

LET  
OUT

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The Let Out

In/Form 2021  
Calarts Aesthetics  
and Politics

Contents

4	<i>Foreword</i> Michael Leong	42	<i>Small House Parties</i> Jayne Pugh
10	<i>Change: Notes for a Film</i> Ling Tiong	44	<i>Nina</i> Jayne Pugh
18	<i>The Death of a Star: Regenerating the Old City of Nicosia</i> Irina Khenkin	46	<i>The mayor has hidden swords throughout Los Angeles</i> Jayne Pugh
26	<i>Let Out: Manufacturing Alternate-Reality Legacy</i> Maureen Phelan:	48	<i>New Horizons: Heterotopias of Quarantine</i> A.C. Smith
32	<i>fluorescent fog</i> Arlette Quỳnh- Anh Trần	60	<i>Queer and Trans Club Life as Queer World-Building</i> Courtney Loi

# FOREWORD

## Michael Leong

This issue of *In/Form* coalesces around the theme of “the let out,” which designates the (more or less) slow and (more or less) unstructured dispersal of an assembly after a scheduled event has terminated. As the egressive flow of the crowd differentiates itself into numerous distributary channels of individuals, the let out sets into motion a variety of trajectories of different accelerations and decelerations—while also inviting, for some, a liminal period of loitering. The opening of doors promises a transitional time for recapping and regrouping, for escape or encounter; it is a moment that connects *what happened* with *what happens next*. The let out presents a kind of narrative crossroads, leading to dénouement or a new node of social interaction. A movement from interior to exterior, the process of letting out—whether it pertains to a counter-public or the institutionally privileged—suggests a shift from and into a different order of visibility and surveillance. The let out can give rise to an unpredictable time of overlapping socialities.

In Jamel Brinkley’s short story “The Let-Out,” the unnamed narrator, who conceives of the let out not as post-activity but main attraction, well describes the lures of such social—and perhaps sociable—intermingling for a straight young man looking for amorous company:

*Only one thing had brought me all the way down to Brooklyn that night: the let-out. So it didn't matter to me what music was playing. The true dance was the shadow*

*dance, or the dance that follows the dance, and it was out here, where a circle of boys who dared to be daring raised their arms and voices in collective awe of girls taking pictures in various poses, their bodies vague silhouettes against the pavilion's shining glass. Out here where every blissful perspiring body was spent, which is to say less guarded, which is to say carefree, which meant a heightened chance for possibility. Out here where there was an openness to the haphazard and the serendipitous, where it seemed feasible to make contact.*<sup>1</sup>

Hovering at the outskirts of the Brooklyn Museum on a First Saturday, this college student, back home for summer vacation, winds up making haphazard “contact”—but not the type for which he was hoping. The encounter begins promisingly enough: an older woman, whom he had been admiring in the crowd, walks directly towards him to converse. Unbeknownst to him, this woman “in her forties, maybe even fifties,” named Ramona, used to be his father’s mistress though she doesn’t divulge this fact to the narrator until after they enter the museum together, first, to dance and, then, to peruse the photography exhibition.

The different cultural practices of dancing and photography spectatorship importantly mediate the characters’ interactions and pose different learning curves for the narrator, who is well-equipped for the former, unprepared for the latter. When dancing with Ramona, the narrator slips into sync with her movements just as easily as he deflects the contemptuous gazes of the predominantly white crowd:

*the eyes of other people were on us, staring with bewilderment and even anger, as though we were stealing from them, as though we were an infection or a stain,*

*threatening to spread. Their looks didn't bother me though. Wherever Ramona was going I wanted to go too.*

Even so, Ramona elects to leave the dance and return to the photography exhibition so she can get a final glimpse before her trip to New York is over. In the quieter gallery spaces of the museum, the narrator struggles with looking and with being looked upon; it is a struggle that parallels his growing unease with Ramona's relation to his family's past. After she lets on that she knows who he is—and, indeed, that she and his father were once “friends,” he says, “we paused here and there to look at some of the photographs, but they made zero impression on me.” The irony is that before he had entered the museum with Ramona, he lies to her about having seen the exhibition, which he calls—as a feint in his shadow dance—“exceptional.”

In a gallery of black-and-white street photography, the narrator winds up experiencing the exceptional after all. Ramona takes him to a picture of a man and woman captured midstride, which he finds “dull” until she points out that it's not an image of New York like most of the others in the room. For her, it's an object of nostalgia depicting “Hollywood and Vine,” where she and the narrator's father used to walk together as lovers.<sup>2</sup> For the narrator, the photograph appears as some indeterminate clue to a mystery of which he is, as yet, unaware. He says,

*I looked again. There on the sidewalk, underneath shadows cast by the couple's legs, and washed out by the brightness of the sun, were a few stars from the Hollywood Walk of Fame. I had missed the stars before, and the shadows and the sunlight too. The photograph seemed full of details now, buzzing with them.*

What the narrator initially misses—the effervescent details preserved within what Walter Benjamin might call the photograph's “optical unconscious”—allegorically stand in for the haunting void that troubled his early childhood. When Ramona informs him that she and his father had run away together to Los Angeles, the narrator forcefully apprehends the traumatic time that was marked by the “boiling sensation” of his father's absence.

The cleverness of Brinkley's narrative conceit is that there are two let outs: the first, when Ramona leaves the museum to eventually meet the narrator, and the second, when they exit together:

*We parted without either of us saying another word. I didn't move. Someone who knew me was out there waiting, I imagined, someone I knew would find me among all the shadows drifting along the plaza. So I just waited, I stood in place. The voice of a woman behind me, emerging from the dimming lights of the museum, said excuse me, and someone else demanded I get out of the way so people could go home. But I didn't want to go home.*

To borrow from the narrator's original parlance, the true let out of the story is the “shadow” let out—after the haphazard has utterly transformed him.

