisation in which Dodge and Kahn take turns to operate the camera, offer prompts and awkwardly conduct exercises, often becoming distracted from the task at hand. Neither are well 'adjusted' to the urban outdoors, revealing an urbanite habitus in which they are unprepared for the demands of heat, lack of water and walking distances. Debating whether they should move their camp to another spot, Kahn complains that her boots are 'a little rubby' and that her hair 'gets caught in stuff'. Taking leave of the camera, they return with seed heads, branches and 'scum paste', foraged goods which are presented to the camera as taxonomical abstractions with idiomatic names.

This chapter explores Dodge and Kahn's use of screwball humour as a critical aesthetic in which incongruity is crucial to producing its desired effects. In ways analogous to Antin's deadpan use of slapstick, 'goofing' in the chapter title focuses on the pair's enlargement of utopian desires that are projected onto the practicalities of dreaming of and building alternative futures. In indulging the situational absurdities of survivalist modes of self-governance, I locate *Nature Demo* within a queer tradition of using failure as both a hermeneutics and mode of dramatised performance to critically expose social frameworks of the future that are normatively hinged on a naturalised ability to ply nonhuman nature to its advantage. In using the comic to speak to these ecocritical considerations, Dodge and Kahn's survival works mark a necessary departure from triumphant accounts of reckoning with crisis that are widespread in the visual arts. The works, I argue, provide a vital counterforce against the status quo by conceiving of deeply collaborative futures built around intuitive responses to the ecology and politics of one's environment. If, as Jasbir K. Puar has described, a late neoliberal regime uses 'aspirational tropes for cover' in support of its ableist fantasies of human resolve and

[513] Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 7.

capability, Dodge and Kahn's survival works subtly pierce the insidious logics of normalised crisis.[514] Refusing the imperative to 'overcome' adversity, their protagonists reinscribe the lived circumstances of economic and social 'shock' cycled through profitable loopholes by occupying spaces of luxury and excess not intended for them.

For this discussion, I draw on two short videos made in 2008: *Nature Demo* and *All Together Now*, two works that while quite different in conceit and production, each draw on recognisable cultural and cinematic apocalyptic imaginaries of end times.[515] While this term has long concerned religious allegory, apocalypse would infuse a wider cultural schema of changes to nineteenth-century society and nature under colonial modernity. In Britain, for instance, existential anxiety towards the rapid technological instrumentation of agrarian industry and transformation of expropriated land across colonial territories partially manifested through scenarios of climatic severity signalling mistrust to modern 'progress'.[516] Today, apocalypse is not constrained to these interlinked imaginaries but extends through a capitalist complex of anthropogenic climate disaster and economic and resource management.[517] Indeed, with the growth of the neoliberal model in the globalist mindset of the late 1970s, the conjugation of Christian metaphor with capitalist inevitability was readily exploited by a managerial outlook. Yet, in public debates, crises would be evoked by senior protagonists urging the behavioural change of an unspecified collective 'we'.[518] '*Everybody wants to own the*

[514] Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 87.

[515] The eschatology of 'end times' has had an integral place in the mythologies of Mayan, Mesopotamian, Greek, Hindu, Christian and Jewish belief systems since the origins of humankind. Its cosmic orientations of finality distinguish it from the revelatory genre of Apocalypse, which developed from Judaism in the second century B.C. and extended through Christian teachings of the Middle Ages. Scholars have interpreted the Book of Revelation as summoning perseverance in the face of cataclysmic upheaval. The Messiah was expected to appear following this victory of faith.

[516] See, for example, John Ruskin's distrust of modern technology, most openly of the railroad, which he referred to in 1887 as 'the loathsomest form of devilry now extant, animated and deliberate earthquakes, destructive of all wise social habit or possible natural beauty'. See John Ruskin, 'Arrows of the Chace', *Library edition of the works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London, 1903–12), vol. xxxiv, p. 604.

[517] It has become a trope to rhetorise an equivalence between worldly ends and a collapsed capitalist order. In his 1979 essay on J.G. Ballard, the cultural historian H. Bruce Franklin regarded the writer's doomsday fantasies about inevitable ecocide as that of 'mistaking the end of capitalism for the end of the world'. 'Someone once said', Fredric Jameson would later write, 'that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'. H. Bruce Franklin, 'What are we to make of J.G. Ballard's Apocalypse?', in *Voices for the Future, Volume II* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1979), pp. 82–105; Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 1; on these intersections see also the writing of Mark Fisher, particularly, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009).

[518] See, for instance, Prince Charles's 2009 speech for the New Economics Foundation, a British thinktank, qtd. in Erik Swyngedouw, 'Apocalypse Now! Fear and Doomsday Pleasures', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: A Journal of Socialist Ecology*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2013), 9–18 (p. 9).

end of the world', Don DeLillo's narrator would state in the opening line of *Patient K* (2016), neatly summarising how apocalypse has infused American cultural sensibilities as a threat absorbed and twisted by the market to its advantage.[519] Both *Nature Demo* – as a survival 'how-to' that advocates individual solutions to structural failures – and *All Together Now* – as a reimagining of what is protected by the nuclear bunker – emerge from this managerial landscape of accumulated chasms.

From the neo-homesteading movement of small landholdings against 'Big Ag' and countercultural interest in 'do-it-yourself' cultures (which gained a specific 'hippy' foothold in California), to the building of domestic fallout shelters against Cold War panic, the rise of survivalism as a set of practices in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has long centred individual autonomy.[520] Beyond a fringe libertarian interest or paranoid disposition, this chapter's exploration of survivalist aesthetics highlights its various formations across public cultures, visual art and photography. In doing so, I consider how its spread across cultural forms has exploited the imperative of species survival to mean self-preservation. *Nature Demo* leans on the strategy of self-taught enrichment at play in so much survivalist media. Reflecting on the dialectic Dodge and Kahn's survival works construct with these media vernaculars provides insight into the nostalgic image of a 'simpler' life when faced with unsustainable and unaffordable living conditions, and in which settler-colonial ideas are more than subtended. In the thesis introduction, I pointed to Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism as a series of flawed cultural investments in the 'good life' that is sublimated into and secured by material things. As Berlant also argued in her concept of 'patriotic intensity', sentimentalism in the form of nationalist fantasies is a dangerous basis for social politics because of how emphatic images of harm and vulnerability distract attention from historically complex and structural causes of social injustice.[521] I also consider how survivalist mandates operate sentimentally by sanctifying traditional formations of social and familial life as

[519] Don DeLillo, *Patient K: A Novel* (New York: Scribner, 2016), p. 3.
[520] For much of its run, Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog featured the by-line: 'access to tools' on its cover, only occasionally trading this in for a biblical namesake approximated from Matthew 5:5: 'And the meek shall inherit the whole earth'. On California utopianism, see *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California*, ed. by Iain Boal, Janferie Stone, Michael Watts and Cal Winslow (Oakland: PM Press, 2012); and various essays in *West of Center: Art and the Countercultural Experiment in America, 1965–1977*, ed. by Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
[521] For Lauren Berlant, national forms of cultural sentimentalism 'makes citizenship into a category of feeling'. Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 11.

authentic or 'honest' forms of domestic production. National defence narratives have long positioned the family unit and home as sites of preservation. Many survivalist formations imbibe and indeed reiterate these normative ways of living, impeding a transformative and creative criterion in response to environmental pressures by distinguishing a future that is *worth* saving.

In assessing the role incongruity plays in these works, I turn to an incongruous theory of humour, a comic structure I see as valuable in identifying the troubling logics behind these responses to environmental anxieties. In engaging with survival frameworks specific to Southern California, I draw on prominent architectural and urban writing on Los Angeles and its environs alongside scholarship on affect, emotion and public cultures. Doing so invites consideration of the work's intersections across capitalist interests, neoliberal subjectivities and environmental affects, while supporting the shifting imaginaries for crisis engaged by Dodge and Kahn's survival works. It should be stressed that survival is geographically situated in these works with Los Angeles providing both a set of vernacular locations as well as the cultural mythology of decline promulgated by Hollywood studios, not unlike the homogenisation of larger areas such as the 'American Southwest' or 'the desert', as discussed in chapter one. In that chapter, I discussed how Wojnarowicz's critical sensitivities to commodified lands stemmed from his cruising persona of Joe Tourist, a kind of cover for avoiding scrutiny in tourist spaces. I revisit these capacities of personae here as a rich critical framework for engaging spatial tensions and conflicts.

In the thesis introduction I articulated several ways in which an 'environment' can be construed. Through the embodied performance of space in these works, the dual sense of the work's environment as a 'relative' term emphasising the mutual dependence of organism to the surroundings in which it exists or operates, and the 'environmental' – as evoking discursive concerns around disintegration fuelled by climate change and the logic of capitalism – are held in dialectical tension.[522] Dodge and Kahn have discussed their approach to space as a negotiation, in which hierarchies between background and foreground are deliberately smudged through pervading sounds and behaviours of an unwitting background cast. Improvisation is key to this rearrangement of space because of how its protagonists constantly expand and contract the frame through a mixture of

[522] Tim Ingold, for instance, contends that '[j]ust as there can be no organism without an environment, so also there can be no environment without an organism'. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–7 (p. 20).

planned and unplanned interactions. This strategy connects to the relational dimensions of environment articulated by Giorgio Agamben in his example of a forest that is not 'an objectively fixed environment' but rather subjectively spatialised by the agents that enter it, from the hunter, the ranger or the carpenter, who all have different relationships to the forest.[523] Agamben, following Jakob Von Uexküll's notion of the *Umwelt* – which outlines a structure constituted by varied elements – positions this against models of a single or unitary environment, an image which is frequently transmitted to arts and cinematic audiences as a holistic or planetary ecosystem subsequently knocked off balance.[524] By refusing the essential characteristics of place in their rambles through Los Angeles, Dodge and Kahn's work moves against the conceit of dystopian transformation in which the city is made to receive disaster. Instead, Dodge and Kahn figure this setting through a nuanced understanding of its composite parts. Incongruity emerges in Dodge and Kahn's highly subjective sense of wilderness, a form of narration extended through free association with words such as 'glob' or 'curlicue' applied to a dried seed stem (figures 3.2 & 3.3). The stakes for an ecocritical reading are more significant than the work itself marks out, and from which the question may be extrapolated: are audiences better prepared by statistical data on our changing environment or by facing the fact of implication?

Like Antin's King, the continual abuttal of a national mythos around land and the power of mythmaking tempers the farcical qualities of Dodge and Kahn's work. I observe their use of the screwball as providing a lens onto a cruelly structured present in which survival skills plug a lack of investment in civil infrastructure and meaningful climate policies. I cast *Nature Demo*'s unidentified 'what-if' and *All Together Now*'s bunker cooperation as products of a set of interconnected anxieties in public life from this period, namely the militarisation of domestic society and aggressive foreign policy enacted by President George W. Bush in the wake of the atrocities of September 11th, 2001; the subprime mortgage collapse following the financial crash of 2007–2008; and an entrepreneurial shift in disaster response through the financialisation of crisis that Naomi Klein succinctly termed 'disaster capitalism'.[525] For the geographer Erik Swyngedouw, these moments are emphatic of shifts in dystopian images of futurity, in

[523] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 41.
[524] Ibid., p. 40.
[525] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Henry Holt and Metropolitan Books. 2007), p. 12.

which apocalyptic imaginaries and rhetorics engage with adjusted possibilities *within* capitalism rather than beyond. Even where distinct, these moments stage crisis as a 'conjectural condition' which requires a 'particular techno-managerial attention by those entitled or assigned to do so'.[526] Swyngedouw is one of several scholars to have mapped the contemporary trajectory of US security measures in the face of 'Armageddon-like' circumstances. By naming these here, I suggest a longer continuum for *Nature Demo* beyond the more obvious suggestions of a 1960s' 'drop out' counterculture. Indeed, as Dona Brown has argued, the rise and fall of back-to-the-land movements in the United States can be mapped onto periods of economic instability since the Great Depression. Although resistance within the New Deal generation to consumer mechanisation existed, Brown suggests that 'security, independence, and autonomy' were primary 'insurance' motivations for white liberal homesteaders in the era before social security or Medicaid.[527] To this, the literary scholar Alison Shonkwiler identifies reinvigorated attachments to the natural environment in practices not dissimilar to the wilderness skills of *Nature Demo*; particularly indicative are a set of neo-homesteading practices revived as post-wage entrepreneurism in the 2000s as their 'own mode[s] of neoliberal survival'.[528] For these academic historians there exists a clear link between periods of restricted social security and an upshot in investments in private familial and social economies which 'salvage qualities of life […] at the expense of those who cannot'.[529] In the context of the thesis' broader aims, the role of economics in deflecting crisis is significant for pointing to the neoliberalisation of agency as a result of depleted social provisions and services. For Swyngedouw, the managerial strategy of deflection in *postponing* dystopia took on greater prominence within the economic rifts across 2007 and 2008, as a crisis that not only took financial autonomy out of many people's hands but also knocked other crises off the political agenda, including climate change.[530]

I theorise Dodge and Kahn's approach as a form of *screwball survivalism,* a term I use to shore up their conceptual exploration of reaching towards a more sustainable world. If the disaster genre in cinema typically revolves around human foibles and

[526] Swyngedouw, 'Apocalypse Now!', p. 9.
[527] Dona Brown, *Back to the Land: The Enduring Dream of Self-Sufficiency in Modern America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).
[528] Alison Shonkwiler, 'Neo-homesteading: Domestic Reproduction and the Limits of the Postwage Imagination', *Public Culture*, vol. 32, no. 3 (September 2020), 465–90 (p. 67).
[529] Ibid., p. 487.
[530] Swyngedouw, 'Apocalypse Now!', pp. 9–10.

desperations in times of societal decline, screwball survivalism prioritises moments of unexpected joy and intuitive discovery within the unbearable Beckettian present of 'I can't go on, I'll go on'. As a mode popularised in the Depression – an era that also cultivated influential comic figures such as Chaplin – the screwball emerges in the spatialisation of performance through a social geography of place. Like Antin's use of slapstick to underscore the King's dislocation from community life at Solana Beach, the screwball in Dodge and Kahn's survival works offers a framework for considering what it means to have agency within crisis situations. In this, I monitor the dynamics between comedy and adversity closely as outlined by an incongruous theory of humour, in which comic resonances emerge though unexpected juxtapositions in meaning. Crucially, Dodge and Kahn's protagonists rarely overcome their distresses, rather, we watch them sustain a series of coping mechanisms. I suggest that their effort to reconfigure resilience as a state of ongoingness is amplified through the screwball's interrogation of conventional social roles and relations, challenging the melting point of ordinary and *extraordinary* that has made Los Angeles distinctive in its blend of natural hazards and siloed safeguards.

Seeing Los Angeles

Turning to the location of preparedness in *Nature Demo* and *All Together Now*, I highlight how the pair draw on recognisable sites in Los Angeles and its environs to reflect concurrent debates in land use. While *Nature Demo* and *All Together Now* are both works of fiction, their respective cinematography – cross-pollinating on-the-fly location shooting, field recordings and elaborate handmade sets and costumes – blurs the receptive boundaries of fiction and reality. While fiction has been readily availed by an environmental framework to dramatise or prophesise, I argue that Dodge and Kahn's methods of extrapolation draw on fiction to emphasise what is already in front of us, configuring a long durée of resisting a managerial crisis of resource marshalling and allocation in Southern California. This formulates a vital alternative to tendencies of instrumentalising art as part of a wider agenda or the moral-bound duty of acting on behalf of a future generation, as discussed in the previous chapter.[531]

The placement of both works in Los Angeles – a setting aped by innumerable disaster spectacles – can be understood as a strategic conceptual and political choice, the

[531] Eliasson and Rosing, 'Ice, Art and Being Human', n.p.

verité use of familiar locations enriches the work's DIY conceit through a set of historical markers of capitalist excess and resource harnessing. Here, locations are introduced to us like characters, offering narrative clues which are mediated by their protagonists. This approach inscribes a metonymical quality whereby the Los Angeles River is recognisable by its relationship to the social, rather than by its topographical features, echoing, as Kahn has put it, '[that] it's not just this character standing in front of the dam. It's citizens next to infrastructure'.[532] Infrastructure, of course, not only describes the design of the built environment, but the operability of facilities and services from those considered basic, like electricity, water and waste management, to the sophisticated integration of transport to healthcare, welfare and educational provisions that organise a social sphere. Though we can follow breadcrumbs in the litany of 'keep out' signs, high fences and guardianship notices, the lines of private and public accountability cannot be fully disclosed.[533] For how it alters the teleology of inherent decline reproduced by Hollywood ad nauseum, Dodge and Kahn's decision to enact a screwball profile activates an incongruous aesthetic, one that could not be further from a familiar typology of 'disaster porn'.[534]

The city of Los Angeles is no stranger to the silver screen. 'Probably the most mediated town in America', as the late architectural critic Michael Sorkin described, it has long been marshalled in fiction to signal the end of the world.[535] Hollywood spectacle and the noir genre have regularly played upon the state's exposure to disaster events, creating an image of it as a site from which destruction emanates. In no small way has this been helped along by the fact that in its near-170-year settler-colonial history, Los Angeles has suffered by fire, flood and earthquake almost a third of the nation's most

[532] Michael Smith, 'Interview with Stanya Kahn and Harry Dodge', *Bomb Magazine* 1 July 2009: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/harry-dodge-stanya-kahn/> [9 November 2021].
[533] In June 2008, all manners of infrastructural solutions were proposed by lawmakers following the declaration of drought by its then-Republican governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. These included the building of new dams, recycled wastewater plants and 'cloud-seeding', a technology first developed by the US military in the 1960s as a method of storm intervention. See Dan Glaister, 'Los Angeles to fight drought with 'cloud-seeding', *Guardian*, 17 June 2008: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/jun/17/water.usa> [accessed 4 November 2021]; and Chris Ayres, 'Arnold Schwarzenegger takes on the California drought', *The Times*, 6 June 2008: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/arnold-schwarzenegger-takes-on-the-california-drought-5nh6x3hgrdh> [accessed 4 November 2021].
[534] On the picturing of extreme or graphic forms of disaster and its relationship to gratuitous violence, see Timothy Recuber, 'Disaster Porn!', *Contexts*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Spring 2013), 28–33; as a forerunner text, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).
[535] Michael Sorkin, 'Explaining Los Angeles', in *Exquisite Corpse: Writing on Buildings* (London: 1991), pp. 48–60 (p. 48).

costly disasters since the Civil War.[536] Over time this has popularised the perception of Los Angeles as 'anti-nature', helping along its national reputation as a place that has done little to recognise its own vulnerabilities by being 'the American city with brown air, fouled beaches, pavement to the horizon, and a concrete river'.[537] While the conjugation of Southern California's portent of disaster, racial inequality and wealth stratification has given Los Angeles, or at least, those intent on destroying it through fiction and cinema, much of this apocalyptic scrim.[538] This has led to the cult appreciation of its disaster fiction, as demonstrated by the endowing of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) with the gift of prescience: accolades that suggest that its vision of disaster emerges through prognosis rather than belatedly from what already exists. The result of this messaging for the natural world, as Price suggests, 'is sort of the death star to American nature lovers'.[539] Both narratives reap for rapt audiences the theatrical repetition of destruction, feeding societal paranoias of impending ecological ruin.