There are many ways to read Brinkley's richly layered narrative of *Bildung*—through the lenses of masculinity or memory, for example—but I like to think of “The Let-Out” as an oblique ode to the Brooklyn Museum and its First Saturdays. In “I Recommend Dancing: Brooklyn Museum's History of Inclusion and Moment of Transition,” Roger Schonfeld and Liam Sweeney observe that “one criticism of the Target First Saturdays is that the large crowds are drawn to dance,

not to engage with the art.”<sup>3</sup> Such an overly binary critique fails to account for all the potential combinations of social and cultural engagement that First Saturdays events can accommodate. In Brinkley’s story, Ramona is drawn to the art though winds up engaging with the dance while the narrator, drawn to the “shadow dance,” winds up engaging with both the dance and the art. If the Brooklyn Museum describes First Saturdays as “monthly evenings of free programming welcoming visitors from central Brooklyn and beyond,” then Brinkley shows how the letting out of such evening events might connect—however improbably, however uncomfortably—one beyond with another.<sup>4</sup>

When editor Jayne Pugh contacted me about this 2021 issue of *In/Form*, she wrote, “Our theme for the issue, ‘The Let Out,’ was originally inspired by the opening of the doors that signals the end of a night out—an occurrence that is hard to remember at this point in the pandemic [...] Broadly, we are interested in nostalgia, release, confinement, togetherness, and solitude.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, well over a year into the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic, many of us, the ones who still remain, still remain sheltered in place, which is to say largely isolated from the embodied co-presences of strangers in concrete space. As the institutions that convene various publics around such social activities as museum going or clubbing are running at a diminished capacity, if at all, many of us are eager to be let out from our quarantine-like conditions. However that may be the case, we would all do well to remember Arundhati Roy’s observation that the pandemic is “a gateway between one world and the next”:

*We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks*

*and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.*<sup>6</sup>

The contributions to this issue, each in their own way, take up the crucial activity of imagining worlds; whether oriented towards urban space or outer space, they draw on the resources of diverse genres—from poetry to essay to film scenario to digital image. Roughly coinciding with the letting out of the 2020-2021 academic year at CalArts, this issue offers—before we all go our own ways for the summer—the possibility of discursive contact at the threshold.

1. Brinkley, Jamel. “The Let-Out.” *A Public Space* 29 (2019). Accessed April 29, 2021. <https://apublicspace.org/magazine/detail/the-let-out>.

2. One imagines that the photograph is a fictive adaptation of Garry Winogrand’s *Hollywood and Vine, Los Angeles* (1969). “*Hollywood and Vine, Los Angeles*.” Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/47323/garry-winogrand-hollywood-and-vine-los-angeles-american-1969/>.

3. Schonfeld, Roger and Liam Sweeney.

“I Recommend Dancing: Brooklyn Museum’s History of Inclusion and Moment of Transition.” *Ithaka S+R*. Last Modified January 23, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.306189>.

4. “First Saturdays.” Accessed May 1, 2021. [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/visit/first\\_saturdays](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/visit/first_saturdays).

5. Email message to author, February 16, 2021.

6. Roy, Arundhati. “The Pandemic Is a Portal.” *Financial Times*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.

# Chang'e: Notes for a Film

## Ling Tiong

### PART 1

1. 095:17:28 Evans: Roger. Among the large headlines concerning Apollo this morning, is one asking that you watch for a lovely girl with a big rabbit. An ancient legend says a beautiful Chinese girl called Chang-O has been living there for 4,000 years. It seems she was banished to the Moon because she stole the pill of immortality from her husband. You might also look for her companion, a large Chinese rabbit, who is easy to spot since he is always standing on his hind feet in the shade of a cinnamon tree. The name of the rabbit is not reported.<sup>1</sup>
2. VO (woman's voice): Are Chinese rabbits different from American rabbits?
3. 095:18:15 Collins: Okay. We'll keep a close eye out for the bunny girl.<sup>2</sup>
4. It was around 2170 BCE. Ten suns rose together in the sky, and the earth was scorching hot. The oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers boiled over. Animals, fish, and crops died. In order to save humanity, the archer Hou Yi shot down nine of the suns, leaving one in the sky. As a reward, the Queen Mother of the West gave Hou Yi an elixir of immortality. Hou Yi gave it to his wife Chang'e for safekeeping. One day, when Hou Yi was out hunting, his apprentice broke in and tried to steal the precious elixir for himself. In order to prevent him, Chang'e drank it. Her body lightened, and she floated toward the heavens. Although she could have flown farther, she chose to land on the Moon in order to stay close to Earth. When Hou Yi discovered what had

happened, he set up an altar with fruit and cakes, and offered them as sacrifices to her in honor of her faithfulness.<sup>3</sup>

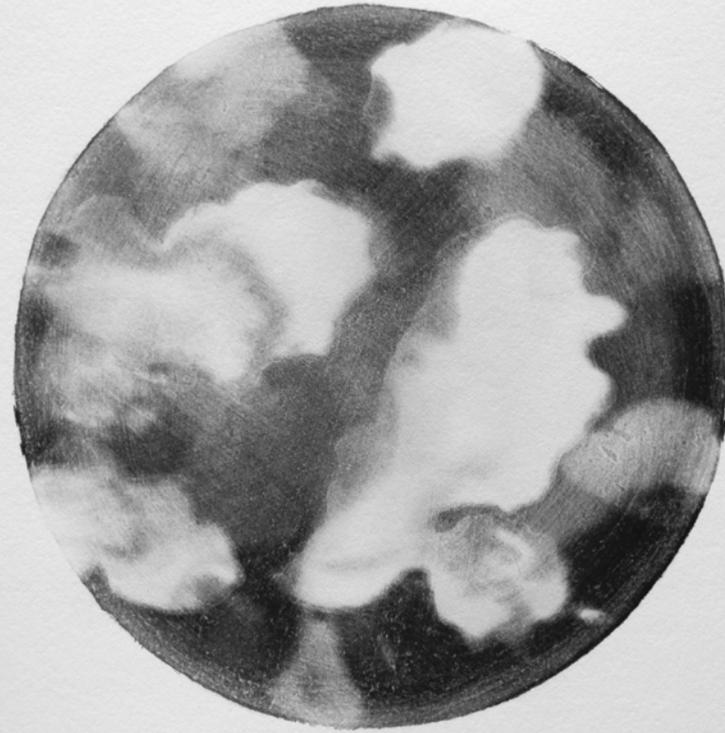
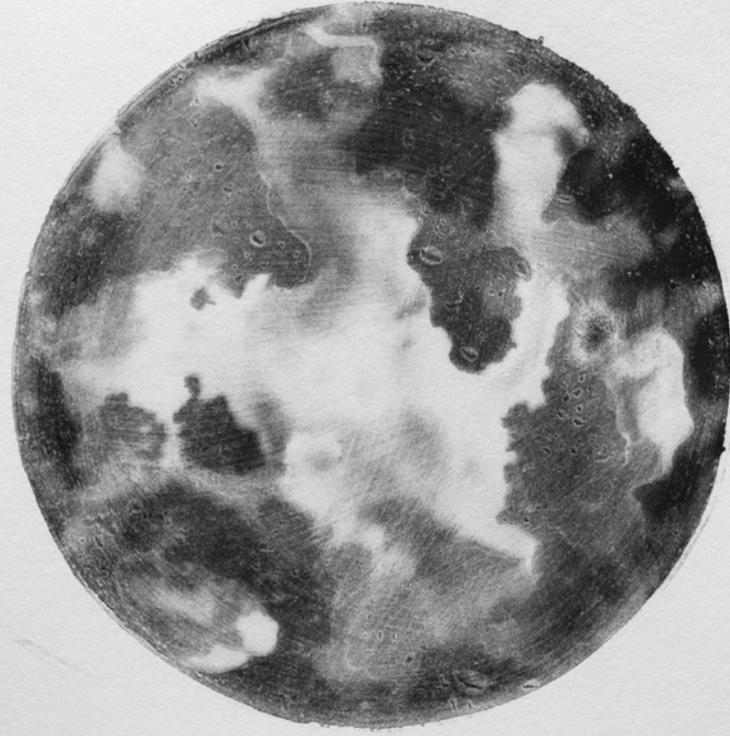
5. Ziyou said, "In mourning one does not go beyond the full expression of one's grief."<sup>4</sup>
6. VO (woman's voice): Sigh. I *hate* cake.
7. There is another version of the tale. After Hou Yi shot down the nine suns, the people made him their king. But he became a cruel tyrant. Hou Yi had been given the elixir of immortality, but his wife Chang'e saw how the people suffered and she pitied them. While he was out, she drank the elixir herself and floated away. When Hou Yi saw her in the sky, he tried to shoot her down but failed. He was too angry.<sup>5</sup>