The Los Angeles River is a scapegoat routinely placed at the centre of this figuration. This view is not without reason: channelised in 1938 under the direction of the US Army Corps of Engineers, its concrete channel barely evokes a river; yet its trajectory covers fifty-one miles through the San Fernando Valley, Downtown Los Angeles and the Gateway Cities to Long Beach to its confluence with the Pacific Ocean. Thanks to the completion of the nearby Donald C. Tillman Water Reclamation Plant in 1985, its headwaters now spring from contemporary engineering rather than the nearby Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains, with the channel receiving daily some forty million gallons of wastewater discharged in the area between Chatsworth and Van Nuys in the San Fernando Valley.[540] This has given the river an ironic identity: manipulated and sullied over the course of a century almost to the point of no return. It is a place where law-abiding citizens do not venture, far less retreat to. And cinema has readily exploited its 'uncivil' appearance for an ersatz getaway track for high-speed chases. As

[536] Davis, *Ecology of Fear,* p. 7.
[537] Jennifer Price, 'Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.', in *Land of Sunshine,* pp. 220–44 (p. 222).
[538] Mike Davis calculates that Los Angeles has been destroyed 138 times in films and novels since 1909. We can be sure that this figure is even higher now, see Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, p. 276.
[539] Price, 'Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.', p. 222.
[540] According to Blake Gumprecht, settlers arriving in Southern California from Eastern states initially showed little interest in the river's identity. Its transformation followed the rise of modern industrialisation, with growing industry on its banks and surrounding areas using it as a convenient dumping site for industrial effluents. As a Los Angeles Parks Commissioner remarked in 1910, the river was fast becoming 'unsightly to the extreme', leading the way for its effective annexation from the idea of Los Angeles as a healthful destination. Gumprecht, 'Who Killed the Los Angeles River', p. 117.

fiction depicts the river as a lawless zone cut off from the city, *Nature Demo* reconnects Los Angeles River within its overarching structure through the sounds of the freeway and the pair's movement between the river and other parts of the city. The effects of this are significant: rejecting the disappearance of nature from the city by demonstrating that even amateurs can locate the river's flora and fauna.

In teasing out the appearance of crisis, Dodge and Kahn engage the question of how Southern California's fraught relationship to water and drought is mediated. I interpret the screwball language of preparedness burlesqued by the pair – engaging practical strategies toward a protected future but failing to teach its object effectively – as working in two directions. Though the artwork's outward aesthetic is playful, even doltish, the performance of unmastered skills functions critically due to how it stages a lack of adroitness. In the absence of performing specialist skills for camera, its protagonists do not fulfil the cynical proposition offered within capitalism that the existential threat of environmental crisis may be effectively overcome by encouraged levels of consumption. Indeed, with million-dollar doomsday economies dovetailing with the growth of extreme wealth in the technology start-up sector, the identity of the survivalist – a figure who embodies cultural anxieties about end times through the lens of capitalist hegemony par excellence – offers for both leftist and libertarian camps versions of a self-initiated independence from debt-financed cycles of ruin, social 'collapse' and environmental degradation. Yet, if in the absence of national safeguards such as public spending and policy, this identity works to inspire confidence in personal safeguards, Dodge and Kahn's performance does little to muster faith in a snowballing industry that by 2013 would have 3.7 million advocates in America alone.[541] Mining this pool of consumption to overcome cultural anxiety is a means of probing the currency of insurance offered against the 'age of uncertainty'.[542] In doing so, we can consider how a watchword like sustainability becomes virtually indistinguishable across political affiliations when the question of *why* degradation is inevitable.

Nature Demo introduces an apocalyptic vocabulary of deterioration that extends through Kahn's independent practice in videos such as *It's Cool, I'm Good* (2010). In this work, the artist appears as an injured protagonist who is more concerned with

[541] Bradley Garrett, 'We Should All Be Preppers', *The Atlantic*, 3 May 2020: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/we-should-all-be-preppers/611074/> [accessed 4 November 2021].
[542] Ibid.

charming their nurse than with the implications of their full-body injuries (figure 3.4). Many of Dodge and Kahn's characters are injured or worn-down as a mirror image of the denigrated environments they ambulate – they pick through wastelands or are wrapped in grubby bandages that expose swollen skin. This harm is visible as well as symbolic, calling forth, as Kahn has put it: 'the broken, the yucky and injured'.[543] Personal injury in these works amplifies the protagonist's experience of dislocation from these physical locations. The dead fish encountered on the shoreline of the Salton Sea in *It's Cool, I'm Good* is just one of many depressing features of her protagonist's tour. Crucially, these landscapes of ecological abuse are more than backdrops to their character's foibles, these physical settings are carried into their characters' lives as real and encompassing forces that stretch the limits of self-preservation.

From the looming towers of monolithic banks and half-finished condominiums, location marks out the flawed social institutions of liberal democracy. Even where new, Dodge and Kahn's protagonists treat these locations as bland and soulless, suggesting infrastructure that wasn't built nor intended for them. Given that many of these sites fall under governmental and corporate jurisdiction, we can assume they are heavily monitored zones in which trespassing would be punitively dealt with. Indeed, the cast are often shown at the point of breaking entry, underscoring their outsider status. Yet, that the protagonists do not seem to interrupt operations at these locations only emphasises the lack of anarchic influence they hold. Rather, their spatial appropriation enacts a symbolic rearrangement of space that disrupts the absorption of these locations into the hum of everyday life. I suggest that this metacritical use of space is central to the collective possibilities Dodge and Kahn forge. By connecting the vulnerabilities of body and environment through the valorisation of limitless growth, the artists propose a cinematic realism that challenges the image of Los Angeles as a city whose defied norms and averages of climate calculus has symbolically constructed its weather as an 'omen'.[544]

Playing Oneself

Having worked collaboratively from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s and drawing from their combined backgrounds in comedy, physical theatre and film, Dodge and Kahn's

[543] Kahn, 'Stanya Kahn and Llyn Foulkes', p. 36.
[544] Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, p. 6.

performative videos from this period revolve around screwy protagonists and their hapless negotiations of mounting vicissitudes.[545] In Dodge's earlier feature-length 'buddy film' *By Hook by Crook* (2001) – made with Silas Howard and Kahn as contributing writer and the on-screen character of Billie – two butch grifters, Shy (Howard) and Valentine (Dodge), relish each other's companionship amid the fallout of their petty hustles in a world hostile to them. Whether this tale of transmasculine homosociality or Dodge and Kahn's later video work, comradery is what makes their characters' misfortunes survivable.

Just as I theorised the use of personae in Antin's King, how Dodge and Kahn approach this framework requires some elaboration.[546] While its theatrical origins describe any presentation of subjectivity constructed figuratively, the pair's personae are deliberately sketched as incongruous in their affect; they are simultaneously chaotic and competent, manipulative and generous, cheerful and depressing. In this way, persona allows for a dialogical engagement with struggles that abound in everyday life in social relations, inner conflicts or with entities larger and more abstract than oneself, such as anthropogenic global warming that extend the representational and rhetorical capacities we have to describe them. But crucially, the conflicts of character Dodge and Kahn's personae model also don't provide a clear sense of 'good' crisis behaviour.

While scholarship has not ignored ecological themes in performance histories per se, the artist's use of the medium doesn't square with more recognised performance works. In Mierle Laderman Ukeles' well-regarded *Touch Sanitation*, for instance, the handshake we see in the performance's visual documentation ritualises typically unceremonious work undertaken by underpaid workers (figure 2.26). In doing so, the handshake registers what Jill Bennett has called 'practical aesthetics' insofar as the work constructs 'an aesthetics informed by and derived from practical, real-world encounters,

[545] Since the mid-2000s, Dodge and Kahn's videos have been included in major exhibitions including *Marking Time*, Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2006), *Eden's Edge*, Hammer Museum, New York (2007), the Whitney Biennial (2008) and *California Video: Artists and Histories*, Getty Museum (2009). For Kahn, whose background in physical comedy and theatre meant that she has performed widely in alternative black-box theatres such as Performance Space 122 in New York and Highways in Los Angeles, this period marked a shift from fifteen years of live performance to video performances for audiences of contemporary art. During this period the pair's videos were also regularly selected for film festivals, such as Sundance (2002, 2005) and film programmes at the MOCA, Los Angeles (2005) and MoMA, New York (2009), among others, demonstrating the extent to which moving image platforms have acted as a vehicle for their video performances.

[546] In Kahn's own words: 'When I'm rebuffing the word "character" I'm rebuffing the self-distancing process implied by the traditional theatrical reading of that word. I see "character" as a metaphorical space, a state of being for myself'. See Smith, 'Interview with Stanya Kahn and Harry Dodge'.

[…] in turn capable of being used or put into effect in a real situation'.[547] Dodge and Kahn's video performances clearly depart from a work like *Touch Sanitation* as does Antin's loner King, yet *Nature Demo* and *All Together Now* engage important managerial aspects of an environmental ethics. Instructive about this comparison is how the environmental subject is performatively produced through a mediated relationship to economies of waste and extraction and to a modelled form of agency. Where constructs of conscientious citizenship are subtended through the upbeat signifiers of the 'blond bombshell', Dodge and Kahn's personae are far from virtuous, upstanding citizens. I suggest that these character foibles are strategically introduced to interrogate idealised ecological behaviours.

While ecocritical scholars have made an effort to listen to stories of contradiction, directed outcomes are often expected. Mark Cheetham, for instance, opens his historical survey of 'eco art' from the 1960s onwards with the provocation 'what can we do in the face of these pressing planetary problems?' In this, he proceeds hopefully, sharing Malcom Miles' optimism that 'art interrupts and exposes contradictions' and 'intervenes to re-inflect the conditions by which it is conditioned'.[548] Though this sounds promisingly open, I am not sure what Cheetham would make of the pair's use of irony, since it doesn't parry with Miles' claim about the dialectical function of experiments in art 'validat[ing] art's response to climate change'.[549] Nor do they fit Cheetham's reverent profile of art that is 'respectfully involved with the earth's otherness'.[550] That Dodge and Kahn's work draws on contradictory behaviours such as situational irony informs the critical stakes of the thesis – namely that incongruity offers insight into *how* environmental concerns are rhetorised to 'orient' or 'pull' us to their cause.[551] Crucially, this allows us to consider the aesthetic modes under discussion not as dismissive of personal investment, but as recognising how incongruous feelings and emotions are part of the lived experience of navigating major existential threats.

As a layered aesthetic, persona is deftly capable of staging the entangled arenas of will and intent within hypothetical scenarios. It can overlay central dynamics between feelings and what Susan Feagin has termed 'meta-responses', as those which arrive self-

[547] Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 2.
[548] Malcom Miles, qtd. in Cheetham, *Landscape in Eco Art*, p. 11.
[549] Ibid.
[550] Cheetham, *Landscape in Eco Art*, p. 13.
[551] On affect as a 'pull' or 'force' see Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 4 and Stewart, 'Atmospheric Attunements', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 29, no. 3 (June 2011), 445–53.

consciously through awareness of their bad form or 'ugliness' (such as guilt arising from envy), only reinforcing the original response.[552] In this, my argument follows critical scholarship into the emotional substrate of cultural life, particularly those long associated with negativity. In Sianne Ngai's literary study of negative emotions, she challenges the central narrative that ambivalence is the absence of expression, understanding affective positions such as passivity as volitional strategies of withholding or other such dysphoric feelings which emanate from suspended agency. When connected to another such 'ugly' feeling – that of complicity – these frameworks evolve philosophical claims about emotions either increasing or reducing the power to act, such as Hannah Arendt's claim that 'what makes man a political being is his faculty of action', reprocessing how autonomy under neoliberal society is structured by normative imperatives of functionality.[553]

Thinking with incongruity is instructive in how the 'very effort of thinking the aesthetic and political together' is brought into view,[554] a task that is often framed as increasingly urgent to how to live with climate crisis in the twenty-first century. But the *use* I am more interested in concerns how Dodge and Kahn's screwball aesthetic reframes this question entirely by demonstrating that ambivalence is 'constitutive' of our lives, 'rather than [one of the] things we should avoid'.[555] Though Dodge and Kahn's characters stage difficulties around action and the role that emotions play in mobilising change (and so are inherently subjective portraits), the pair's metonymical treatment of place and characters as products of their environments, frames incongruity as part and parcel of capitalist inevitability. This provides a carousel for viewing a longer chain of reactivity between social autonomy and powerlessness from bourgeois cultural revolution to artmaking shaped by political antipathy towards state leadership in 1970s America, and beyond to the period of Dodge and Kahn's work. Persona is greatly instructive here, reaching beyond ecocritical tendencies that articulate art as inherently radical or transformative, and focusing instead on the precise ways in which individual and collective experience intersects with environmental thinking.

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[552] Susan L. Feagin, 'The Pleasures of Tragedy', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 20:1 (1983), cited in *Aesthetics*, ed. by Feagin and Patrick Maynard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 305–13.
[553] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, pp. 2–4; on functionality under a capitalist society see Paolo Virno, 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment', in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 17; Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), p. 82.
[554] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 3.
[555] Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 8.

As already suggested, humour is one such method that has been widely underappreciated as well as considered irrelevant to more direct forms of cultural engagement that take us straight to the heart of the matter. Because humour hasn't been treated substantially as an art historical object, let alone appraised for its ecological themes, it is necessary to visit the expectations around humour in art and its use and application in animating certain experiences. While comedic modes in Dodge and Kahn's work have been widely praised, a value matrix of humour has often been applied to their personae, smudging the nuances of their deadpan aesthetic. Also missed is how Dodge and Kahn's personae characterise environmental affiliations that are already in conflict, entwined with the turmoil and complicity of building more liveable worlds. To develop the framework of screwball survivalism, I proceed by conducting a close analysis of *Nature Demo*'s survivalist ethos, interpreting the work's sense of difficult questions around complicity, or as Alexis Shotwell has put it, the things to which a privileged 'we' are 'implicated, tied in to things we abjure'.[556]

Incongruous Humour or Laughter Out of Place

Humour has long provoked interest in western philosophical enquiry from Aristotle to Kant, but the essence of humour has more intensively been explored by Hobbes, Schopenhauer, Bergson, Freud and Gombrich, among others. Its specific properties in parody, satire, farce and caricature exceed the scope of the thesis, yet I focus on incongruity by way of the screwball as a term that more accurately describes a form of social misalignment. For Schopenhauer, such awareness of misalignment could arise in 'the sudden perception' of incongruity 'between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation'; laughter, he suggested, 'is just the expression of this incongruity'.[557] Of course, not all incongruous things are funny or amusing, nor is every kind of laughter a response to humour, as evidenced by the bodily discomfort of being tickled against your will. However, if incongruity may be found in various types of humour, delving into its mechanics is required. Schopenhauer, for one,

[556] Shotwell's recognition the interpolative power of the 'we' evoked in ecocritical debates is instructive: 'The "we" in each of these cases shifts, and complicity carries different weight with our social position—people benefiting from globalized inequality are for the most part the "we" in this paragraph. People are not equally responsible or capable, and are not equally called to respond'. Shotwell, *Against Purity*, pp. 6–7.