## PART 2

1. Chang-O is also spelled Ch'ang O and, in the more modern rendition, Chang'e. Chang'e was adopted as the name of the Chinese unmanned lunar exploration programme, the first spacecraft of which was launched in 2007. The third in the series, Chang'e 3, was the first to land on 14 December 2013 in Mare Imbrium.<sup>6</sup>
2. In East Asian folklore, the moon rabbit is a figure that resides on the Moon. It is based on pareidolia readings which interpret the dark markings on the Moon as forming the shape of a rabbit. The moon rabbit is busy pounding the elixir of immortality

with a magical mortar and pestle. When it gets tired, it rests in the shade of a cassia tree.<sup>7</sup>

3. The name Yutu was given as the name of the first Chinese lunar rover, delivered to the surface by Chang'e 3. Yutu translates to "Jade Rabbit."<sup>8</sup>
4. Once, the Jade Emperor turned himself into a poor, starving old man and begged for food from Monkey, Fox, and Rabbit. Monkey picked fruit from the trees, and Fox gathered fish from the river. Rabbit, though, could only gather grass. Knowing that humans cannot eat grass, Rabbit decided to offer itself as food, and leapt into the fire that the old man had built. Miraculously, Rabbit didn't burn, and the old man suddenly transformed into the Jade Emperor. Moved by Rabbit's sacrifice, he sent it to the Moon to become the immortal Jade Rabbit.<sup>9</sup>
5. There was a time when the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl transformed himself into a man to explore the Earth. He started on a journey, and after a long time, he became tired and hungry. A small rabbit grazing nearby came close and offered him some grass. The god explained that he did not eat grass. The rabbit then offered itself as food. Quetzalcoatl was so touched by the rabbit's offering that he raised it up to the Moon and imprinted its silhouette upon its surface. He then lowered the rabbit back down to Earth.<sup>10</sup>



Evelyn Hang Yin. *Between the Farthest Ocean and the Deepest Clouds*, 2021. Cyanotype.

PART 3

1. The lunar maria are large basaltic plains on the Moon formed by ancient volcanic eruptions. These lunar “seas” appear dark because of their iron and titanium-rich mineral composition.
2. Some of these maria are:  
 Mare Crisium (“Sea of Crises”)  
 Mare Fecunditatis (“Sea of Fertility”)  
 Mare Imbrium (“Sea of Rains”)  
 Mare Nectaris (“Sea of Nectar”)  
 Mare Nubium (“Sea of Clouds”)  
 Mare Serenitatis (“Sea of Serenity”)  
 Mare Tranquillitatis (“Sea of Tranquility”)  
 Mare Vaporum (“Sea of Vapors”)  
 Oceanus Procellarum (“Ocean of Storms”)
3. Since ancient times, the lunar landscape occupies a special place in the Chinese imagination and takes on a distinct character. A nebulous sphere at once watery and crystalline, it is not the barren and dusty planetoid our modern imagination now takes it to be.<sup>11</sup>
4. 103:12:44 Armstrong: I’d say the color of the local surface is very comparable to that we observed from orbit at this Sun angle ... It’s pretty much without color. It’s gray; and it’s a very white, chalky gray, as you look into the zero-phase line. And it’s considerably darker gray, more like ashen gray as you look out 90 degrees to the Sun. Some of the surface rocks in close here [to the spacecraft] that have been fractured or disturbed by the rocket engine plume are coated with this light gray on

the outside; but where they’ve been broken, they display a very dark gray interior; and it looks like it could be country basalt.<sup>12</sup>

5. A solitary woman swims slowly through an underwater landscape filled with gem-like flowers and dark water weeds.
6. VO (woman’s voice): I no longer remember my old life.

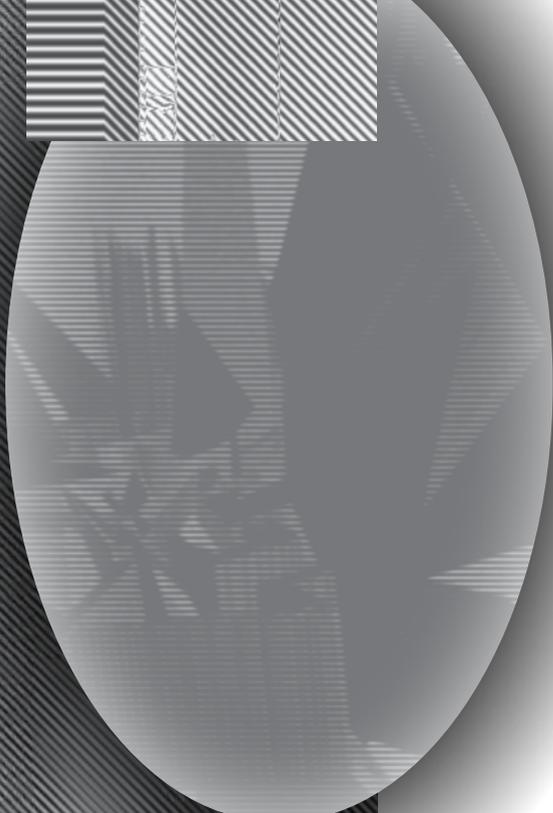
Special thanks to Mona Heinze, Bérénice Reynaud, and Evelyn Hang Yin.

<p>1. David Woods, Ken MacTaggart and Frank O'Brien. "Day 5, Part 1: Preparations for Landing." Apollo 11 Flight Journal. <a href="https://history.nasa.gov/afj/ap11fj/14day5-landing-prep.html">https://history.nasa.gov/afj/ap11fj/14day5-landing-prep.html</a>. Accessed April 20, 2021.</p> <p>2. Ibid.</p> <p>3. Lihui Yang and Deming An. <i>Handbook of Chinese Mythology</i>. Handbooks of World Mythology. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011. <a href="http://www.credoreference.com/book/abcwmyc">http://www.credoreference.com/book/abcwmyc</a>. 86-90.</p> <p>4. Confucius. <i>The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation</i>. Trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. New York: Ballantine Books, 1999. 221.</p> <p>5. <i>Handbook of Chinese Mythology</i>, 86-90.</p> <p>6. "Day 5, Part 1: Preparations for Landing."</p> <p>7. <i>Handbook of Chinese Mythology</i>, 88-89.</p>	<p>8. "Day 5, Part 1: Preparations for Landing."</p> <p>9. "The Jade Rabbit and the Moon." <i>Myths and Legends</i>. <a href="https://mythsandlegend.com/jade-rabbit-and-the-moon/">https://mythsandlegend.com/jade-rabbit-and-the-moon/</a>. Accessed April 20, 2021.</p> <p>10. "La Leyenda de la Luna - The Legend of the Moon." <i>USC Digital Folklore Archives</i>. <a href="http://folklore.usc.edu/la-leyenda-de-la-luna-the-legend-of-the-moon/">http://folklore.usc.edu/la-leyenda-de-la-luna-the-legend-of-the-moon/</a>. Accessed April 20, 2021.</p> <p>11. Eugene Y. Wang. "Mirror, Moon, and Memory in Eighth-Century China: From Dragon Pond to Lunar Palace." <i>Cleveland Studies in the History of Art</i> 9 (2005): 42-67. <a href="http://www.jstor.org/stable/20079752">http://www.jstor.org/stable/20079752</a>. Accessed April 20, 2021.</p> <p>12. David Woods, Ken MacTaggart and Frank O'Brien. "Post-Landing Activities." <i>Apollo 11 Lunar Surface Journal</i>. <a href="https://www.hq.nasa.gov/alsj/all/all.postland.html">https://www.hq.nasa.gov/alsj/all/all.postland.html</a>. Accessed April 20, 2021.</p>
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# The Death of a Star:

*Regenerating the  
Old City of Nicosia*

Irini Khenkin



The old city of Nicosia is enclosed inside a Medieval circular fortress with eleven pentagonal bastions; an asteroid city. Designed by Italian engineer Giulio Savorgnano, the fortress constitutes a prominent example of Venetian fortification architecture that has become the emblem of Nicosia. Sitting neatly at the exact center of the city, it contains historic neighbourhoods tangled together by winding alleyways that paint a laconic picture of the city, an abridged version of centuries-worth of change. Outside the walls lurks a burgeoning modern European city with cosmopolitan aspirations, slowly piercing through the fortress and altering the asteroid city in the process.<sup>1</sup>

The restructuring of the old city suggests a reconfiguration of social, political, and economic life. Politically, it provides the mise-en-scène of the 1974 invasion and its aftermath.<sup>2</sup> Acting as a landmark of division, the old city stands as one of the visible reminders of the South-North separation of the island while accommodating some of the crossing points currently in use. The Venetian walls were the first border of Nicosia, a fortifying one aimed to protect. The second border is the Green Line that decisively cuts through the city and reflects profoundly intense political tension. Military check-points, abandoned houses, sandbags, and barbed wire cut through the circular embrace of the walls. <sup>Fig. 1</sup>

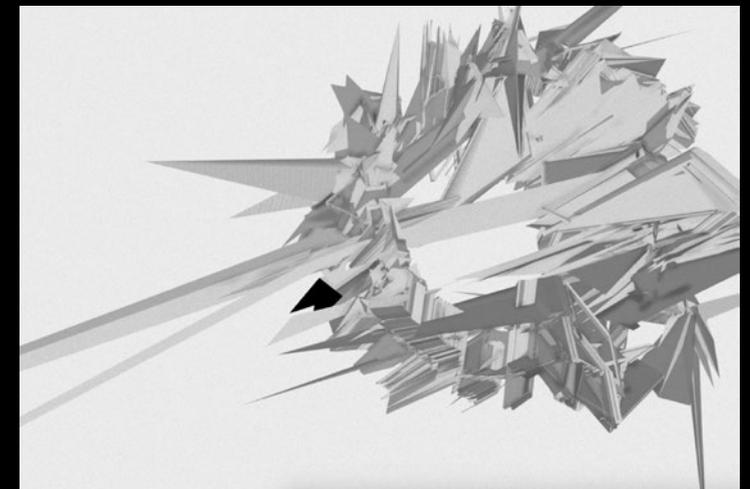
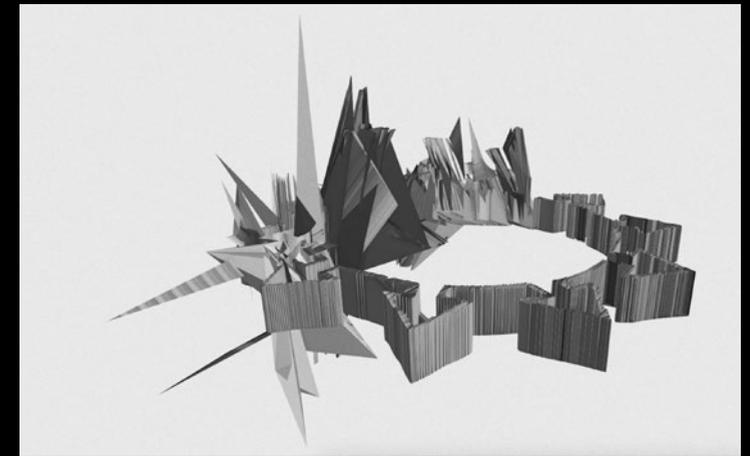
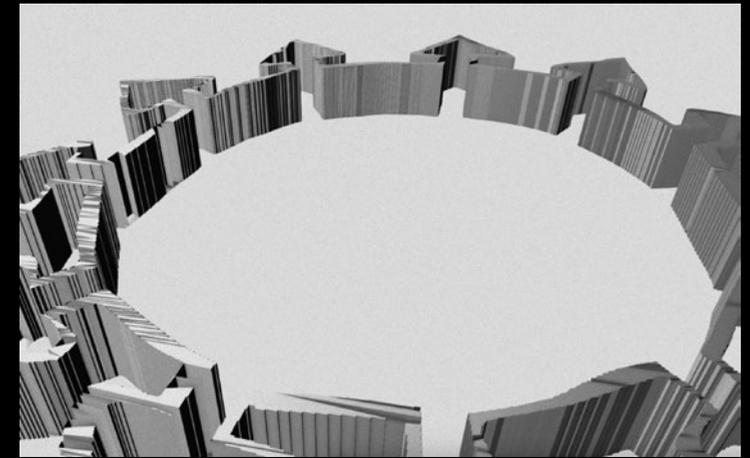
In terms of social life within the old city, we have to consider how its relative spatiality is situated within the walls and against the Green Line. The old city is caught in the middle of separation and contact, between hyper-monitored militarised spaces and amidst abandoned domestic spaces. This intricate borderscape renders the old city into a liminal space, a transitory space between thresholds that fosters a