[557] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol. 1.,* trans. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1909), p. 95.

emphasised it as the apparent incongruity of things arranged under a single concept.[558] For the philosopher Michael Clark, this is evidence that incongruity needn't actually convince the amused of their belief in what they have seen or misunderstood, they only need to 'see it in that way' in the moment.[559] Incongruity, as it is addressed here, emerges in highly subjective moments of perceptive disunity, differentiating it from the potential gratification of cathartic modes of humour explored in chapter two or the 'superiority' view of laughter described by Hobbes as 'a kind of sudden glory' and which processes morally superior feelings of triumph over displays of misfortune, clumsiness or gracelessness.[560]

In this respect, incongruity engages differently with the typical butt of the joke – displays of ineffectiveness – to chiefly sketch a phenomenological encounter in which expectations do not need to be fulfilled nor corrected. *Screwball survivalism* outlines a critical aesthetic that is formed in neoliberal endurance and compromise yet invests in collective moments of camaraderie. Persona is highly relevant to the screwball because of how incongruity occurs when multiple phenomena are subsumed under a singular concept.[561] For Clark, adapting Schopenhauer, the subsumption of the multiple under the singular is crucial to the encounter because this is when their misalignment becomes glaring.[562] In the case of *Nature Demo*, incongruous descriptions proffered by its protagonists bring us to the primacy of knowledge and invite pedagogy through interpretative and improvised response.

Dodge and Kahn's videos are composed of largely non-sequitur narratives that abound with weird jokes that belie a deeper set of anxieties. For how their videos produce a stoic view of suffering between the pursuit and materialisation of desire, tragicomedy might be the expected analytical frame: as the character of Nell says in Beckett's *Endgame,* 'Nothing is funnier than unhappiness […] it's the most comical thing in the world'.[563] Yet, in how it accents interpersonal relations, particularly those that destabilise conventional formations of agency, the screwball is also highly relevant. In its early US-based iterations of the 1930s, screwball comedy dramatised social as well

[558] Ibid.
[559] Michael Clark, 'Humour and Incongruity', *Philosophy*, vol. 45, no. 171 (January 1970), 20–32 (p. 25).
[560] Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. by William Molesworth (London, Bohn, 1839–45). References to 'glory' in III (*Leviathan*) and IV (*Human Nature*).
[561] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol. 1,* p. 95.
[562] Clark, 'Humour and Incongruity', p. 25.
[563] Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* was first presented as a French-language production at the Royal Court Theatre in London on 3 April 1957.

as romantic disjoints and humiliations. In ways analogous to slapstick evoking experiences of alienation from modernity, Wes D. Gehring notes how the 'antihero' was a recurring motif of screwball comedy 'with the male generally losing' – an apropos 'loser' to that of Antin's King in the previous chapter. The male protagonist, Gehring contends, was 'fated to be forever thwarted', his frustrations 'the result of his attempt to create order […] in a world where order is impossible'.[564] Scholars have since incorporated friendship and the 'buddy' narrative into its premise of absurdist comedy.[565] For this chapter, the screwball provides a framework for understanding the dramatisation of ineffectiveness as the effort of existing within the allotted conditions of disaster capitalism.

From slapstick to puns, Kahn and Dodge's comic modes have gifted them the reputation of 'vaudevillians of the apocalypse'. Yet, their comic wit is yet to be parried with accounts of feeling unsettled by their work.[566] With attention to the spaces, genres and media that Dodge and Kahn's work straddles, I sketch the lack of sustained study on comedy and feeling as part of a blind spot into the role and aesthetics of humour in art history. Indeed, my examples are predominately thematic exhibitions and their critical reception, rather than scholarship on comic artworks. For this, literary and cultural studies of humour and humourlessness by Lauren Berlant, Sianne Ngai and others have proved integral to tracking their affective qualities. Reviewing *Laughing in a Foreign Language* staged at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2008 (which included Kahn and Dodge's 2006 video *Can't Swallow It, Can't Spit It Out*), the critic Adrien Searle describes how he walked away from the exhibition feeling 'depressed'.[567] For the art historian and critic Richard Dorment, the problem was that none of the works by the thirty artists were 'remotely amusing'.[568] A sense of dissatisfaction is also demonstrated by Searle's lack of patience: he finds himself bored and annoyed by the exhibition ('talking drivel'), but is also undirected in how he wants the works to make him feel.

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[564] Wes D. Gehring, *Romantic Vs. Screwball Comedy: Charting the Difference* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), p. 4.
[565] Molly Haskell, *Holding My Own in No Man's Land: Women and Men and Film and Feminists* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 113.
[566] Jori Finkel, 'Unsettling, in a Funny Sort of Way', *New York Times*, 2 March 2008: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/arts/design/02fink.html> [accessed 8 November 2021].
[567] Adrian Searle, 'Laugh? You must be joking', *Guardian*, 29 January 2008: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/jan/29/art> [accessed 29 October 2021].
[568] Richard Dorment, 'Laughing in a Foreign Language: Beyond a joke', *The Telegraph*, 5 February 2008: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturereviews/3670973/Laughing-in-a-Foreign-Language-Beyond-a-joke.html> [accessed 29 October 2021].

Acknowledging that 'a show about humour doesn't have to be funny' he is still disappointed that he 'didn't laugh once'.[569] These comments get at some of the critical expectations underpinning the confluence of art and humour, particularly around catharsis. Not only does this demonstrate that an incongruous aesthetic is difficult to capture in a critical format, but it also reveals a criterion for art 'doing' comedy, marshalling the work's unruliness into predisposed affective outlets.

Indeed, *Laughing…* followed in the contemporaneous footsteps of international exhibitions organised around humour, including *pero si sólo estaba actuando* ('…but I was only acting') curated by Kirby Gookin for Museo Nacional Reina Sofia in Madrid (2006). That the exhibition's title '…but I was only acting' directly lifts a histrionic refrain from a *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) sketch by Jon Lovitz is indicative of 'the art world's recent crush on comedy'.[570] The exhibition explicitly stated its intentions with this reference to *SNL* – a long-running American skit show that first aired in 1975 – as a means of accessing complex political, sexual or psychological topics through comedy, freeing up debate within critical and unpopular ideas.[571] The critic Glenn Philips credited such shows with the capacity for affective transformation: 'Humor is all about *making discomfort comfortable*. […] —humor lets you get away with it. That's why late-night television is the area where most of our political critique happens'.[572] In a similar vein, *Laughing…* drew on humour as a leveller between people from different backgrounds as a 'catalyst for understanding the unfamiliar'.[573]

Far more credit is due in how Dodge and Kahn pull this political critique through the markers of cultural legitimacy for the contexts relevant to their work. In the increased exposure to their work within a visual arts context, their videos reveal parochial lines in the 'art world' itself. Towards the end of their video *Winner* (2002), for instance, the

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[569] Searle, 'Laugh? You must be joking'.
[570] Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal, 'In the Studio: Stanya Kahn', *Art in America*, 9 September 2015: <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/in-the-studio-stanya-kahn-62844/> [accessed 9 November 2021].
[571] Several critics have identified significant changes to the writing of SNL through the early 1980s, diagnosing a 'political disappearance' with the presidential appointment of Reagan. See Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 10; as well as Jeffery P. Jones, 'With All Due Respect: Satirizing Presidents from Saturday Night Live to Lil' Bush', in *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-network Era*, ed. by Jones, Jonathan Gray and Ethan Thompson (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 37–62 (p. 42).
[572] Quoted in Rachel Wolff, 'Carry a Big Shtick', *ARTnews*, 1 September 2008: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/carry-a-big-shtick-205/> [accessed 9 November 2021] [emphasis added].
[573] *Laughing in a Foreign Language*, ed. by Simon Critchley and Mami Kataoka (London: Hayward Gallery, 2008).

character Lois (played by Kahn), guides the camera (with Dodge playing the camera-operator Peter) to the trunk of her car to reveal an odd-looking sculpture crafted from motley items, including a ball and a huge peach wrapped together with packing tape. 'I'm not sure what to say', Peter mumbles. 'It's OK', says Lois. 'Not a lot of people know how to talk about art. It's complicated'. Lois' understanding ('It's OK') adjusts itself around Peter's lack of expertise for which he is speechless but also uninquisitive. The comic encounter is not only produced by Peter's lack of words, but that Lois will continue her merry ways regardless of critical interest. The characterisation of a dogged volition also extends in Dodge and Kahn's *All Together Now,* a frenzied media enterprise manned by a hooded group who produce artifacts according to their own logic. These moments are significant for highlighting how the DIY aesthetics of the video map onto the work's circulation across different platforms and audiences in and beyond the 'art world'; as Kahn has described, '[f]or me, live performance transitioned into making video, and I feel like I'm still fully living in both worlds'.[574]

For what it affords in comic timing and set design, the controlled environment of performance for video has been complimentary to comic profiles. In *Mike Builds A Shelter* (1985), the artist Michael Smith parodies the aspirational spin of government-approved fallout shelters through issued FEMA instructions of a fallout shelter/snack bar as the extension of cosmopolitan dining. Demonstrating the mod cons of his basement shelter/bar, Smith's character of 'Mike' is the picture of earnest compliance, a cookie-cutter everyman of bland tastelessness (figures 3.5 & 3.6). While artists like Smith and George Kuchar have been 'doing' absurdist humour combined with personae in off-kilter videos for decades, blockbuster exhibitions of contemporary art approached such modes as relatively novel sensibilities. Critics have also suggested that the collision of these two worlds, that also helped grow interest in the art of humour, confused the point of origin. As Kirby Gookin opined, 'With Mike Smith's characters, it wasn't that he was just doing something like *Saturday Night Live,* but they were doing some things like Mike Smith. The two have merged somewhere. As we become more and more a media culture, people are more and more willing to participate in different media forms. *Everything ends up on* YouTube'.[575] Gookin's comments unintentionally evoke the formal attributes of Dodge and Kahn's methods. YouTube, as Kirby would imagine it, is a terminus for bootleg and

[574] Smith, 'Interview with Stanya Kahn and Harry Dodge'.
[575] Kirby Gookin qtd. in Wolff, 'Carry a Big Shtick' [emphasis added].

low-budget video, music videos and comedy clips, a hybrid media resting place in which authorship is often nebulously attributed and stars emerge through accumulated clicks.[576] Yet the possibility that Dodge and Kahn's work *could* end up on YouTube is precisely the critique of modernist value systems the artists stage through an aesthetic that strategically mirrors familiar media vernaculars yet warps the ubiquity of its form.

Even as comedy is lauded for its deft handling of topics such as the cultural anxiety attributed to Reagan's 1983 'Evil Empire' speech in the background of Smith's *Mike Builds A Shelter*, comedy that engages environmental concerns has largely eluded critical insight. In what follows, I argue that environmental sobriety has played a significant part in this. And yet, if, as Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson observe, the normalising discourse of a natural order is 'still often used as a rallying cry around which mainstream environmental problems are mobilized', the carnivalesque properties of humour are capable of revealing the normative discourses that underpin ideas of environmental integrity and purity. More than this, they promise a set of counterpoints to the moral organisation of 'waste' within society, as the basis for further neglect and denigration.[577]

Acknowledging the potential of humour is not to say that comedy is without risk. 'Getting' the joke does not make the joke funny by default; indeed, it can even make problematic circumstances worse by activating trigger points. This *limit*, as a means of evaluating an appropriateness of humour, concerns physical and psychological boundaries.[578] As such, humour can elicit a powerful social response that requires we confront our own bodies in the here and now as a 'way of arriving on the scene'.[579] Crucially, Dodge and Kahn configure comfort in other ways, producing care in places where it often goes absent. Whether by organising screenings of the work in the house they shared at the time of the work's release or the inclusion of La-Z-Boy chairs for reclining in their gallery shows, the artists extend the atmospheric conditions of comedy performance as a social experience. As with the work itself, these rare votives skewer the formal conventions of the white cube space while speaking to the personal and spatial

[576] At the time of writing, several of their pair's videos from the 2000s are accessible online, including *Nature Demo*: https://vimeo.com/149461829 [accessed 6 June 2020]; others are distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI).
[577] Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 'Introduction', p. 35.
[578] Sara Warner notes how laughter can give rise to ethical, as well as felt discomfort, such as muscle tension, heart palpations or cause us to blush as a result of stress or embarrassment. Warner, *Acts of Gaiety*, p. 109.
[579] Suzan-Lori Parks, 'Elements of Style', in *The America Play and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group [TCG], 1999), p. 15.

tensions that inform Dodge and Kahn's sense of survival, insofar as it emerges through the negotiation of art and life, domestic and creative space.

Dodge and Kahn's protagonists can be construed as articulating playfulness as a form of resistance; or as Dodge aptly describes of exuberance: 'a way to wield power without actually having it'.[580] Crucially, to consider play in relation to crisis contexts is not to treat disaster events as 'funny', rather, screwball survivalism attends to the interpersonal dynamics that arise the normalisation of crisis as those which cannot be controlled or marshalled. In sketching out this mode of performance, I build on Nicole Seymour's work on the critical faculties of play introduced in the previous chapter – a transgressive mode inspired by the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in which playfulness has the capacity to critically upend social norms.[581] As Seymour suggests, play in ecocriticism is sorely missing, marred by the perception of humour or insincerity as destabilising the 'doing [of] important work', an observation I extend to ecocritical art history. The ecocritical defence of 'important work' is also telling, specifying a value for instructional and other affective materials that augment green consciousness through educationally 'worthy' forms.[582] In the context of art history, this has helped cultivate a set of 'good' ecological examples that accrue art historical merit by the seeming good they perform. As such, I examine insightful models of play as politics that take influence from nonconventional formations such as Theater of the Ridiculous, a theatre genre that emerged in New York in the 1960s with absurdist and experimental roots and which often constructed self-reflexive situations where '[one is] not so much seeing a play as the making of a play'.[583] Such sensibilities, I argue, are uniquely positioned to emphasise cultural processes and feelings within the involving context of environmental crisis.

In the following, I turn to the conceptual show-and-tell Dodge and Kahn stage in *Nature Demo*, from equipment and location to the staging of the work itself. In Dodge and Kahn's screwball view of environmental survival, comic timing serves multiple ends, not only challenging the highly masculinist profile of the survivalist, but subtly defusing

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[580] Orr, *Tragicomedy and Contemporary Culture*, pp. 4–5. On 'wielding power without having it': 'Exuberance on the margin. A way to wield power without actually having it, to bombard a space with so much truth that power is the result. So while Lois is always saying, "Well, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know," she's also keeping the camera on her for hours. That's power'. Smith, 'Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn'.

[581] Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[582] Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, p. 79.

[583] Stefan Brecht, 'Family of the f.p.: Notes on the Theater of the Ridiculous', *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Autumn, 1968), 117–41 (p. 129).

the underlying justification for further damage enacted on denigrated sites of planning intervention through an inquisitive engagement with what survival looks like on a bioregional scale.

Nature Demo: Personality and Ethos in the Age of Survival TV

Formally speaking, *Nature Demo* echoes the direct-camera address of survivalist 'demos' as though it were a video diary. As Dodge suggests in *Nature Demo*, their preparations are hypothetical: a 'what-if' rather than a named event or prompt. While his scavenging for rocks and tree branches clearly takes effort, we do not actually see them sleep in their shelter nor consume any of their foraged haul. As such, these exercises are directed by subjective responses to phenomena rather than the purpose they serve. The resulting shelter is far from secure with Dodge's wind block actually resembling an artful arrangement of objects. Once Dodge has crouched down in his 'nook' Kahn calls out 'you seem really natural in there'. In their playful dynamic, *Nature Demo* muddies rather than filters useful information that would help one survive the urban wilds of Los Angeles, a place described by McWilliams as 'strong on climate, […] weak on weather'.[584]

The self-styled use of survivalist to describe skills of self-reliance has various tributaries, from military-inspired survival cultures and postwar outdoor training schemes to self-published countercultural texts such as Mike Oehler's *The $50 and Up Underground House Book* (1979) and John A. Freeman's *Survival Gardening* (1982), where it was noted that '[u]nder catastrophic circumstances, such ties [of interdependence] may well be the difference between a community's disintegration and its survival'.[585] Somewhat difficult to place are its alarmist survival imperatives triggered by a range of social, ecological or economical events including nuclear meltdown, radiation, war, invasion, resource scarcity and ecosystem collapse. Across these millenarian hypotheses, crises share an equivalence as events that must be prepared for beyond their given statistical possibility.

While deeply idiosyncratic, survivalism isn't the sole remit of fringe interests. As spoofed by Smith's *Mike Builds a Shelter*: shelter plans for nuclear protection issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as late as 1980 offer a mainstream

[584] McWilliams, *California*, p. 269.
[585] John A. Freeman, *Survival Gardening: Enough Nutrition from 1000 Square Feet to Live On – Just in Case* (n.a.: 1982), pp. 79-80.

example of this as a form of domestic prudence. However, my interests lie in the point at which a conventional profile of domestic protection overlaps with what Alison Shonkwiler has identified as revivalist practices of 'neo-homesteading'. For Shonkwiler, neo-homesteading is an umbrella term for an entrepreneurial white middle-class interest in offgrid living, small holding and homegrown food alternatives to economically coercive or restrictive workplace arrangements. Shonkwiler additionally demonstrates how progressive and regressive political imaginaries collide in the realisation of alternative work regimens within capitalism.[586] To see how survivalism offers a space for libertarian politics to thrive we only need to skim the litany of dislikes in Oehler's book: 'businessmen, the American medical profession, "liberated" women, most architecture, agri-business, 90 percent of industry, cities, pavement, the American philosophy of self-indulgence, strip-mining, clear-cutting [and] nuclear reactors' or the Oregon survivalist Nancy Tappen's view that '[a]ll survivalism is saying is to go back 40 years. Only since the 1930s is it that we have become totally dependent on the system'.[587] Shaped by individual perceptions of economic instability and shot through with libertarian ideology, these perspectives indicate the place of regressive assertions of a masculinist and racialised primacy over land holding within proprietary claims on survival.