sense of in-betweenness, of non-absolutes. This liminality appeals to a new broader cultural scene that fosters opportunities for alternative political traditions and communities that have grown over time.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of this new cultural scene and its instrumentalization of public space in the old city is directly related to growing interests in the area by foreign investors and developers. Economically, the city centre has historically been a highly valued centre for commerce, tourism and small-scale industrial production. The cultural capital of the old city along with its underused and mostly dilapidated nature, gave way for big redevelopment projects, both private and state-funded, that now contribute to the area's quickly increasing real estate value.

A survey of households in the old city carried out in 2004 for the UN Operation for Project Services (UNOPS), found that around 50% of the population within the walls is not Greek Cypriot. Cyprus is a common destination for migrants and asylum seekers from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus.<sup>4</sup> The precarious economic and political conditions of the old city produced an abundance of low-income housing options which are commonly in poor condition and often operating under unregulated circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the old city is one of the only spaces in Nicosia where migrants are visible. Unlike the rest of Nicosia that lies outside the Venetian walls, the old city acts as a center for immigrant congregation, allowing migrants to foster new ethnic and religious communities, build businesses, and establish their families as an undeniable and integral part of the Cypriot socio-economic landscape. *Fig. 2*

The asteroid city has and will continue to foster



Top to bottom: Savognano Vector, Irimi Khenkin, 2021. Slow Build, Irimi Khenkin, 2021. Supernova, Irimi Khenkin, 2021.

*Figs. 1-3*

currents of political opposition, creative expression, and cultural expansion. One of the more palpable obstacles on the horizon is none other than the urban redevelopment of the old city. The Nicosia Master Plan is a bi-communal project drawn up in 1979 under the auspices and the financial backing of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The plan aims to manage the challenges that arise from the capital being divided geographically between two separate government jurisdictions. The third and current phase of the plan, introduced in 1986, focuses on revitalizing and upgrading the city's historic center.<sup>8</sup>

On a general basis, the restructuring of a city or a portion of it tends to point towards a reconfiguration of social, economic, and political life. By going through the procedure of deconstruction and redevelopment, the old city is predestined to develop conventionally as a way to adapt to the structural changes to come.<sup>7</sup> In connection to contemporary ambitions of modern, European, or global cities, the processes of erasure, division, and expansion that are at play ought to be considered. Old and familiar spaces disappear and are then replaced with new, undifferentiated and homogenous ones. For the sake of modernization, the city becomes a different landscape altogether that can no longer sustain what it had once protected.<sup>8</sup>

The southern portion of the walled city is strongly informed by capitalist objectives. This process is embedded within a broader context; the need for international political recognition and external financial investment. Gentrification efforts began with the slow extinction of local businesses in favor of internationally well-known retailers. Meanwhile, spaces for public gatherings, a fundamental element of social relations

in the old city, drastically decreased. The benches, squares, and open courtyards that previously acted as an alternative social space for many, were either closed off to the public or taken over by businesses. Benches were removed, church courtyards were locked up, squares were shrinking. This left many on the search for alternative locations to let out, that is to experience social life without acquiescence.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most publicized development projects was the reconstruction of Eleftheria (Liberty) square, the main access point into the old city. The project was undertaken by Zaha Hadid's architectural firm, first breaking ground in 2005. The square has been criticized heavily for its aesthetics as well as its functionality. One of the most worrying criticisms comes from the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of the Disabled (KYSOA) stating that the needs of disabled individuals were not taken into account in the design process.<sup>10</sup> A partial opening of the square brought in a considerable amount of private security and police presence surveilling the square and its surrounding areas. The increase in policing disproportionately affected migrant workers that comprise the majority of the population in the old city. The new square displays "an aspiration to reconnect the ancient city's massive fortified Venetian walls and moat with the modern city beyond". In early 2021, the project is yet to be completed.<sup>11</sup> Fig. 3

Presently, multiple sections of the Venetian walls have collapsed, something that in all probability will continue to happen in both South and North Nicosia. The collapse of the walls acts as both a reminder of the physical deterioration of the walls attributed to lack in communication between governments in regards to

restoration and preservation of cultural heritage, and also point towards a future of a different Nicosia that is no longer embraced by the same walls. The ameliorative change that is promised by state actors, by developers and by foreign investors does not seem to be the change that the walls are calling out for. The walls holding the city are letting out from beneath and beckoning for different types of recognition and action by those who care for it, those that inhabit it and those who roam its streets.

The death of a star occurs when its core runs out of hydrogen fuel causing it to contract under the weight of its own gravity. This process, that takes billions of years to complete, culminates when the outer layers of a star fall inward, crushing its core, which then explodes. Much like a star, the walls of the old city of Nicosia are already starting to contract under their own weight, leaving its core, the city, ready to collapse.

1. *Nicosia Today*, Nicosia Municipality, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.nicosia.org.cy/en-GB/municipality/history/nicosia/now/>

2. The Turkish invasion of 1974 resulted in the territorial occupation of 36% of Cyprus, mainly in the North of the island. Nicosia is separated in half between North and South making it the last divided capital.

3. Eirini Iliopoulou & Pafsaniyas Karathanasis, *Towards a radical politics: Grassroots urban activism in the walled city of Nicosia*, p.73.

4. Olga Demetriou, *Migrant Cities Research: Nicosia South*, British Council, 2008, p.6.

5. Most domestic spaces in the old city are early to mid 20th century builds. Modern builds are rare and often not available for rent to migrants due to housing discrimination.

6. UNCHS, *Nicosia Master Plan: A Landmark for Future Cyprus*, 1988.

7. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Verso, 2010, p.159.

8. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*, Pelican, 2015, p.194.

9. Bethania Soriano & Sharon Ayalon. *Developmental disparities and regeneration processes in divided Nicosia*. 2017.

10. Antigoni Pitta, "Nicosia centre revamp 'didn't take account needs of the blind',

reparations promised," *Cyprus Mail*, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/01/19/nicosia-centre-revamp-failed-to-take-into-account-needs-of-the-blind/>

11. *Eleftheria Square*, Zaha Hadid Architects, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.zaha-hadid.com/masterplans/eleftheria-square/>

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# LET OUT:

MANUFACTURING  
Alternate-  
Reality  
LEGACY

Maureen  
Phelan

I don't really think people are Basic just for fun. Rather, I believe there must be some reason. What's considered Cool doesn't emerge from a vacuum, and neither does Basic. "Basic" is just what we call a specific sort of aesthetic failure—it's criticism for choices that are boring, lacking in any taste or spice—that relies on an outlook where some of us make interesting, curative choices while others are simply unable. To me, this explanation isn't satisfying. I also feel that what becomes popular in this specifically 'safe' way can illuminate an existing undercurrent of collective goals and desires.

I want to know about those desires as revealed through Basic baby names. Whether a child's given name *can* be Basic isn't really up for debate. We know that this is a thing. The most frequently used shorthand used to make fun of this kind of name is "Mackynleigh," as in, "You can just tell her kid is named Mackynleigh." Unlike other names-as-memes such as Karen, Kyle, or Becky, Mackynleigh is not the target of criticism. To invoke "Mackynleigh" is to attack the parent. It means "you are Basic, clueless, and you seem like you would pick a dumb name."

McKinli Hatch became a well-known meme after sharing her new daughter's name and the list of contenders: Taylee, McKarty, Nayvie, Maylee, and finally Lakynn. Later she did the same for her son: Taysom, Ollie, Grayson, Asher, before landing on Tatum.

Every time I hear the name of a child, baby, or toddler online I write it down. When grouped together, these names share a very similar sound. First, the boys: the names given to boys sound like surnames, with varying degrees of "proper" to surreal. The sample

pool were not *exclusively* white, upper-middle-class parents, though that is the general demographic that pursues these conventions. Without getting too in-the-weeds about it, I'm comfortable assuming that there's an aspirational angle to the name-selection process most parents go through for their children. If something becomes so commonplace that it has become Basic, what is it *precisely* that was so appealing in the first place?

The lists are shared in entirety. Each list has its outliers re: the assertions I'm making, but I feel that a holistic portrait of *~vibery~* shines through.

#### NAMES FOR SONS

LONDON	JAXTON	THATCHER	GRANGER
BRANNIGAN	COOPER	GRYFFIN	BECKETT
FRANKLIN	OWEN	TRAPPER	BECKHAM
LIAM	OLLIE	SHERLOCK	JAMESON
MIL0	TRUETT	HUXLEY	GRAYSON
BRAXTON	WRENLAND	CREW	JACKSON
PAXTON	HALEN	COVE	MASON
MAXTON	CHASE	JETT	HARRISON
NIXON	BRODY	RYDER	BRYSON

#### the Fantasy

*Why* do so many parents concoct something that sounds vaguely like an Anglo-Saxon surname? The *Let Out* is the fantasy. Bequeathing the modernized White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant surname suggests an alternate reality within which familial legacy already exists. If the parent cannot pass down land, the parent can pretend.

Cooper can hunt and fish. Jameson has a front porch. Landon has an elite education. Granger doesn't care for Fortnite.

To be moneyed-enough and *suburban* would be an aesthetic failure. How does one make special *their* son? I'd also go as far as to say: these are white Americans who feel that the suburban condition is too neutral and lacking in "culture." The surname-vibe echoes those of America's English colonizers, but in a way that's closer to a game of Telephone than a perfect facsimile. Okay. Maybe there's a desire to manufacture a sense of heritage: re-writing colonial life and claiming the right to take space.

#### the Platform

The aesthetic indicators of land-owning and legacy became an object of romance operating below the surface of Basic desires. Of the social media platforms, maybe Pinterest makes the most room for Basic and what Basic does.

In 2019, Ilfeoma Ozoma quit her job at Pinterest. Ozoma was responsible for measures that led Pinterest and The Knot to cease promotion on plantations as "charming," "elegant," "classic," "romantic," and "timeless" wedding venues. In her performance review following the new guidelines, she was criticized for her language used in the written policy and for not sufficiently vetting the "pros and cons" for plantation weddings.

I'm not particularly shocked that plantations remain in use as event venues, but I was surprised to hear that Pinterest resisted the change. Whatever it is

that the photos from Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds' wedding at Boone Hall Plantation evokes must have been, in some way or another, significant.

### NAMES FOR DAUGHTERS

EVERLY/	WILLOW	ADLEY MARIE	KINSLIE
EVERLEIGH	WILLA	ADDISON	HENLEY
SOPHIE	BRINLEE	AISLEY	ASPEN
ARYA	OLIVIA	MARLEIGH	LARKIN
PIPER	PEYTON	KNOXLEY	
AVA	BROOKLYNNE	PAISLEY	
EVA	ADDYLYN	TINSLEY	

### the Brand

By contrast, the names given to daughters generally lack the same 'legacy' vibe as the boys' list. What *seems* to be happening, instead, is that parents of girls choose names that are eternally cute. Maybe it's branding, too, but it's functionally different. Where the boy branding is designed for a fantasy world where the son has land, power, and wealth, the girl branding is for our world, where power may be an influencer.

Chip and Joanna Gaines named their sons Drake, Duke, and Crew; their daughters are Emmie Kay and Ella Rose.

Brinlee is three years old wearing a ruffled-denim number and a matching bow. Knoxley is also three years old, with white-blond curls and a headstrong attitude. Tinsley is very sweet and will always be sweet. Brooklynne might be nineteen and loves a wide-brim hat.

### the Let Out

The Let Out lives within the American convention of bestowing names that attempt to re-write American culture, manufacturing romance onto perceived neutrality.

The daughter remains a member of the family attached to the parents; rather than branding for a fantasy alternate-reality legacy, the daughter's brand adds to that of an existing family unit. The child is accessory to the parent-as-storyteller grounded in this world. The son represents an autofiction: manufacturing historic romance in order to generate a possible alternate reality.

Sometimes, I think the way that we discuss history suggests that we believe that events will circle around again, so that we can witness them and delight in what we got right or didn't. This gesture of naming that can only function when in conversation with the potentiality of re-living history reveals common inclinations; the fantasies borne of our current social and economic conditions manifest as a desire for land ownership, financial stability, and clarity regarding the consideration of one's own American whiteness.