While survivalist practices extend across the twentieth century, *Nature Demo* relates to a cultural aesthetic which, influenced by the popularity of reality television in the early 1990s, entered a blended phase of survival entertainment augmented by confessional and self-reflective interludes. Network channels such as the Discovery Channel came to embrace reality-based shows in the early 2000s, giving rise to show titles such as *Survivor* (2001), *Man vs. Wild* (2006–11), *The Colony* (2009), *Dual Survival* (2010–16), and the frontier-themed *Pioneer Quest: A Year in the Real West* (2000) and *Frontier House* (2002); American households were also given recurring survivalist personalities in the likes of Bear Grylls, Ray Mears and Christopher Nyerges. This elevated profile of survival education cast a wider net attracting those who sought the rush of weather and climatic extremities at a remote distance. How the above models

[586] Shonkwiler, 'Neo-homesteading', p. 467.
[587] Mike Oehler, *The $50 and Up Underground House Book*, 1979, p. 5. For Nancy Tappen skills of self-reliance also promised a richer, more protected life even if disaster didn't arrive. 'Oregon Survivalists Await the Collapse', *Los Angeles Times*, 26 November 1982, p. 10.

engage their audiences through scenarios staged in natural environments reiterate social-environmental values and attitudes about the pedagogical exercise of nature.[588]

Through the metafictional development of the documentary form, the presence of an 'expert' narrator, either on screen or as a disembodied authorial voiceover, has proved difficult to part with.[589] This mode has helped ratify the didactic design survival media draws from, while echoing its logic of spectacle and thrill as pedagogical tools and strategic hooks that serve a greater purpose. We see this in *Nature Demo* when Dodge confidently espouses the value of a wind block or marvels at the exterior protection of a dried seed head. These moments tantalise us with a bioregional knowledge of the Los Angeles River but this is never delivered. Peppered with words like 'rubby' and an overload of superlatives ('absolutely', 'amazing'), the dialogue plays on the tools of education as constructed narratives that reify human capacity and intelligence. This leaves us with a brand of survivalism that is neither entirely ironic (since there is admiration in what they find) nor lightly amusing in the sense of an 'easy, fluffy place' of escapism.[590] Instead, the work's pedagogical mode processes the question of *how* to live within ongoing crisis – a processing that takes place through tools inherited from popular culture that promise acquainting viewers with 'nature's plan'.[591]

It should be said that the narratives of natural order ordinarily injected into such televised scenarios are harder to discern within the self-reflexive mechanics of Handycam video. For its audience, the possibility of rupture to what might be suspected as 'real' is often used as a plot device to reveal the constructed quality of a situation – a hidden-camera practical joke played on an unassuming target. As such, where reality TV consistently muddies mediated and unmediated acts, the DIY characteristics of

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[588] The proviso of the nature documentary genre has largely followed the practice of a camera crew placed behind the camera that helps distinguish what are seeing before the camera as an unmediated and unedited encounter with nature. This melodramatic development for the purpose of nature education can be traced back to the 1920s and 30s when Disney and other motion picture giants began tapping into a growing market for documentary forms with their emulations of well-known fairy tales and fables. Ronald B. Tobias describes their 'virtuous' endings as positioning nature as 'spring[ing] back to its original form no matter how much it has been deformed'. Ronald B. Tobias, *Film and the American Moral Vision of Nature* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011), pp. 180–81.

[589] Iconised by the English broadcaster David Attenborough who later shifted to voiceover commentary.

[590] Kahn: 'I'm supposed to say: "Oh no, it's not entertainment". Entertainment – poor thing – has suffered, through a (valuable) Marxist critique. It's associated with the spectacle, with alienated labor, with the dissociation of the viewer from their bodies, as if it's an empty spell-casting, an easy, fluffy place. But I do value entertainment in connecting with an audience'. Rosenthal, 'In the Studio'.

[591] There is reason to reject a restorative view. For Noël Sturgeon, the image of harmonious nature is repeated over and over within the nature genre to patch over 'broken' social contracts of the heterosexual patriarchal family. See Sturgeon, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), p. 110.

Handycam direction and media tutorial in *Nature Demo* amplify this zone of ambiguity. Indeed, while its first-person direction creates the impression of candid viewing, its off-the-cuff framing emerges through a combination of scripted and improvised performance.[592] As such, the awkwardness and affray between characters can be understood as a setting in which the plausibility of its events are tested. In the culvert of the Los Angeles River, we half expect the argy-bargy of passers-by disgruntled by being caught on camera.

Amateur, as I have been using it, doesn't confer a lack of skill but describes an accessible engagement with a form or craft and a defence of personal enthusiasm in loving what you do without measured application. In many ways, amateur cultures flourished through online forums the internet could provide. In *Nature Demo*, its protagonists expressively enjoy their encounters with the flora and fauna of the Los Angeles River without any directed sense of what they should be seeking. I suggest this strategy has critical implications for addressing compromised futures because it engages with the *how* of creating different futures. In fact, that *Nature Demo* is open to digressive possibilities isn't coincidental, its openness makes the unexplained comradery of its protagonists all the more intriguing. While the pair seemingly remain in 'character', their characters are also amplified experiences of unassuming being. Engaging survival somewhere between instruction and entertainment, their controlled improvisation of an ordinary level of competence acts critically on the formal imperative to demonstrate an applicable skillset as an art form. Throughout, the protagonists consistently remind each other of what they should be doing (Dodge: 'Maybe I don't know if I recorded all that. Ok let's do that again'). This attentiveness towards the demo's pedagogical function rather than its message also means that the demo never really gets going beyond the hypothetical stance of the demonstration itself; it stops and starts, tarries and backtracks.

Despite its crosshairs of utopian and dystopian thought, scholarship on the phenomenon of preparedness is thin within art history. Here, I am interested in how artists have engaged preparedness in the lived or conceived negotiation of disaster and in so doing expose shifting American social values, relationships and identity through

[592] While I am resistant to signalling its wide reach as the democratisation of media, as has elsewhere been suggested of artists using social networks of 'Web 2.0.', for a generation of artists working with video performance from the early 2000s onwards, internet video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo constituted an evolving set of strategies for placing work in relation to their audience. See, for instance, Ricardo E. Zulueta, *Queer Art Camp Superstar Decoding the Cinematic Cyberworld of Ryan Trecartin* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018).

twentieth-century environmental consciousness. Its practices frequently reveal individualised actions that concern not the collective survival of humankind, but survival of those who have *learned* how. Where eugenic fantasies have played a significant role in libertarian survivalist models, the left has also shown significant survivalist tendencies, with many countercultural communes through the 1960s and early 1970s offering their own brand of 'doom and gloom' hypothesising and interest in building a community 'from the ground up'.[593] Preparedness thus evokes and muddies reactions along a political spectrum. Yet, across these examples, escape is both accorded by a physical departure (from urban centres) and a metaphorical distance from the drudgery of conventional work, familial ties and social expectations. While *Nature Demo* pokes fun at the self-assured confidence of these practices, it also provides an imaginary for survival that remains underexamined: one in which the recognition of one's potential for failure is central.

In the following, I turn to the theoretical development of failure as a queer hermeneutics to explore the dynamics of such 'bad' sentiments in greater depth.[594] As a sentiment and expression, failure absorbs many sober affects. In environmental contexts, failure tends to be isolated as a form of despondency to be overcome, while in the language of comedy, failure is often a catalyst for humour, whether the slapstick amusement of another's misfortune or feelings of superiority that emerge from 'getting' the joke.[595] Joining these figurations to another form of negative attachment, I consider how failure as a mode of dramatised affect is capable of redirecting the cynicism of hopelessness and the hubris of human superiority.

Humour, Affect and Environmental Sobriety

Throughout *Nature Demo*, Dodge and Kahn talk openly about working out and staging shots (figure 3.7). While they do not hide their movements between the river and their

[593] Residents of Ananda community in Nevada City, for instance, described how the appearance of violent trends in the latter part of the century had encouraged them to develop 'disaster seminars' that offered advice on building a community 'from the ground up'. New-age millennialism apprehending the coming apocalypse aside, the proactive stance of preparedness could thus form a part of pacifist or spiritualist inclinations, as one Ananda resident put it: 'We are saying instead of waiting until things are snatched away […] people should start orienting themselves towards a life where they can survive'. Stein, R. 'Learning How to Survive a Disaster', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 February 1975. Unpaginated.
[594] Muñoz, failure, cynicism, depression and opportunism are just some of the 'bad' or 'negative' sentiments 'associated with an emotional tonality of hopelessness'. He is interested in how these sentiments can ultimately 'transcend hopelessness'. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 176.
[595] Clark, 'Humour and Incongruity', p. 1.

car, the isolated location of the 'demo' is consistently undermined by the rush of flowing freeway traffic. While this calls bluff on the pair's exposure, it also underscores the complexities of distinguishing 'nature' from the infrastructure put in place to marshal it. Though this revelation doesn't incite laughter, its goofiness injects a rare frivolity into what Bill Nichols has identified as a form of discursive sobriety.[596] Nichols sees this as productive of documentary filmmaking in particular, with 'expository' modes, such as verbally addressing the spectator or 'evidentiary' modes that advance an argument by maintaining consistency and continuity of information flows.[597] While Nichols doesn't refer to environmental topics, his theorisation of sober affect is useful for addressing *Nature Demo*'s skewering of authenticity.

In 2010, the photographer Alec Soth published *Broken Manual*, a six-year project that follows the desires of individuals to 'disappear' from society and extends many of the above themes and the anxieties underpinning them.[598] As part of the work, Soth produced quasi-fictional pedagogical materials, including self-published pamphlets and instruction manuals authored and signed with the pseudonym 'Lester B. Morrison'. In the photographs, Soth presented subjects who have grown into their remoteness: a naked person with deep tan lines stands calf-deep in a pond; another shows a two-storey construction that has been set into a cavity in the mountainside (figures 3.8 & 3.9). These are hermits, survivalists and forest dwellers who have actively sequestered themselves away from society. Yet Soth's photographs mediate something other than the desires of his subjects for disconnection from civilisation; the work's use of persona provides a vehicle for fantasy at a safe distance from those who have pursued it as a lifestyle. When asked to reflect on his interest in the topic, Soth sheepishly described feeling 'sort of embarrassed about it. I look back and see a white guy whining about his art-world success'.[599] Here, Soth confesses his interest in seemingly authentic experiences of seclusion as connected to a desire to throw off his artistic recognition. While he admits to 'mocking himself' through his pseudonym, he also stresses the bathetic quality of the

[596] Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 67.
[597] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 30 & 33.
[598] Aaron Schuman, 'Broken Manual: Alec Soth in Conversation with Aaron Schuman', *Magnum Photos*, 14 April 2018: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/theory-and-practice/broken-manual-alec-soth-aaron-schuman> [accessed 4 November 2021].
[599] Ibid.

materials as allegorical, particularly in how the 'How to Disappear' pamphlets he found online confirm a sophomoric naivety about reclusive autonomy:

> Schuman: *Broken Manual* is also partly about the dangers of spending too much time alone. But in many ways being alone – on the road, in hotel rooms, on planes and so on – is the nature of your life as a photographer.
>
> Soth: Absolutely. The reason I wanted to become a photographer was to spend time alone. It's funny, because for the last year and a half I've been trying to learn how to work alone again. The psychological elements of working alone are so profound.[600]

Soth's sobriety is a sharp departure from the affective tonality of *Nature Demo*.[601] Even as his subjects can be seen living out their retreater fantasies in verdant seclusion, their flat expressions and drooping enthusiasm register their hermetic existence as the fateful acceptance of their circumstances; they are neither ecstatic nor rueful. By contrast, the goofiness of *Nature Demo* inserts a self-consciousness that complicates the meaning of 'character' as wholly performed. Working out their scenes on screen, we hear Dodge asking Kahn to 'make [it] clear that you're in a little clearing […] because with the shot it's hard to tell'; at other points, the pair bicker over the best method of tick removal after Dodge has already 'presented' his theory to the camera. Their dialogue is reproduced as closed captions, laying out the full extent of their elliptical backtracking. This self-aware mode leans into the unpredictability of the surrounding landscape, meaning that those on screen must actively engage through structured improvisation rather than work off assumptions. Indeed, the nature Dodge and Kahn encounter along the Los Angeles River repeatedly causes their language to falter. By constructing a direct correlation between these gaps in knowledge and how humbled Dodge and Kahn are by their finds, the video underscores a sorely missing humility when it comes to shaping environmental futures and imagining who they serve. Dodge and Kahn's screwball performance of unspecialised knowledge is thus a kind of commitment to place, one that is willing to

[600] Ibid.
[601] Soth described the 'How to Disappear' pamphlets he found online as 'such ridiculous little pamphlets, which would be completely ineffective if you really wanted to run away'. Ibid.

explore its uneven, jagged edges where others have fled and a way of asking how living practices might be adapted, rather than dismantled through spatial transformation.

Dodge and Kahn's refusal to demonstrate their findings according to the medium's conventions offers an anti-hegemonic gesture without foreclosing, as Soth does, the capacity for working through human fallibility and error. As conducted through its near-constant feed of dialogue, survival is a collective negotiation between actors and forces. This is significant to the ways in which survival TV participates in the gaining of control over nonhuman life 'out there' as a means to reify human superiority. In one episode of *Bear Grylls: Born Survivor* (2008), for instance, Bear Grylls provokes and spears a Puff Adder for his lunch. In what seems like an extravagant prop for hype, this action is subsequently supported with the claim that the adder 'kills more people than any other African snake'.[602] Violence is naturalised within the show's sensational stylings as a necessary rebalancing of the scales. But as Jennifer Doyle has argued of the history of representational violence, the assumption here is that certain forms of violence are 'good' for us when complementary to social norms around human behaviour.[603] The *good* of Grylls work is doubly instructive: first as retribution for the snake's hypothetical victims, and second, as an evolutionary battle that Grylls ultimately wins by turning a renegade performance of pest control into a protein-rich meal. His demo delivers on multiple levels, demonstrating not only the skills needed to avenge the murders of adders but also the hard truths about 'mastering one's limits as a viewer'.[604]

The extremes of showy wilderness competence or else embarrassment at its idealism prefigures survivalism as a mastered art, idealising survival communities as social formations and networks united in defiance of social fragility. Given the gendered and racialised makeup of survivalist personalities demonstrated by Soth's series alone, this attainment does nothing to skewer a longstanding mythology about rugged masculinity meeting its natural component in the wilderness, as praise for Grylls's book *Born Survivor* (2007) effused: 'Wonderful – a dangerous book for men'.[605] Indeed, there is no better setting in which to stake one's competency than against 'unforgiving'

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[602] *Bear Grylls: Born Survivor*, 'Namibia', season two, episode ten (Channel 4/Discovery Channel UK, 2008). Transcription by author.
[603] See Doyle's discussion of conquered emotion in Thomas Eakins' *Portrait of Dr. Samuel Gross (The Gross Clinic)*, 1875. Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 39–41.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Bear Grylls, *Born Survivor: Survival Techniques from the Most Dangerous Places on Earth* (N.p: Channel 4 Books, 2007).

nature.[606] As its protagonists emerge triumphant, the notion of human nature as a distinct and separate remains unchallenged, reinforcing the conceit of the natural world as a resource to be lassoed and stockpiled in the face of exhaustion. These performances of naturalised competency thus work on various fronts, reiterating ingrained conceptions of nature as well as legitimising 'truths' about human behaviour.

While typically framed as frustrating and wasteful, non-purposiveness is not inherently detrimental to an ethics of care; indeed, it calls for attentiveness to the moment in situations where there is much to learn from cooperation. As a self-conscious process of improvisation, it can reveal how 'alternatives are embedded already in the dominant'.[607] Although Kahn and Dodge call out a set of instructions to one another in the video, they also nervously adjust themselves on camera, indicating a level of adaption that can only move *with* unpredictable forces through collaborative effort. This resonates with Jack Halberstam's outline of queer practices of failure as capable of 'exploit[ing] the unpredictability of ideology' by revealing how power 'is never total or consistent'.[608] Failure here forms part of a revaluation by feminist and queer historians to outline a critical practice, aesthetic and affect. Given that failure and non-purposiveness are cut from the same cloth of negative value, its reclamation as a 'tale of anticapitalist, queer struggle […] anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming' frames relevant contexts for the environmentally concerned.[609] For José Esteban Muñoz, these modes emerged from a utopian refusal to accept the hostile conditions of the present for queer life; by insisting on 'something else, something dawning', failure as refusal potentiates 'a flight plan for collective becoming'.[610] For Halberstam, the connections between failure and economic hegemony are paramount.[611] If the normalisation of crisis emerges through a market logic that manages crises through the promotion of individual resilience practices while deferring structural action, *Nature*

[606] For a historical view of gendering the American landscape see Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
[607] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 88.
[608] Ibid.
[609] Ibid., p. 88.
[610] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 189.
[611] For scholars of Black consciousness and decolonial thought, James C. Scott's 'weapons of the weak' has supported key efforts to rearticulate historical power dynamics and temporalities. On Scott's notion of 'weapons of the weak' see *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); on Saidiya V. Hartman's development of the term, see Hartman, 'Seduction and the Ruses of Power' in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 79–112.

Demo's screwball survivalism extends these aesthetic traditions to an environmental context. In this way, improvisation presents a critical strategy against anthropocentric thinking by distinguishing between failure as a critical aesthetic and failure as a defeatist acceptance of the status quo. Rather than a defining feature of their character, failure emerges as a political critique of the exploitative conditions of the present and its delayed environmental targets and provisions that set a minoritarian class up to fail. These dynamics are well suited to the workings of improv comedy, its risks of success part and parcel of its mode; improv may fail, but in doing so can reveal the conditions that lead to its failure.

Identity is also implicated in *Nature Demo*'s dramatisation of failure as a central 'misperformance of green cultural codes'.[612] For a survival video, one would expect camouflage fatigues or a khaki field uniform, and yet the casual and impractical outfits worn by the protagonists flout the 'green codes' of ecological identities.[613] We also might anticipate Dodge and Kahn to admit the errors of their ways; after all, Kahn's 'rubby' boots are enough to undermine any shred of professionalism. But neither express regret nor rebuke for each other's choices. This gives variance to the word 'demo' as a means of *acting out*. In deliberately failing to produce these credentials, Dodge and Kahn prompt us to ask what norms these identities harbour more deeply with regards to claim and inheritance. Indeed, the forces of consumerism and 'green' citizenship work hand in hand with the performance wear market which both equips and produces an optics of readiness. Foregoing proper outfits, then, doesn't only jeopardise efficiency, it also reduces their impact and influence over others. This signalling in environmental aesthetics can be found at large in the edicts of outdoor citizenship, from Scout values of trustworthiness and character edification to the tendencies of nature and wildlife programming to connect spatial belonging to normative familial and social values. For survivalists, belonging to place is a matter of stabilising inheritance and ownership, whether tapping into atavistic training or ensuring one's genetic survival in the burgeoning bunker industry and proliferation of underground arks.[614]

Far less acknowledged in cultural discourses of environmentalism, is that living *green* is an identity shaped by social forces. For Dave Horton, the green cultural codes of

[612] Horton, 'Green Distinctions', p. 68.
[613] Ibid.
[614] See here Bradley Garrett, 'The Dread Merchants: Selling Safe Space', in *Bunker: Building for the End Times* (London: Allen Lane, 2020), p. 21–45.

environmental practices and debates are no less performative than the social reinforcement of gender normativity articulated in Judith Butler's foundational work. By this, Horton raises what Dodge and Kahn already make clear: that social norms extend across outdoor spaces from national parks to urban scrublands, legitimising certain identities and behaviours that are consistent with middle-class, assumed white and gender-normative values. By exaggerating the normative survivalist subject, *Nature Demo* opposes the claims that certain subjects make on outdoor space as an extension of their natural right. As in Butler's claim, where sociocultural codes are most noticeable when 'scripted' behaviours are broken or breached, the pair's lack of specialised wear amplifies the social conventions that dominate in the outdoor environment. If appearing 'out of place' is based on a normative set of bodily and sartorial descriptors of what 'nature lovers' should embody, the queer resonances of presenting atypically within the natural world abound through the work's irreverent occupation of *demonstrating nature*.

This is, I argue, significant for the purposes of a 'demo' given its premise of performing a transmittable knowledge. Indeed, much of the comedy of *Nature Demo* gathers through opposing effects: wavering indecision as opposed to a firm delivery, whims over facts and statistics. Dodge and Kahn's misperformance thus mounts an alternative tack: one that refuses to reproduce survivalism as a kind of second nature. Here descriptive of the enmeshment of a system or logic with the 'first nature' of ecological relations, *second nature* has been understood as a site of profound capitalist transformation in which the boundaries of natural and unnatural, human and nonhuman are intermingled.[615] If the performance of green identity registers a commitment to a 'green cultural world' as a 'way of life', *Nature Demo* asks what kind of world is promised by preparedness. Crucially, where the pair show a lack of interest in what they are preparing *for*, their interest is piqued by what they can learn from nonhuman nature along the way: Dodge: 'These things are cool though. Look, they're like in all stages of umm, I don't know, I don't know what would *come out of an egg like this*'. Kahn responds: 'It's just amazing. It's just incredible how nature has its way of intuiting that it needs to protect itself like that. You know, like *yes, you are not safe*'. Kahn's earnestness is based in admiration for the seedpod's defence against disease and predation, rather

[615] The environmental historian William Cronon has described how, in the context of a city such as Chicago, '[t]he result was a hybrid system, at least as artificial as it was natural, that became second nature to those who lived within it'. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), pp. 264–65.

than how humans may intervene in this course or process. Acknowledging that nature might not require human intervention is not only rare for environmentally facing art, but it also skewers sentiments of creative innovation. This is where *Nature Demo*'s dynamics are most insightful, admitting that representing such a thing as the authenticity or the rebalancing of 'nature' is, as Seymour has put it: 'impossible and perhaps even undesirable'.[616]

What is achieved by reframing disaster as a lived configuration? For Catherine Keller there is a humility in recognising, if not individually, the situation of others who are 'already there, in apocalypse – in its narrative, its aftermath, its compulsion, its hope'.[617] Because deflection obscures the historical processes of violently organising territories and societies through a colonial apparatus, challenging the perpetually forthcoming threat of ruin or apocalypse calls to decolonial imperatives. As the environmental humanities scholar Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey has written, to speak of the disaster that has *happened* or is *ongoing* along a postcolonial axis, is to place the 'catastrophic ruptures to social and ecological systems [that] have already been experienced through the violent processes of empire'.[618] The duration of apocalypse may thus be one that has already taken place or continues through the present. This provides a critical teleology that builds upon what the literary critic and Black feminist scholar Hortense J. Spillers calls 'apocalypse now and then', the intermittency of disaster rather than finality marked by an 'ineluctable rupture or tear in the fabric of time'. For Spillers, apocalypse defines the time-sense through which the social order is viewed as functional or even an ideal to return to or restore.[619]

Revealed through these insights is how *Nature Demo* contends with the social, economic and political structures which fuel unsustainable conditions in the first place. In encouraging us to not take ourselves so seriously, the work's screwball survivalism gets at the affective moment of where we are at in negotiating the critical challenges of environmental crisis. Its focus on negotiation and the collective and collaborative structures this necessitates, underscores the comradery of 'belonging in difference and

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[616] Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, p. 81.
[617] Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. xi.
[618] Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 7.
[619] Hortense J. Spillers, 'Apocalypse Now and Then', *A-Line: Progressive Journal of Thought*, 1 July 2020: https://alinejournal.com/convergence/apocalypse-now-and-then/ [accessed 10 November 2021].

dissent' in the face of threatened futures.[620] Within queer theoretical scholarship, Lee Edelman's polemic against reproductive futurism provided an influential framework for how the future is normatively figured through the value of the child. While respecting the historical specificity and motivations of Edelman's argument, its lack of consideration of other models of futurism such as Afrofuturism has prompted critical dialogue among scholars and thinkers, not least with Muñoz's pertinent call to practices of utopian thought which refuses the 'hand[ing] over [of] futurity to normative white reproductive futurity'.[621] In the first chapter, I considered how Wojnarowicz recognised his positionality through his work in relation to the patent violence of systemic forces of oppression. His loose subjectivity underscored the necessity of confronting these forces in solidarity and in relationship to others. To forge environmental futures, as per these examples, is to join structures of queer and ecocritical thought in rewarding ways.

In Los Angeles, a vast metropolitan area that incorporates several satellite cities and organised through the class-riven zoning and urban planning of what Shonkwiler calls 'lifeboatism', the negotiation of environmental challenges in a world already hostile to minoritarian life takes on particular dimensions.[622] Turning to Dodge and Kahn's *All Together Now*, I consider how this work animates these themes through the postapocalyptic genre. While this is precisely the kind of aesthetic Davis and others have identified as troublesome, I contend that despite its initial appearance, *All Together Now* formulates a profoundly different kind of survivalism, one rooted in an anarchic resistance to the normalisation of crisis.

Figuring A Really Bad Reproductive Future

In the opening of *All Together Now* a bloodied, crazy-eyed Kahn clubs something unidentified in the bushes just offscreen. Her bounty is a portable radio that brings the sounds of funk to the wasteland, revealed in snatches as the Los Angeles River and its surrounding environs. While devoid of dialogue, its sound design moves elastically between punk sampling, music from the pilfered radio and field recordings of animal decomposition. Kahn's character profile is incongruous: her muddied and swollen face misshapes her features, and she is decked in contemporary fashions that are dirty and

[620] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 177.
[621] Ibid., p. 95.
[622] McWilliams, *California*, p. 4; redolent of David Harvey's 'lifeboat ethic', Shonkwiler uses 'lifeboatism' to describe a defensive politics in which 'the few salvage some quality of life for themselves at the expense of many who cannot', see Shonkwiler, 'Neo-homesteading', p. 487.

worn (figure 3.10). All around Kahn are signs of death by exposure, dead kittens and birds attracting flies; buzzards also circle overhead, providing an ominous tonality to her attempts to haul water up from the river's dull flow. As Kahn's character struggles with her load, a clan of survivalists hooded in white work furiously alongside one another in a windowless bunker. They dip things in tubs of paints from filled sacks to their own genitals and watch nature documentaries on grizzly bears. Other members, wearing blue hoods and medical overalls, join them, filling out the bunker. Mesmerised by an industrious groove, they work without dialogue but hum as they go, producing a disconcerting reverie. We see them move inexplicably from creation to destruction – smashing furniture and soaking objects in a plastic pool, all the while keeping surveillance on the world outside through cameras wired to their laptops (figure 3.11).

A third alliance is forged on a Californian beach: a toddler and an older child lark unsupervised in the sand among dead seagulls and seaweed. Apart from being unseasonably dressed (one is wearing white suit trousers and a waistcoat) they appear content and relatively self-sufficient. Later we see them preparing mussels over a camp stove, at which point Kahn's character has serendipitously joined them. Arriving as a solo traveller, she doesn't assume parental responsibility for either, troubling the anticipation of a rescued filial relationship. The adult communities of hooded 'clans' similarly decentre the composition of the nuclear family. Despite their different uniforms the clans broadly coexist without confrontation, presuming a synchronic relationship without the need for verbal reinforcement. The hooded 'blues' and 'whites' work in unison to build cryptic technologies and destroy objects with power tools, yet their relationship to one another is never explained. Members of Kahn's muddied clan also ferry water and supplies to the bunker or score hook-ups; on the beach Kahn's offer of a piecemeal picnic blanket is accepted and is turned into a sledge on which to slide down the dunes (figure 3.12).

As Kahn moves through a deserted city in her socks, scavenging for edible and useful items, it becomes apparent that she is part of a cast of affiliate characters (including the American writer Eileen Myles). They lug their haul back to their bug out location: a high-rise hotel room overlooking downtown. The room boasts a deluxe jacuzzi in which the group proceed to soak, somehow emerging just as dirty and smeary as before (figures 3.13 & 3.14). As the adults in the group rest on king-size beds a young boy watches the 1968 animation *Yellow Submarine* on a makeshift powered television for which the Beatles provided its soundtrack. This second reference to the group (the first

being the video's nod to their 1969 track 'All Together Now') works in tension with the film's call for togetherness – that of the conflicting impulse to retreat to private arks.[623] Yet, how the group ease into the luxury of their surroundings in *All Together Now* is an exorbitance that has been taken rather than transacted. The excesses of late capitalism exert themselves forcefully in the appropriation of a hedonistic space – not for all-or-nothing survival – but for another kind of idleness. Dodge and Kahn intersperse this scene of relaxation with roving takes of downtown's financial district opposite, reminding its audience of the capitalist order the leering towers stabilise. The surveillance that looms around them – what Davis theorised as the spatial mechanisms of downtown's virtual 'scanscape' – emphasises the grifted rather than granted conditions of this reprieve.[624] But this temporary sanctuary does something else in turning the hotel room – a fantasy space of coupled intimacy and room service – into a bug-out location. Without the workers that maintain, clean and restock its fantasy of abundance, it is an empty and futile space.

That Los Angeles plays itself in *All Together Now* is significant given how the fictional mediation of the city in ruins plays into public perception of its environs. As Davis, one of the keenest observers of the sacrificial annihilation of Southern California has argued: 'No city, in fiction or film, has been more likely to figure as the icon of a really bad future'.[625] This ritual sacrifice has meant that films like *Blade Runner* – as those that cast Los Angeles as virtually uninhabitable – act as the city's official nightmare, 'a possible, if not inevitable, terminal point for the former Land of Sunshine' (figure 3.15).[626] Alongside the Los Angeles River, the film draws on construction sites, sites of Black Lives Matter protests, street fares and the ocean: locations that continue to be organised by social activations, defeat and transformation long after their initial occupation.

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[623] Critics have speculated on the meaning of 'Yellow Submarine': from an anti-Vietnam war anthem to the preserve of retreat; the latter LeRoi Jones agreed: 'the Beatles can sing "we all live in a yellow submarine" because that is literally where they, and all their people (would like to) live. In the solipsistic pink and white nightmare of "the special life"'. See Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays Since* 1965 (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 36.

[624] Davis: 'This comprehensive surveillance constitutes a virtual *scanscape* – a space of protective visibility that increasingly defines where white-collar office workers and middle-class tourists feel safe downtown'. See Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, p. 366.

[625] Ibid., p. 278. See also Norman L. Klein's essay in *Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s*: 'according to novels and films since 1930, LA is supposed to die by fire, earthquake, suffocation, amnesia, in the dark, in a movie theatre, or in some way seen from a distance, perhaps through the window of a car'. Klein, 'Inside the Consumer-Built City: Sixty Years of Apocalyptic Imagery', pp. 23–32 (p. 23).

[626] Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, p. 360.

As becomes clear, *All Together Now* was filmed using scant equipment and minimal props. This light-touch method extends from a scavenger's ethos, which the pair have themselves articulated, having often worked with a limited budget and in the context of a global recession. This approach is not only symptomatic of recessional parsimony but is also demonstrative of its effects on land and development in Southern California during this time. With many of the work's locations figuring forms of temporariness, collapse or calcified power in the Los Angeles environment, *All Together Now* poses crisis as an ongoing condition of life in the city in which crisis might not look like crisis at all but actually blends into the background of quotidian events. Indeed, *All Together Now* gains much of its potency in the fact that the survival mode of its characters is thinly theatricalised as fiction. For example, while deserted and run-down, the video is peppered with tell-tale signs that indicate that life in the city rattles on. Like *Nature Demo*, freeway traffic roars in the background, suggesting the capacity for the urban landscape to absorb crisis without compromising its central functions. Further disconcertion emerges from the spatial excesses of *All Together Now*. Given that Los Angeles is one of the most densely populated areas in the United States and the centre of Southern California's homelessness crisis, the depiction of excess space within the city indicates the woeful attempts of local bureaucrats to provide for its residents. The crisis of *All Together Now* is, in a sense, what many of us have become accustomed to seeing: whether the dead kittens that exceed the rate of adoption, towers rather than homes, or the river wastewaters that poison the fish. In this way, Dodge and Kahn draw on the principles of social realism to show how crisis is decentred in the present so that life can continue as 'normal' – a reframing that resonates with Bonnie Honig's claim that emergency 'only aggravate[s] and accentuate[s] the ordinary ways in which we retrench from the more life of democracy into the mereness of mere life'.[627]

The use of vernacular locations in *All Together Now* provides a metacritical function. As Kahn's character drifts from the city to the mountains and plains of Southern California, she witnesses the myriad ways in which the natural environment has been transformed into 'use-value' (figure 3.16).[628] Localised resilience is also used by the artists to tap into the wider implications of setting their improvised survivalist within and

[627] Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 140.
[628] A classic example here is Raymond Williams, 'Ideas of Nature', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 67–86.

not beyond California. Whether the Los Angeles River or the Salton Sea visited in Kahn's *It's Cool, I'm Good*, it is no accident that many of the sites Dodge and Kahn take us to have embattled protection status. Dystopian literature has long explored the annexation of the state whereby climate destruction and severe recession pushes citizens north in search of resources. Ernest Callenbach's 1975 novel *Ecotopia*, for instance, sketched a new nation comprising Northern California, Oregon and Washington, hinting at Southern California as a lost cause. Scrutinising extant racial and wealth inequality in Los Angeles from the place of science fiction, Octavia E. Butler's 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower* took these ideas further in her vision of the fragile existence of a faith-led community in a world brought to its knees by climate crisis. Central to the book's odyssey is the escape of its young protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina from the wreckage of her gated community in Los Angeles and the journey she takes north in search of a safe location in Northern California. Los Angeles (of the 2020s) is imagined by Butler as an epicentre of opportunistic violence, a dying place referred to by Lauren's father as 'a carcass covered with too many maggots'.[629] In what follows I examine how preparedness is conceptualised in *All Together Now* as a series of improvisational activities that interrupt the market logics of lifeboatism that have risen up around climate crisis in the late twentieth century. Although the video features one such private ark in the bunker the hooded groups commune in, this space is sketched as an anarchic space without rule or convention, complicating its promise of domestic preservation.