The Let Out is the result of the action, the release of steam that comes with writing Jaxton on a birth certificate. Ultimately, this precise exercise of millennial-classist neo-neo-classicism illuminates subconscious solutions, consequently exposing common fears.

# fluorescent

# fog

Arlette  
Quỳnh-Anh  
Trần

EDITING AND TRANSLATION:  
Thái Hà

I am noting down some personal musings I've had over the past six months on painting, art, the zeitgeist, and philosophy to serve as the exhibition essay for Đỗ Thanh Lãng's *fluorescent fog*. Reading and thinking, and at the same time viewing Lãng's paintings, have helped me forge connections that at first seem far-fetched, but on second thought became logical, as though a predestination even before any brushstrokes sweep the canvas. Every time Lãng sends me a picture of his works or when I visit his studio, my nerve plexuses, like rhizomes, vibrate. What was once difficult to understand now gradually unfurls as I look at Lãng's paintings.

An imaginary scenario: The artist frees his body from Alberti's Frame - a geometric instrument that determines perspective. He shoots himself into the Void, where neither logic nor horizon nor light nor shadow exists. His body is floating, stretching, thrashing, bouncing, his buttocks hoisting in the air in an attempt to touch the surfaces of his surrounding environment. He utilises the sensorium to feel his flight through space-time. A fog appears as soon as he escapes that blindfold of a Frame, when he is yet to reconstruct a sense of stability. In that ambiguous space, he learns to lay out new horizons by simulating surfaces and having his subjects interact with those surfaces. They do not follow the principles of the convergence point. They follow his random rhythm. *Fig. 1*

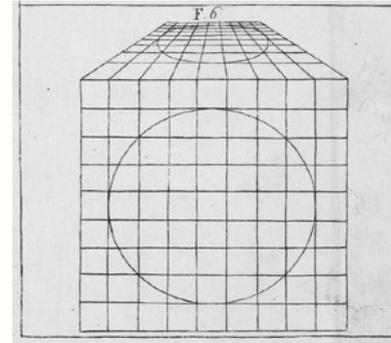
Initially, I was embarrassed and had to hide my confusion when viewing Lãng's paintings, as if I was lost. Fumbling through the artist's constructed space, I held onto a feeling of having 'misstepped'. I interrogated that feeling, and was suddenly awakened: it wasn't that I was lost inside a maze; the paths to get lost in did not even



exist. My senses could not locate the distance between me, the object, and the happenings that occurred on the picture plane. Often, non-abstract visual art will guide its viewers by creating conventions on how to perceive space: that is, through the depth and distance between objects, and between the entire composition and the eyes of the viewer. Playfully, Lãng breaks free from that guide.

In 1450, with his treatise *De Pictura* (On Painting), Leon Battista Alberti laid the foundation for an important theoretical framework on representative realism. Through the conventions of spatial geometry—the relationship between the object, the horizon and the convergence point—the Renaissance painter outlined the rules of linear perspective in order to scientifically, and thus, most authentically, represent the object. The painting's depth is an authentic visual truth, helping us perceive the order of appearance, our distance

from the objects, and the evolution of those objects. From there, we are able to grasp the nature of visual representation.



The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty has critiqued this concept of artistic idealism, in which painting becomes a tool to preserve the form of objects. At the time of writing, painting represented the façade of objects, which, through rea-

soning, one perceives and categorises to arrive at a set of seemingly immutable and self-evident definitions for those objects—a 'conceptless universality.' With a strong scientific orientation, painting directed human knowledge towards metaphysics. This is typically seen in works such as da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, which aspires to universalise the concept of what is 'human' without specifying any particular human. The ultimate goal of painting was to provide countless symbolic images for our cognitive faculties to categorise and grasp the world.

What happens if human perception is corrupt, and detaches itself from universality? If the laws of perspective deviate from the axis of convergence, are we still able to comprehend the world? Do artists only abide by convention to cater to reason? Of course, it was the project of art movements such as Post-Impressionism and Cubism to clear up these questions. Yet what excites me most is when the curtains of these seemingly unshakeable conventions are drawn, when the 'Missteps' in Lãng's paintings are no longer unfathomable. Accepting those 'Missteps' allows me to

Facing : 56 Thanh Lãng, *Untitled*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas and PVC transparent  
This page: Alberti's diagram showing the perspective transformation of a circle to an ellipse [source: archive.org].

stretch my visual amplitude, betray the dimensions, see what was previously invisible, and appreciate the multidimensional relationship between things and landscapes. On the other hand, the visuals shift not just for the viewer—who, as an outsider, is not privy to the process through which the artist experiences reality and reimagines that reality on canvas; the visual experience goes hand in hand with the eyes and, by extension, the body of the artist.

*“It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings.*

*“[...]The enigma derives from the fact that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. [...] It is a self, not by transparency [...] but a self by confusion, narcissism, inherence of the see-er in the seen, the toucher of the touched, the feeler in the felt—a self, then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future...”*

excerpts from *Eye and Mind* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Painting connects sight and touch. When we capture an image of an object belonging to the world in front of us and project its shape into our mind, it is not only the object’s form that is being mirrored into our retina. Our sight has to examine the context and atmosphere that contains it. By inspecting the object’s enveloping atmosphere, while at the same time visualising it based on the experiential reference of touch—structure, contour, material, dimension, and temperature—our eyes can touch the object. Objects exist because we can touch/see them. That is the substance of the object.

A referential scenario: The artist covers that indeterminate sphere of fog with countless layers

of fluorescent paint. These layers—part opaque, part translucent—allow light to pierce through. They coalesce. The subjects Lãng allows to emerge from his new horizons are now filled with excitement. They hug, dance, sprawl across those fluorescent layers like citizens of the New, the Modern, the Twentieth Century World. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, the entertainment industry focused on exploiting methods of illumination/projection, and the illusions that followed. Synthetic substances, colours, and artificial lights relentlessly stimulate the senses, prompting the inhabitants of the twentieth century to endlessly notice and perceive their world. Glaringly luminous, that perception blends reality and illusion. When the body reaches its limits of endurance, when the senses refuse to take in more signals, they are paralysed.<sup>4</sup> The artist instantly freezes them in their postures, “static to the extreme.” Fig. 2