Screwball Survivalism: Irony and Ecology on the Margins

> Homeland security will make America not only stronger, but, in many ways, better. […] And as government works to better secure our homeland, America will continue to depend on the eyes and ears of alert citizens.[630]
>
> Are you looking for anything to take seriously? Begin with evil.[631]

While made in the same year, *All Together Now* offers a very different portrait of survival from *Nature Demo*. Where the former revolves around an anticipatory moment

[629] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000), p. 9.
[630] President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, 29 January 2002: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html [accessed 10 November 2021].
[631] Roger Rosenblatt, 'The Age of Irony Comes to an End', *Time*, 24 September 2001: <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1000893,00.html> [accessed 8 November 2021].

of a 'what-if' scenario, *All Together Now* proceeds from the premise that a disaster is underway and, as a result, small communities now fight for their survival underground. The behaviour of the survivalists in *All Together Now* projects a certain desperation, but unlike *Nature Demo*, the groups demonstrate skills of production, improvising a system of labour and leisure that is accorded by their desires rather than a wage economy. While these survivalists clearly reap fulfilment through this system, this value is never productively ratified. Conceptually, *All Together Now* presents a more familiar version of postapocalyptic dystopia, but the indeterminable results of this social consensus fail to offer a prophetic vision of life *afterwards*. We might ask whether life for the present-day American citizen is any different? This question substantiates deliberate ambiguity around the value of survival by any means necessary, complicating what Susan Sontag saw as a central drive of science fiction in instructing 'the hopeful fantasy of moral simplification'.[632] Similarly, the ambiguity of *All Together Now*'s communitarian dynamic leaves doubt as to whether its practices – labour-intensive, materially dubious and potentially exploitative – are any less precarious for seeing its cohort through the other side of disaster.

Like much postapocalyptic fiction, preparedness in *All Together Now* is unabashedly violent in its depiction of life on the edges of civilisation. While its scenes are occasionally disturbing, the prevailing implication is that no image of the future is untouched by the mess or incoherence of the present. Through this, *All Together Now* offers a vital account of facing environmental urgencies by allowing its language for the future to remain unsettled, particularly in terms of who the future is for. By resisting the imposition of fixed meaning for its viewers, the work encourages self-reflection on attitudes towards human-nonhuman relations for which we can also judge its characters. Crucially, this takes place in the absence of mobilising the affective trademarks of artworks engaging with environmental apocalypse through upstanding proposals of ecological citizenship. One such example is *This Is Not A Test* (1979–91), an installation of a bunker by the artist Beverly Naidus that explores an emotional response to apocalypse as a primary course of action (figures 3.17 & 3.18).[633] Composed of projected images of pastoral scenes, the installation remorsefully presented images of 'what was', while a soundtrack contained a call-and-response of two voices, one hyper-anxious and

[632] Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster', *Commentary* (October 1965), 42–48 (p. 47).
[633] *This Is Not A Test* was conceived for several exhibitions including the 1983 exhibition The End of the World: Contemporary Visions of the Apocalypse held at the New Museum, New York.

the other apathetic to the calamity at hand. In its insightful exploration of rhetoric and impulse, *This Is Not A Test* exemplifies the aims of positive influence by experiential art, willing its audience to break the cultural impassiveness over nuclear power through an empathetic openness to seeing multiple perspectives on the issue.

What I have isolated here is a set of ecocritical affects constituted by 'moral earnestness'.[634] According to Bronislaw Szerszynski, this mode in environmental politics has 'gone hand in hand with its over-estimation of the epistemic power of science, and by a neglect of the way that meanings and values about nature are not just socially situated and partial but also shot through with ironies and aporias'.[635] By this claim, Szerszynski queries, like Kari Norgaard, the perception that information is inherently mobilising. Where moral earnestness sets upon the task of educating audiences on environmental 'truths' in order to overcome or solve environmental issues (on the basis of swapping out 'untruths' from climate denial), Szerszynski considers the potential of irony as a critical environmental sensibility. This is significant given that the term 'affect' is rarely given recognition within cultural responses to environmentalism, even as art engaging these issues has been imbued with much emotive potential, as attested by Sandrine Simon's claim that 'ecological artists have been able to *emotionally shake their public* […] both by portraying the beauty of nature and by expressing their outrage concerning the destruction of the environment'.[636] This sentimentalism is extended more fully in the identificatory appeals issued by the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, an artist known for his large-scale installations and environmental interventions that emphasise the temporal conditions of climate change. 'All of us know the experience of being moved by a piece of music, a book, or a painting' he writes. 'Experiencing art is not a matter of learning something new; rather, it allows us to discover something in us with which *we suddenly identify*, and through the connection we establish, we are *better able to express who we are*'.[637] Like Norgaard, Eliasson recognises that even as knowledge plays a communicative role, 'people will not act on facts alone'.[638] This sentimental reasoning not only places great faith in art that will 'move' us but relies on an inscriptive sense of the power of art to elicit ethically sound affective responses that would

[634] Bronislaw Szerszynski, 'The Post-ecologist condition: Irony as symptom and cure', *Environmental Politics*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2007), 337–55 (p. 351).
[635] Ibid, pp. 351–52.
[636] Sandrine Simon, 'Systemic Educational Approaches to Environmental Issues: The Contribution of Ecological Art', *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2006), 143–57 (p. 148).
[637] Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing, 'Ice, Art and Being', n.p.
[638] Ibid.

(logically) spur an environmentalist ethos. Moreover, Eliasson's comments point to the subjective edification such good affective responses serve, augmenting self-expression regardless of environmental gains.

In the above passages, emotion is implicitly discussed as upwardly mobilising. Whether 'shaking' their public into outrage or leading viewers to 'discovery', good actions inculcate valued responses like learning and initiative. Yet, the evidence they give is either rhetorically vague, from Eliasson's claim that 'art allows us to feel ideas and thoughts'; or unsubstantiated, such as the undirected outrage Simon evokes, leaving much to the imagination. Dodge and Kahn's videos present tonal and affective ambiguities that clearly do not fit with this characterisation, nor do its associations of terror tarry with the kinds of naturalised violence that are deemed 'good' for taking us to and beyond our limit. My goal is not to recuperate aspects of Dodge and Kahn's work in places where they do replicate these textual values, but to explore what these incongruities have to offer through mutual uses of irony and ecological thought. I draw on Szerszynski's alternative irony – a 'thoroughgoing irony' – as a mode that 'involve[s] a reflexive awareness of the limited and provisional nature of human understanding'.[639] Much like the self-reflexive mode I have highlighted in Dodge and Kahn's work, the thoroughgoing ironist also doesn't reiterate stasis by 'lapsing into cynicism or quietism' but reveals critical areas of implication within political debates. Although Szerszynski's model of ironic ecology concerns the conventions of environmental discourse, these insights are valuable given that instructive characteristics of moral earnestness prevail in ecocritical art history. Irony also usefully spotlights representational performance practices, allowing us to consider how personae and pseudonymous identities draw down and complicate environmental 'truths' without exhausting the full range of subjective expression and feeling.[640]

It is important to recognise that as a strategy, irony isn't wholly subversive, as in the case of 'corrective' irony that has generally been deployed in a public arena to 'reveal situational ironies in order to shame their targets into repentance' such as disclosing in a sanctimonious manner, where bodies presenting as responsible have 'revealed

[639] Szerszynski, 'The Post-ecologist condition: Irony as symptom and cure', p. 350.
[640] Here, I draw on the use of pseudonyms in Kierkegaard's work that concern the problem of 'writing the infinite', see Butler, 'Kierkegaard's Speculative Despair', in *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 128–29.

[themselves] otherwise'.[641] It also depends on what we mean by irony. In his widely cited *Compass of Irony* (1969), D. C. Muecke characterised irony as a result of incongruity between two layers of meaning: the first as it appears to the victim (or personification of a 'victim') and in the second, a more complex reality as it appears to the observer or ironist. This characterisation of irony also depends on a third level of 'innocence' in which the victim is either unaware or feigns unawareness of the divergence in meaning. Crucially, Muecke further drew distinctions between 'verbal irony' and 'situational irony' as the difference between an ironist, as 'someone consciously and intentionally employing a technique' and the '"outcome of events" which [...] is seen and felt to be ironic'.[642] While foundational models like Muecke's track clear outlines for irony, such easy distinguishability breaks down in the shifting contours of representation and event, fiction and document in the cultural landscape in which Dodge and Kahn made these works.

Where critical diagnosis of the post-911 'death of irony' has been widely debated in the popular press, with culture declared, for instance, in the pages of *Vanity Fair* as having entered a 'seismic change' in facing 'the end of the age of irony'– few have attended to the contingencies of irony and ecology in public cultures following September 11.[643] Largely overshadowed by 9/11 discourse, the decision by prominent environmental organisations to cancel campaigns that were critical of US environmental agencies was reminiscent of the call for national cohesion by observance that 'the preciousness of life' be 'taken seriously […] in a new and chastened time'.[644] Corroborating the outlook that 'the environment had, quite justifiably, fallen off the public agenda', the Sierra Club rationalised cancelled campaigns by stating that 'our nation faces other longterm problems and challenges [...] only when the healing is under way and we have begun tackling the security challenges we face will our nation be ready to focus again on other issues'.[645] A substantial part of the Bush administration's

[641] Bronislaw Szerszynski, 'Ecological rites: ritual action in environmental protest events', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2002), 51–69 (p. 56).
[642] D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 42.
[643] For a rebuttal of irony's supposed end, see Michiko Kakutani, 'Critic's Notebook: The Age of Irony Isn't Over After All; Assertions of Cynicism's Demise Belie History', *New York Times*, 9 October 2001: https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/09/arts/critic-s-notebook-age-irony-isn-t-over-after-all-assertions-cynicism-s-demise.html [accessed 6 November 2021]; and Zoe Williams, 'The Final Irony', *Guardian*, 28 June 2003: <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2003/jun/28/weekend7.weekend2> [accessed 10 November 2021].
[644] Rosenblatt, 'The Age of Irony Comes to an End'.
[645] O'Brien, 'On Death and Donuts', pp. 150 & 152.

'readying' of the nation involved underscoring the language of 'good' and 'evil' in the bid to re-secure the homeland by identifying how 'the enemy' abroad could also be found lurking at home. This advocacy of civilian surveillance task forces would be emphasised forcibly, perhaps most memorably in Bush's 2002 State of the Nation address delivered less than five months after 9/11, as well as through the tentacles of the 'disaster capitalism complex', that saw the newly created department of Homeland Security granted greater powers of agility to defend the nation in its 'war on terror'.

A substantial part of the discomfort in *All Together Now* arrives in the cast's compulsive enactment of self-actualising practices performed without explanation. We are introduced to various subjects in the work, yet many of these characters remain anonymous to us. Crucially, however, while the gap between the video's external audience and its subject is never breached, many of these characters take up their own means of visual production in the work, producing their own sense of reality and simulation by erratically turning the lens on themselves and filming one another (figure 3.19). This doubles down on the video's self-reflexivity, in which the layers of spectatorship are two, even three layers deep. And indeed, while the characters appear in charge of their own actions through this and other means of production, they also work fitfully and impulsively to satisfy their own fixations and compulsions. They fulfil sexual urges in the collective space of the bunker, work at frenzied speeds on inexplicable constructions, and destroy the assemblages with equal fury.

Much like *Nature Demo*, *All Together Now* augments this queasy encounter with its Handycam direction. This aesthetic convention has proved popular with postapocalyptic horror such as *Cloverfield* (2008), a film that uses the handheld camera as a conceit to simulate the horror of a disaster that cascades over the unassuming documentation of a social event (figure 3.20). With its mechanical 'eye' imitating the liveness of human vision, this mode constructs for its viewers the sensation that one cannot leave the scene quickly enough nor intercept the action because they are only a witness to the disaster event. Viewers of the work, then, must attempt to make sense of what they are seeing by becoming a secondary witness in the disembodied experience of watching the disaster unfurl to a primary audience. In this way, the video resonates with the enmeshment of self and mediatic culture that shapes contemporary states of being, wherein, as Kahn has put it: 'We are no longer separate from capital, technology, and

consumerism, even in our most intimate moment'.[646] That *All Together Now* echoes the cinematography of *Cloverfield*, in which terror is constituted in the accident of catching the event on tape is central to its play on authorial film language. Much like director Matt Reaves' remark that, 'What you're watching [with *Cloverfield*] is a home movie that then turns into something else', *All Together Now* teeters on the potentially nightmarish clickbait of YouTube's algorithmic carousel of news media, ripped content and home recordings, where watching a user's uploaded video can introduce dissonant affects and feelings into an otherwise nice time.[647]

Much of the pair's work proceeds from the invasive outreach of watchful media within everyday life that can be read as part of sustained intelligence strategies under Bush's vision of a nation working together to nullify threats at home, as an 'America [that] will continue to depend on the eyes and ears of alert citizens'.[648] While *All Together Now* maintains a level of abstraction from the receptors of harm, the sinister instrumentation of communication technologies – from the clans' hoods which are painted with lurid, crooked smiles to the group's constant surveillance on the outside world – evokes the military-industrial complex under which human rights violations could be clandestinely actioned as 'enhanced interrogation techniques'. The graphic images that emerged of the treatment of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison, a US Army detention centre for captured Iraqis between 2003 and 2006, catapulted the aggressive defence of Western superiority in the 'war on terror' into public view, with images of detainees masked, covered and bound widely shown, in one example, appearing full bleed on the front page of *The Economist*. By these schematic references, *All Together Now* draws together the subjection of citizens and the environment under the promotion of judicial 'justice', a violence Paul Virilio described as a defining feature of modern warfare.[649] In doing so, Dodge and Kahn effectively link the postmodern technologies that both affirm state power (by acting in its name) and the abstracted qualities of geographic space produced in this virtualised regime of defence.

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[646] Liz Craft, Anna Gritz and Stanya Kahn, 'And I Stop and I Turn and I Go for a Ride: Stanya Kahn and Liz Craft, *Mousse* 60, 19 December 2017: <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/stanya-kahn-liz-craft-anna-gritz-2017/> [accessed 9 November 2021].

[647] Christopher Goodwin, 'The first monster hit of 2008', *The Sunday Times*, 22 December 2007: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-first-monster-hit-of-2008-jfftcm9mkk2> [accessed 9 November 2021].

[648] Bush, State of the Union Address.

[649] See Paul Virilio, 'A Travelling Shot over Eighty Years', in *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 68–95.

Incoherence as a defensive response here exemplifies how state power is amplified by dehumanising and deracinating its point of focus, a communications strategy found, no less, in Bush's televised apology that many decried as inadequate. In this address, Bush disassociated from the released images, stating that the people of Iraq 'must understand that what took place in that prison does not represent the America that I know'.[650] That an abuse scandal described by the acting president as *a crisis of representation* could come to light through the same visual technologies instrumentalised under state-sanctioned violence is all too revealing of the shift (rather than departure) of irony through the optics of modern warfare. It also points to the inextricability of situational irony from verbal ironies in this political climate. As Susie O'Brien contends, 'the question of whether George Bush is being a conscious ironist when he uses the language of "good" and "evil" to condemn the fundamentalists, or whether his memory of posters with the words "Wanted: Dead or Alive" on them came from movies or real life, is neither answerable nor really significant'.[651] In *All Together Now*, the amalgamation of state-sanctioned images of terror and a Hollywood repertoire of horror evokes the primary features of the post-9/11 cultural imaginary of preparedness as an expression of resurgent military and economic domination on a world stage.

If in *All Together Now* the assemblage of terror the hoods signal is difficult to read apart the disclosed horrors of US abuses, it is also true that this semiotics has become a source of messaging within disaster imaginaries to signal a threat to American civilisation as we know it. The title sequence of *Doomsday Preppers* (2011–14), for example, a National Geographic reality-tv series that followed 'preppers' as they 'obsessively prepare themselves and their loved ones for the worst', featured waterboarding as a designated endurance exercise (figure 3.21).[652] Elsewhere, *The Colony* (2009–10) openly advocated shock tactics as a means of strength-building, opening the programme by inducing its cohort into a state of shock, having kept them awake for thirty hours with almost no food and water (figures 3.22 & 3.23). The show then sent its contestants out into the 'wasteland' (the Los Angeles River and its environs) in search of an empty warehouse to secure. Notably, the 'colonists' describe the desertion

[650] Brian Whitaker, Suzanne Goldenberg and Rory McCarthy, 'Arab world scorns Bush's TV "apology"', *Guardian*, 6 May 2004: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/may/06/broadcasting.iraqdossier> [accessed 9 November 2021].
[651] O'Brien, 'On Death and Donuts', p. 151.
[652] *Doomsday Preppers* aired on the National Geographic Channel between 2011 and 2014, see the episode guide here: <https://www.natgeotv.com/ca/doomsday-preppers/about> [accessed 9 November 2021].

on the freeway as ‘unforgettable’, and like the ominous scene-setting of *All Together Now* (figure 3.24), the Downtown skyline rises up from background smog.

The lack of easy distinguishability between representation and event in the above examples indicate multiple situational ironies darkly animated by the breakdown of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ when configured in domestic terms, not least by the revelation that at the extreme end of things, ‘preppers’ simulate ‘intelligence’ strategies widely used in US detention centres abroad as a means of preparing against external threats on the homeland. Dodge and Kahn’s aesthetics of terror in *All Together Now* thus resonates with the view that irony in the post-9/11 period merely moved with the surreal qualities of national discourse, a shift that has been characterised as ‘a reinvigorated opposition movement to dominant media, industry, political, and economic interests’.[653] Others have noted the irony of renewed interest in the terrorist action genre despite calls for Hollywood to limit certain depictions of violent acts, from which, of course, media giants and Hollywood executives reap financial gains. This demonstrates that even as verbal ironies become tentative in moments of national crisis (exemplified by the September 29 episode of *SNL* that included executive producer Lorne Michaels asking the then-New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani: ‘Can we be funny?’), situational ironies have been robustly drawn upon as political critique to amplify points of incongruity within, as Michiko Kakutani has claimed in the case of fragmentary techniques used to explore the Vietnam war, ‘the heightened weirdness’ of these experiences without smoothing over their disjointed form.[654]

All Together Now evokes an acute period in US politics which saw conservative leaders double down on aggressive policies at home and abroad to ‘preserv[e] its way of life at the expense of other lives’.[655] Antin had characterised this doubling down as a narcissistic character trait of leadership, as the inability to see oneself beyond the constructed image they have crafted for themselves. As Dodge and Kahn connect these policies to the twin forces of degradation and destruction, they construct a distinctly ecocritical perspective. In what follows, I argue that *All Together Now*’s amplification of situational ironies in the breakdown of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ prompts a wider take on environmental thinking, particularly if it is to contend with the ways in which crisis is now managed as an industry. I insist that a demanding work like *All Together Now*

[653] Gournelos and Green, *A Decade of Dark Humor*, xi.
[654] Kakutani, ‘Critic's Notebook’.
[655] O'Brien, ‘On Death and Donuts’, p. 156.

belongs in ecocritical art history because of its critical arc in flipping dystopia to describe the capitalist management of crisis. This reconfiguring of crisis isn't a means of simplification, say, by offering an 'unprecedented opportunity' to 'solve' crisis, as per Al Gore's calls to 'turn to boldly face down the danger that is stalking us'.[656] Rather, in apprehending an extended temporality of crisis, we learn from what is maintained as a normative state wherein 'crisis is everywhere and [goes] unnoticed, or only noticed through the event of disaster'.[657]

Bunkering Down

Dodge and Kahn's screwball survivalism can be read as a critical aesthetic that dramatises in part Naomi Klein's theorisation of disaster capitalism – as the prioritisation of the national economy in managing environmental crises. Klein's theorisation is particularly attentive to mapping the rise of disaster outsourcing to private firms alongside that of the 'security boom' of the Homeland Security industry, which has seen further strain piled upon existing social disadvantage, as Klein notes, 'in the name of reconstruction and relief'.[658] The industry of disaster-response is poised to pick up the pieces, promising precautionary security through brazen offers, such as that of a company called Help Jet, described by Klein as 'the first hurricane escape plan that turns a hurricane evacuation into a jet-setter vacation'.[659] The rise of luxury escape hatches alongside compounding environmental crises demonstrates the absorption of preparedness into the neoliberal mindset of late capitalism, marketing relief for prone regions as something that can only be privately realised in the absence of national safeguards.[660]

This language didn't go unnoticed by artists engaged in the topic of survival. Evoking the emerging social mobility of survival 'solutions' is *Life Line*, a set of sculptural works by Lucy + Jorge Orta that connect to a larger body of work on 'refuge wear' (figure 3.25). That *Life Line* was initiated in 2008, the same year as Dodge and Kahn's survival works, speaks volumes about public understanding of the threats of

[656] Al Gore, 'The Moment of Truth', *Vanity Fair*, 16 April 2009: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2006/05/gore200605> [accessed 9 November 2021]. For a skewering of 'stalking', see Anna Tsing, 'A Feminist Approach to the Anthropocene: Earth Stalked by Man', *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 2–16.
[657] Puar, *The Right to Maim*, p. 87.
[658] Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, p. 413.
[659] Qtd. in Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, p. 419.
[660] Ibid., p. 419.

ecological degradation to human and nonhuman life and the individuated survival strategies designed in response to these anxieties. The uniform product design of the equipment in *Life Line* embodies this intersection, quantifying survival in anthropometric terms of bodily mass and vitals in a systemisation of the body that obscures the political and economic circumstances that force communities and individuals to seek assistance. The subject is abstracted by this systems aesthetic but not absented, rather, it is constructed as a site of assisted capacity 'as the measure of one's capacity to overcome ordeals or support others in distress, but also as a fragile structure to be preserved'.[661] If *Life Line* figures technology as central to contemporary biopolitics, its answer to homelessness and displacement through wearable objects and sculptural tents is a gesture of utopic resource redistribution that could only ever symbolically patch disaster in the postcrisis period.

Where disaster capitalism is complicit in the elision of national preparedness measures, it also defines the terms through which destruction is represented and later reabsorbed by a neoliberal market. 'The desert, the sprawl, the dirty aqueducts have all been used as post-sites or to signify the onset of ruin' is how Kahn describes the cinematic spectacularising of disaster, with many of these sites subject to ill-conceived design and managed decline.[662] Extending screwball survivalism through this framework makes it possible to read key differences in how Dodge and Kahn use the medium of video to depict degradation. I contend that degradation in the video characterises the industrial-liberal erosion of social and environmental health. In the various dwellings the clans inhabit, none are served by running water. This alights on a major anxiety concerning water governance and security in Southern California, one not only presented under the spectre of disaster, but felt ubiquitously through ongoing threats to infrastructure compounded by chronic underfunding and climate havoc.[663] Destruction is conversely used by Dodge and Kahn as a tool of non-compliance to probe and dismantle

[661] Lucy Orta, 'Operational Aesthetics: The Work of Lucy + Jorge Orta' (London: University of the Arts London, 2011), p. 32.
[662] Craft, Gritz and Kahn, 'And I Stop and I Turn and I Go for a Ride'.
[663] Literature on water management and rights in Southern California includes William L. Kahrl, *Water and Power: The Conflict over Los Angeles Water Supply in the Owens Valley* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983); William F. Deverell and Tom Sitton, *Water and Los Angeles: A Tale of Three Rivers, 1900–1941* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016); *Water Crisis: Myth or Reality?* Marcelino Botin Water Forum 2004, ed. by Peter P. Rogers, M. Ramón Llamas and Luis Martínez-Cortina (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006). One author in this collection notes how even though two thirds of the state's population live in Southern California, the region receives less than 10 percent of the state's total precipitation. See W.M. Hanemann, 'The economic conception of water', pp. 61–92 (p. 73).

the conventional appearance of degradation. This takes on significance once we acknowledge that destruction happens most spectacularly within the clans' safe space: the bunker. Here the hooded families ritualise the destruction of the place they call home. Crucially, this activity is undertaken collectively and without conflict, with signs of affection and pleasure even passing between them. If the bunker is a means of ensuring the survival of an existing social arrangement, Dodge and Kahn envisage this site as one of fragmentation that leads to new ways of living together beyond the bunker's originating technology of reproductive futurism under wartime, then nuclear threat. The use of the bunker as a site of social production, rather than *reproduction*, wherein the hooded clans engage in casual sex and absurd industry, suggestively indicts the key functionality of the bunker as constructed to shield the nuclear family.

In equal measure, the destructive actions of the clans complicate the narrative tendencies of the postapocalypse genre in which a set of survivors move against the curve of decline. *28 Days Later*, for instance, focuses on the struggle of four survivors to make sense of and cope with the breakdown of society following a mass viral infection. The drama proceeds from the perspective that degradation is inevitable and will only get worse, echoing the survivalist outlook that society is a stacked system, and environmental and economic breakdown only lead to further losses. In *All Together Now*, the clans' hoods are a sinister cipher for latent violence. Their outfits suggest that its members are unreserved about using violence to secure their safety, while their constant monitoring demonstrates the accustomed paranoia of their new normal. Yet, even as *All Together Now* bears the trademark violence of postapocalyptic horror as the magnification of existing inequity, it resists the teleology of violence assumed of anonymity. As a result, *All Together Now* fails to incite the darker tones of its characters' behaviours as suggestive of the inevitable deplorability of human nature. In fact, Dodge and Kahn insistently return us to the abuse of power conducted in the name of protection through use of visual refrains that require double takes. From the bunker, the hooded 'blues' watch footage of a skyscraper crumbling to dust in mere seconds (figures 3.26 & 3.27). Although this footage is unrelated to the footage of the falling towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, it evokes this highly mediated event in the parallel of playing out in real-time the symbolic collapse of an economic and political stronghold. The way in which this scene is tracked, connecting three adults ('blues') in their underground bunker to the urban scene of destruction and back again, attests to the omnipresence of surveillance as a means of controlling private space. As Beatriz

Colomina has observed, the development of surveillance in and around the domestic sphere brought the house into consanguine relations with the state and its military programme.[664] The incongruous use of the bunker space in *All Together Now* implies that where the nuclear bunker was once used to calcify conventional familial relations, the video's appropriation of surveillance tactics can destabilise the nuclear family model this architecture was built to serve.

The suggestive forms of communing in *All Together Now* indicate how these representations have been politicised in the contemporary mediasphere. But just as this reiterates the representational dynamics of disaster, the editing of these scenes suggests an active commitment to probing the ways in which images are used to instrumentalise social values and behaviours. In this I argue that Dodge and Kahn develop an aesthetics of anonymity as a framework for radical communitarianism. Not only do the hooded clans play an active role in representing their own proclivities and pleasures through image feeds but they also cooperate and cohabitate as strangers without seeking to resolve their unfamiliarity. In doing so, the clans reformulate their relationship to futurity *through* surveillant media, breaking with the assumption of opportunistic or predatory behaviour in times of social breakdown. Further scenes in *All Together Now* see that moments of collaboration and cooperation are not isolated. There are, for instance, touching resonances to Kahn's makeshift funerary pyre for the dead kittens. Other moments float predation before us, such as when the young boy of the muddied clan turns to find a hooded clan member watching him. This scene is ripe for gratuitous violence in how power is accorded by the older male's age and physical stature, and yet this scene expresses much of the goofiness of *Nature Demo*, given that all they do is swim and make weighted sock weapons (figures 3.28 & 3.29).

Anonymity also plays into the clans' use of digital interfaces. Although the groups clearly take advantage of opportunities as and when found, they are directed by their own urges for pleasure and productivity and have no clan leader nor internal social hierarchy. This has several repercussions for the vision of environmental survival Dodge and Kahn explore. Where video recordings in the disaster genre are typically used to address and alert a future society to their destructive ways, *All Together Now* retracks the temporality of crisis as contextual to Los Angeles, as the city in which the artists also live and fight for representation in. The move to reframe the prophetic outlook of media, then,

[664] Beatriz Colomina, 'Domesticity At War', *Discourse*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Winter 1991–92), 3–22 (p. 4).

as that of 'speaking' to and projecting a future of America, grapples with the impossibility of stabilising the present by individual acts alone. More broadly this self-conscious mode is mirrored in how Dodge and Kahn explore what gathers in mass when the camera is kept rolling. We see this in action in *All Together Now*, as the narrative splays off at different points when the clan members obsessively produce and stream their own footage feeds. While this metavisual style of shooting gives the video an irregular sense of time, it also presents different streams of reality, with the characters alert to what this looks and feels like, and how they might shape it.

Dodge and Kahn's protagonists are captivated by these regimes, but they also carve out space within the constant of cameras and media platforms for physical interactions. In *All Together Now* the hooded blues keep watch on the outside through CCTV cameras and communicate with their entourage over webcam, attesting to their own covert operations. This speaks to the transformation of social relations through digital interfaces that has elsewhere been evoked by Kahn's work more directly, alighting on the casualness with which internet users consent to being watched as a trade for watching others. Even as the presence of digital interfaces in these videos highlight the extent to which surveillance cuts through everyday relations – even more so at the end of the world – their characters are far from virtuous. Crucially then, while the potential of anonymity to enact harm is never expunged from these social interactions, the collectivity we find in the videos subverts the assumption that anonymity introduces the intent to degrade or violate others. Indeed, as in the hook-ups the clan members seek, anonymity needn't be violent, revealing radical possibilities for connection between strangers. The emphasis on pleasure here, as self-guided rather than demanded, resonates no less ironically with the outlook that post 9-11 irony can show us moments of 'pleasure that have transformed the US political climate'.[665]

To close, I home in on the framework of anonymity in *All Together Now* to think about the wider implications of connecting environmentalism to a virtuous notion of the natural world. In virtuosity, one is able to reflect on the goodness of nature and find affirmation in its authenticity, much like Eliasson's interest in the moral edification nature brings. By contrast, screwball survivalism recognises the difficulties of being mired in incongruous states without an easy route forward. For the legal scholar Jedediah Purdy, looking back is one possible solution, substantiating his ecological thought

[665] Gournelos and Green, *A Decade of Dark Humor*, p. xi

through that of his West Virginia childhood. Purdy credits his rural upbringing with giving him a 'perfect confidence in the reality of things' and an education acquired in the 'words […] that we knew in common'.[666] When Purdy connects environmental degradation in his 'corner' of West Virginia to a national reliance on fossil fuels, he does so with the security of knowing about the 'real' ways of the local. 'Maybe because so much of our talk had to do with these stable, certain, solid things' he continues, 'West Virginia was not an ironic place'.[667] That his rebuttal of ecological irony comes attached with a plea to take 'our inhibition seriously' is reminiscent of Simon's observation that 'ecological artists have been able to emotionally shake their public'.

Dodge and Kahn's solidarity in anonymity and trust in things or people one may not know challenges the views that Purdy and Simon express in the name of ecological consciousness: that sincerity returns us to ourselves while irony disconnects us from what really matters. Yet, as we have seen in the situational ironies of the disaster industrial complex, this isn't strictly true: irony can run a flashlight over vexed circumstances. In Dodge and Kahn's survival works this provides evidence of a critical moment in the social and material geography of Southern California during an intense period of resource marshalling. This assumes a new kind of significance to Purdy's assessment that the ecological pleasures of the 'reluctant ironist' are 'superficial […] belong[ing] to other people and other purposes' given the proprietary terms of land use in Los Angeles Dodge and Kahn's works reveal.[668]

Where Purdy's call echoes sentiments in ecocritical art history to awaken to reality, Dodge and Klein's videos, much like Antin's humourless king (figure 2.1), proceed from the position that ecological consciousness is difficult *because* it is ongoing rather than because it is downplayed or denied. Their actions imply that the imperative for greater consciousness is inadequate when singling out environmental degradation from intersecting issues of gender, race and class, thereby entreating systemic acknowledgement of interacting forces. In both *All Together Now* and *Nature Demo*, the mutual degradation of the subject and landscape are insistently linked and reformulated, communicating survival as a critical issue of social welfare as well as concern for the nonhuman. Furthermore, without the moral parenthesis that video testimony or voiceover

[666] Jedediah Purdy, *For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. xix–xx.
[667] Ibid.
[668] Ibid., pp. xii–xiii.

narration instate, neither does ecology 'attemp[t] brazenly to incorporate the world' nor does irony 'ris[k] the opposite error of ignoring it in favor of an obsessive focus on words'.[669] Rather, these works reveal how irony can be used as an ecocritical strategy to scrutinise overlaid representations and meanings such as of the Los Angeles River as wasteland, catalyst and lifeline.

The scenes I have examined exemplify Dodge and Kahn's effort to make agential decisions under the conditionality of crisis. While both *Nature Demo* and *All Together Now* suggest that their characters are vulnerable to a set of external flashpoints, these threats emerge through systemic relations with which their characters are already acquainted. In this way, Dodge and Kahn temporalise crisis in relation to a lived tense, with their characters *keeping on* in environments that are just as damaged. This emphasis on sustained crisis, as opposed to the reactive 'event' popularised by the disaster genre, calls to mind the Beckettian refrain of ongoingness and the lived sense of crisis captured in *Parable of the Sower*, whereby the present consists of 'things […] unravelling, disintegrating bit by bit'.[670] That crisis can be without a singular point of origin or a sudden dramatic turn in Dodge and Kahn's works invites a vital skewering of spectacularised crisis. Much like Walter Benjamin's claim '[t]hat things "just go on" is the catastrophe', this frames crisis as structurally embedded in society, culture and the marketplace.[671] By using their personae to intervene in the capitalist logic of inevitability, Dodge and Kahn pose sincere questions about how communities express solidarity. This use of humour is politically directed because as Benjamin surmised: 'capitalism will not die a natural death'.[672]

The risks Dodge and Kahn take by courting incongruity are useful to consider. While these works trouble the binary separation of nature from culture in liberal-capitalist society by underscoring interrelations between social, economic and environmental degradation, the pair's screwball survivalism importantly does not tell us *how* to feel about these fraying conditions, far less how to channel that response. This 'no "final word" highlights the lack of guarantee that is conducive with Gournelos and

[669] O'Brien, 'On Death and Donuts: Irony and Ecology after September 11', p. 160.
[670] Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, p. 123.
[671] This is part of Benjamin's wider argument that progress is rooted in the concept of catastrophe. See Walter Benjamin, 'Central Park', trans. by Lloyd Spencer, *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985), 32–58 (p. 50).
[672] 'The experience of our generation: that capitalism will not die a natural death'. [Xlla,3], Walter Benjamin, *The Archives Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 667.

Greene's assessment that post-9/11 satire 'open[s] more questions than it closes' […] point[ing] out more areas of incongruity than areas of clarity or consensus'.[673] Yet, while the tactical evasion of ethical responsibility is a potential outcome of these feelings, I suggest that in throwing incongruities into relief we are as viewers better placed to identify and address them. This point is key to my argument, that in the exploration of ordinary sentiments such as uncertainty or a lack of specialist knowledge, Dodge and Kahn's survival works produce felt and embodied responses to the realisation that 'we cannot go back […] so how do we live now?'[674] Both videos use improvisational practices to move through stuck or blocked conditions. Dodge and Kahn's screwball aesthetic, as do other incongruous strategies across the thesis, engage with the social values at the heart of the pursuit for survival, doing so in ways that have been ignored by a more acceptable 'eco' art history. In connecting queer and anti-racist cultural theories of affect with ecocritical art history, I have explored the role of dramatised incongruity *under* situations of resource depletion and extraction, rather than topically *about* these issues.

Dodge and Kahn's work engages with emergent ironies in the pursuit of survival, with the characters in *All Together Now* reaching a level of peace with their situation rather than positions like Purdy's that are dismissive of the constructive possibilities of situational ironies. We see this in how the survivalists take over sequestered spaces not as a retreat from the world, but to stage acts of dissidence from the capitalist order that are then virtually telegraphed from these spaces. These moments of agency punctuate the social and ideological conservatism of the hotel room and the nuclear bunker from which these protagonists have been socially jettisoned. Rather than the proprietary angling of survival in which 'money and race buy survival', Dodge and Kahn cast preparedness as a radical opportunity for togetherness.[675] Not only does this reveal the absurdity of a politically fuelled prepper's market, it suggests another way of imagining a future, revealing an ecocritical engagement capable of recognising its own delusions.

[673] Gournelos and Greene, *A Decade of Dark Humor*, p. xxxiii.
[674] Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, p. 73.
[675] Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, p. 413.

Conclusion: Toothless Commentary

> What has so exhausted the world for us? For one, we are all exquisitely self-aware. Around us, commercials mock the very idea of commercials, situation comedies make being a sitcom their running joke, and image consultants detail the techniques of designing and marketing a personality as a product. […] We reluctant ironists realize that our pleasure in these places has been anticipated by a thousand L.L. Bean catalogues, Ansel Adams calendars, and advertisements promising a portion of the rugged or bucolic life. So we sense an unreal quality in our words and even in our thoughts. They are superficial, they belong to other people and other purposes; they are not ours, and it may be that nothing is properly ours. It is this awareness, and the wish not to rest the weight of our hopes on someone else's stage set, that the ironic attitude expresses.[676]

Writing at the turn of the millennium – nearly three decades after Ansel Adams first encouraged audiences to 'Drive a Datsun, Plant a Tree' – Purdy consigns the photographer's work to the bargain bin, his oeuvre reduced to a consumer product that drains our appreciation of his subjects even as it reifies our desire to experience them. Adams may be reduced to farce in Purdy's diagnostic of 'ironic time', but I close by asking whether the photographer's commercial veneration is really the political death knoll Purdy suggests it is. Does the ironic imagination render its objects any less 'real' or 'ours' than an earnest belief in hope, as the epigraph suggests? Are 'running jokes' beyond the substance of political merit or a way of narrating life's absurdities?

The thesis has argued that art explorative of environmental engagements and *dis*engagements is highly suited to identifying tensions around ethical practices and behaviours. I have sought out significant instances of works that appraise an environmental position of care and consideration without their authors promoting them as model or transformative behaviours. Such aping of the visionary has been reincarnated across the periodisation of the thesis, from comments sparked by the first Earth Day in April 1970 like Robert Rauschenberg's that 'once the individual has changed, the world can change', Olafur Eliasson's contention that '[a]rt is the key, and science, the tool for ensuring humanity a wondrous future here on earth' and the 'martyr culture' admitted among Greenpeace's ranks.[677] While commentators generously endow art with

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[676] Purdy, *For Common Things*, pp. xii–xiii.

[677] Robert Rauschenberg, qtd. in Robert S. Mattison, *Last Turn, Your Turn: Robert Rauschenberg and the Environmental Crisis* (New York: Jacobson Howard Gallery, 2008), p. 4; note that Rauschenberg designed the first Earth Day poster in 1970 to raise funds for the American Environment Foundation in Washington, DC; Eliasson and Rosing, 'Ice, Art and Being Human', n.p.; in reference to Greenpeace, see Alex Smith, 'As climate worsens, environmentalists also grapple with the mental toll of activism', *NPR*, 13 November

'instrumental' capacities for 'revisioning *ourselves* and *our ways of living'*, responding to environmental crisis is not always straightforward or continuous, as terms recognised beyond art history such as activist burnout and eco-anxiety attest.[678] When these positions are the prevailing note the onus on individual merit and creative innovation is unrelenting: we are either acting with intention or contributing to the problem, rather than discerning how to sustain and evolve ethical practices through rising disaffection.

This is more than a missed opportunity for the discipline: I insist that art history is an important place from which to identify and dramatise these incongruous positions and feelings as shared cultural sensoria, not only as a means of reinvigorating humanities scholarship around art in times of ecological crisis but for fostering new collective practices that are more accepting about the provisional mobility of individual responsibility in a world where government and corporate leaders seek to capitalise on the 'code red for humanity'.[679] In this, I have argued that moral incumbrances must be challenged to allow maligned or 'inappropriate' forms to cut through. Eighteen years after Rosenblatt's admonishment that irony mocked 'the preciousness of ordinary living' and following a fresh avowal of satire's 'death' in 2019,[680] we might be more tempted to consider the political possibilities of layered aesthetic forms: whether by reclaiming the disavowed realm of pleasure as a framework for queer, anti-imperialist solidarity in chapter one; exploring the range of humourless slapstick for exposing egomania in chapter two; or demonstrating the properties of irony for advancing an ecocritical perspective during its 'official banishment' in chapter three.[681]

Political work is rarely impervious to uncertainty, despair and other vexed feelings, it can leave us feeling blocked or impotent – a concession, rather than blanket embarrassment or shame I've explored at length in each chapter. It has been the prerogative of writing the thesis within a rapidly evolving period of scientific

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2021: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/11/13/1053567654/as-climate-worsens-environmentalists-also-grapple-with-the-mental-toll-of-activi?t=1641220164447> [accessed 3 January 2022].

[678] Brooker, 'The Heart of Matter', p.8 [emphasis added]; on these affects see, for instance, Matthew Taylor and Jessica Murray, '"Overwhelming and terrifying": the rise of climate anxiety', *Guardian*, 10 February 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health> [accessed 2 January 2022].

[679] 'Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report "Code Red for Humanity", Stressing "Irrefutable" Evidence of Human Influence', United Nations, 9 August 2021: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm> [accessed 3 January 2022].

[680] Rosenblatt, The Age of Irony Comes To An End'; Seán Moncrieff, 'Welcome to the Death of Satire', *The Irish Times*, 19 January 2019: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/se%C3%A1n-moncrieff-welcome-to-the-death-of-satire-1.3751287> [accessed 3 January 2022].

[681] O'Brien, 'On Death and Donuts', p. 149.

understanding around the climate crisis that a form like persona has been marked as uniquely positioned in its capacity to process ecological thinking and feeling as critical enquiry *and* creative possibility. Across its theatrical and performance history personae have been used by artists and other cultural figures to juxtapose bodies and places – fictional and real, present and historical – and explore tensions between reality and desire, making it a highly suitable form for characterising the struggles of the here and now. The arguments I've made in the project will not convince everyone but there is clearly a demand for challenging forms that match the unfunny or 'toothless' sensations of struggling against the superiority of a Western economic system in order to extend collective moments – whether to foster new ideas or to simply feel less lonely in times of crisis.[682] Major film productions now consider it apropos to portray environmental collapse as an atmospheric disquiet to a Thanksgiving dinner (*The Humans*, A24, 2021) or use satire to highlight the limited influence of the scientific community against the self-serving interests of politicians, big tech and news media (*Don't Look Up*, Netflix, 2021). These representations of living with crisis, simultaneously understanding the gravity of mass extinction and the 'ordinariness' of our (selfish or well-meaning) desires and fears under intractable conditions, hyperbolise some of the tangled positions I've explored here. Their release is most welcome but also underscores the need for scholarship that identifies cultural provenances and antecedents to these projects, and in that examination renders *minoritarian* histories, subjects and possibilities in their complexity.[683]

In this project, incongruity has provided a guiding framework for exploring moments of incoherence on various levels: topically (in the case of situational irony in Dodge and Kahn's screwball survivalism), within the conceptual tapestry of the work itself (Antin's anachronistic life performance of the King) or as a mode of social camouflage (Wojnarowicz's account of cruising at rest stops). As outlined in the introduction, I used its etymological associations with *out of placeness*, *conflict* and *inappropriateness* to frame positions of dramatised exteriority in relation to a

[682] Charles Bramesco, 'Look away: why star-studded comet satire Don't Look Up is a disaster', *Guardian*, 27 December 2021: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/dec/27/look-away-why-star-studded-comet-satire-dont-look-up-is-a-disaster> [accessed 2 January 2022].

[683] Tavia Nyong'o expresses a minoritarian position as 'shift[ing] [one's] resistance to refusal as a stance toward power'. See Nyong'o, 'José Muñoz, Then and There', *The Baffler*, 10 February 2021: <https://thebaffler.com/latest/jose-munoz-then-and-there-nyongo> [accessed 2 January 2022]. *Minoritarian*, in Jose Esteban Muñoz's sense of the term, is a form of 'seize[d] social agency' enacted by those on the political outside of a *majoritarian* public sphere. See Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Politics of Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 1.

monopolised cultural experience and proprietary sense of space and relationality with others, human and nonhuman. Crucially, I demonstrated how these were enacted as embodied, self-reflexive critiques. In the first chapter on the photography of Wojnarowicz, I studied the artist's contact sheets and related writing to draw out his persona of Joe Tourist – a coded articulation developed in relation to the touristic conventions of the Southwest that enabled Wojnarowicz to both distinguish himself from, and protect himself against, homophobic society as a mode of seeing and being seen. It is through this practice of hypervigilance that Wojnarowicz reported on the spatial injustices he witnessed, engaging the incongruities of the car as an experiential space for coming together and cleaving class relations in society.

In the second chapter I shifted Wojnarowicz's self-reflexive engagements with land use to Antin's critical ambulation in San Diego triggered by the gentrification of an ocean town. The King's sparring with developers to protect the 'small-town' feel of Solana Beach approaches environmental citizenry eagerly but without traction. Using first-person pronouns to address his reader, one communique tells of a ninety-three-year-old resident named Mrs. Harris, 'a widow living on a pension that the continued devaluation of the currency reduces to nearly nothing', for whom '[e]ven the physical act of getting food has become harder now the developers have pulled down the neighborhood market to build a steak house'. The King concludes his letter in a plaintive tone, noting that, 'I'm afraid most of my people are not winners'.[684]

Interestingly, the use of persona in this work doesn't mask the artist's presence but muddies the two, animating tensions around Antin's own motivations in claiming and camping up the likeness of Charles I as jaded capriciousness. As suggested in relation to Wojnarowicz's use of persona, there is a danger to collapsing theatrical and biographical representations; here, it risks reinforcing the critical function of Antin playing Charles as a combative character who refuses to recognise the incongruities between his attachment to life and what his power actually looks like. That Charles incited civil war in England and imported imperial doctrine into the Americas elicits a demand that his audience read this spectral colonial presence through the King's motivations, capturing what E.H. Gombrich and Ernst Kris called caricature's 'perfect deformity' of sketched likeness.[685]

[684] *Battle of the Bluffs*, 31 January 1980, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans. Eleanor Antin papers 1953–2010, Series III. Projects, circa 1965–2009, box 17, folders 17–18.
[685] E.H. Gombrich and Ernst Kris, The Principles of Caricature', *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, vol. 17 (1938), 319–42, n.p.

Antin's screwy characterisation of the King as incapable of accepting his own loss of supremacy shows how untenable this mode of rule is and provides mounting evidence that capitalist solutions to resource insecurities (like Charles' financialisation of the royal forests) do not work. Antin's sending up of the King also cannot be detached from the artist's racialised and racist stereotypes of works past, and I considered at length in the first and second chapters (first through Rimbaud and then Charles I) how histories of personae are troubled artifacts. Wrangling with the past is integral to persona's characteristics and its attendant scholarship. I see no merit in simplifying or rescuing these narratives but believe we stand to learn from these objects about the boundaries and limitations of using appropriation in social critique.

Returning this tale of anti-heroism to its historical context, Antin's persona probed models of creative innovation just as the contemporary ecology movement was gathering political momentum across the United States. With the King's styled self-interests initially obscured by the reception of his 'benevolence [as a] 'political moralist', the critical depths of Antin's fantasia have been lost to decades of cultural sobriety around environmental issues.[686] Much like the humourlessness staged by Antin to demonstrate the deep denial of one's ebbing hold on the world, Dodge and Kahn's screwball aesthetic engages in the improvised status of ethical practices. Like Antin's King, the pair's survival works refuse simple routes of catharsis and enlightenment – we are rarely treated to a punchline that would release tension and some of the descriptions in *Nature Demo* are plain ridiculous. As a result, we are left with a sense that the protagonists' relationship to crisis is a lived practice of trying to keep it together without withholding spaces for humility and vulnerability. This feeds into *All Together Now*, in which social commitments to one another are effectively made 'without any reward', proposing a reinvention of reciprocal care at the end of the world independent of biological or normative familial ties; a realisation that returns us to Seymour's point about the reclaiming of irony by queer politics when queer and minoritarian subjects who have been handed foreclosed 'relationships to "the future" in heteronormative terms' are 'deeply concerned about the future in ecological terms'.[687]

In theorising Dodge and Kahn's screwball aesthetic, I considered how the work gets at the difficulty of emotional processing in times of crisis, viewing *Nature Demo* and

[686] Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, p. 61.
[687] Seymour, *Strange Natures*, p. 11; and 'Toward an Irreverent Ecocriticism', p. 63.

All Together Now as emphatic visualisations of what Sarah Ensor calls 'contribution[s]' that are 'provisional, partial, and minor'. Realisations of this kind are significant for the questions they ask about relating to what 'lie[s] beyond the reach of our control, and beyond the reach of our intent'.[688] Dodge and Kahn's work is insightful for staging scenes of suspended agency – indecision, ineffectiveness and improvisation – all of which form far less glorious yet vital facets of political striving. In examining these modes, I paid attention to moments in the work in which a lack of congruity between desire and reality opens up intuitive possibilities for plotting a way forward, framing persona as a compelling form of rendition that animates tensions between will and behaviour. I discussed how commentators have long attached an unbridled optimism to knowledge as the key to spurring change. In their openness to unexpected detours in knowledge, *Nature Demo*'s cooperative survivalists are the first to admit and learn from their gaps in understanding. The thoroughgoing irony of admiring river flora while knowing nothing of its biological processes is integral to the work's mode of address, as is being able to laugh at one's inadequacy without being totally disheartened with how those interactions have gone. Being comfortable in these admissions is crucial to climate adaption, as Szerszynski contends: 'If instead we recognise that our predicament is itself ironic, maybe we can be more clearsighted about our problem'.[689] This thesis hasn't tackled the crisis of misinformation but rather complicates the equation of knowledge with action to conceive of other forms of environmental agency in art history.

As an unfolding context, questions necessarily remain. Many of us will be asking what kind of agency can stem from the arts when climate activists from the Global South are outnumbered by fossil fuel delegates at recent international summits like COP26; yet the inventive and adaptive faculties of persona – as a vibrant mode of renarrativising the present and practicing social critique – might just be capable of outsmarting cynicism and performative green values at their own games.[690] This mode offers one significant method for devising new forms of self-awareness and accountability that emerge from places of collective enfranchisement. My motivation is to move ecocritical art history towards what Ann Cvetkovich has called 'practices of living', heeding the possibilities of scholarship that can support inertia and depression by 'both accommodating […] and

[688] Ensor, 'Queer Fallout', p. 164.
[689] Szerszynski, 'The Post-ecologist condition', pp. 352–53.
[690] Matt McGrath, 'COP26: Fossil fuel industry has largest delegation at climate summit', *BBC*, 8 November 2021: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-59199484> [accessed 3 January 2022].

alleviat[ing] it'.[691] In so doing this project claims a powerful collection of non-moralising cultural objects: *ordinary* in their relationship to lived experience and *extraordinary* in their dramatisation.

[691] Cvetkovich, *Depression*, p. 26.

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