This territory created by Đỗ Thanh Lãng, comprising off-kilter horizons and atmospheres dyed fluorescent, is void architecture. Void architecture lends a feeling of space but is immaterial. Material architecture exists statically, containing an atmosphere of definite form, so that touch guides sight towards the object. Lãng’s void architecture is animate, yet frozen within the confines of the painting. Though in a state of stillness, due to our bodily experience we can still imagine the rhythm and movement of the subjects, whom Lãng has placed inside his territory of void architecture. The painting lies at the threshold of movement and paralysis. What is interesting, though, is that this threshold is also not static in the domain of time. Usually, the movement of objects from the back, to middle, to foreground lets us decipher time and progress. Here, void architecture

allows the entire “paralysed” threshold of the object to slide off in any and all directions. We cannot tell if, by approaching the foreground, the objects are nearing the end of their expedition or borning back into the past. Fig. 3

A re-produced scenario: The painter slides his fingers across a smartphone touchscreen. He is hunting for floating objects in the world of data in order to replicate them in his fluourescent Void. He whispers to Facebook’s algorithm: “Decode the reading of data in my eyes!” With its sophisticated ability to track and surveil, the algorithm has, of course, been constantly decoding him, trying to identify the object/subject/scene implied by the movement of his fingers. He whispers to a world constructed by predictive algorithms: “Slide along with what my eyes see!” Characters/Things/Landscapes, as a result, replicate their own images in the vault of data—the virtual morgue—and slide from the glass screen to the shiny surfaces of resin, of negative film, of PVC sheets.

The works of Đỗ Thanh Lãng do not completely deny the symbolism of objects in reality: the objects still capture and re-constitute reality. The question is: where does a point of view come from, if today’s reality cannot escape the algorithmic gaze? The images that appear on our phones at any given moment result from the countless contexts we are interested in. Aren’t these images what created what Walter Benjamin always referred to as the “aura”the quintessence of the original, the convergence of history, and the specific place whence it came?



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Top: Đỗ Thanh Lãng. *Untitled*, 2020. Oil, acrylic, and epoxy resin on canvas, 120 x 140 cm.  
 Bottom: Đỗ Thanh Lãng. *Untitled*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas and PVC transparent sheet, 120 x 120 cm.

*'[...] a digitalized image or text appears always in a new form, according to the formats and software that a particular user applies when he or she causes the digital data to appear on a screen. [...] In the case of mechanical reproduction, the original is visible and can be compared to a copy - so the copy can be corrected and any possible distortion of the original form reduced. But if the original is invisible, no such comparison is possible: Every act of visualization of digital data remains uncertain in its relationship to the original; one could even say that every such performance itself becomes an original.'*

excerpt from "Modernity and Contemporaneity: Mechanical vs. Digital Reproduction," in *In the Flow* by Boris Groys

Through painting, Đỗ Thanh Lãng renders the off-kilter the aura of the digital age. The images he takes from Facebook's algorithm releases that quintessential aura into the eyes of the artist as well as the surveilling eye of the software. Lãng pulls the subject out of the "algorithmic perspective" that is bound to a chain of personal context/image source/surveillance policy, and releases it into the Void. The subjects of Lãng's paintings now have a distinct aura. What was once copies of digital data—the culmination of the artist's clicks and slides on the screen—now slide off into a sphere of fluorescent fog. I call this sphere the "Off-Object," based on and inspired by what Svetlana Boym calls the "Off-Modern:"

*"Off" introduces a moment of chance; it is both distancing and defamiliarizing, but also casts a short shadow next to the outlines of things. [...] Off plays optical tricks with nearness and distance, belonging and straying off.*

*Off doesn't enter into a clear binary opposition with anything [...] Off is not transcendental or transgressive, but mysterious and improbable.'*

excerpt from 'On Off', in *The Off-Modern* by Svetlana Boym

A scenario to "let them fly": The artist's virtual morgue now lies at the heart of the lantern. The reveling artist of course need not wait until the mid-Autumn to project his figures (rendered in cellophane pink, red, green, blue) which freely slide back and forth. The lantern illuminates, the subjects wake up, climbing one after another out of the warehouse towards the layers of fluorescence. If classical painting uses spatial perspective to structure its narrative, then Lãng's paintings use lights and lanterns to provide that structure. The lights rapidly swirl, then slow all of a sudden - a derailing. One layer of narrative hops atop another. Personal memory overlaps breaking news. Inexplicability is the new explanation. After some time the swirling lantern transmutes as disco lights. It flashes as it sings:

*When will our fate (ooh!) catch fire my sweet,*

*Paper elephant (oohwahh) paper horse (ooh) running off (oohwahh) to the distant distance'*

Vietnamese folksong

1. This description references Susan Buck-Morss's essay *Aesthetics and Anaesthetics*.

# Small House Parties

In December,  
the horizon was snow  
gone by noon  
I could only cleave time,  
a subject  
dissolving  
in the absence of others  
where we assume  
post-shapes  
vibrancy  
and sand

I take signs  
from the legs of a spider,  
to avoid hard conversations  
I read texts on revolution  
I decide to live as a rock  
because there is no truth but mass

In this overgrown grass  
in this thingishness  
I still miss the choreography  
of small house parties  
I want to be cloistered  
in tangibility,  
in that which seems  
unnecessary  
simulations of danger,  
obstacles  
and props.  
I remember you:  
in one moment  
it sounded like  
cutting grass  
with dulled shears  
in another  
stopping  
the screen door with  
your whole hand,  
mid-swing,  
to call inside,  
*this is only*  
*your sense of horizon*  
*not the convergence itself*

The mayor  
has hidden swords  
throughout Los

Angeles

sad little earth  
lay, coughing  
there is little  
left to say  
about love  
ok: a car  
wrapped  
around a tree

those are crisis sounds  
you're hearing  
wanting  
those  
outside  
of you  
creates civil war  
I've grown  
skeptical  
of the body  
as such

the word  
a tired  
algebra  
instead  
I will learn  
to throw  
rocks  
leave  
gracefully  
store rain

today  
the mayor of  
Los Angeles  
announced  
the indefinite  
presence  
of swords  
in the street  
and every  
doorway  
linen closet  
car dashboard  
on barstools  
he said  
sleepwalking  
wasn't dangerous  
enough

# Nina

I first saw Nina  
on the mezzanine  
I crouched,  
    smoking  
in January's elbow  
before taking  
    scissors  
to her laugh,  
I ask  
    Nina  
what we should do  
about all that  
that evades  
description  
all that  
    lost time  
sitting by our beds  
like water towers  
with our most boring  
    desires?

Nina loses whole days  
under the auspices of care  
we were meant  
to be slutty  
    with time,  
enter it  
as you would  
    an open field  
I will forget most days  
    anyway

I ask for change  
to arrive  
like a birthday  
    rare  
and unremarkable  
Nina taunts change  
    *come at me*  
a brick careening  
into a glass eye  
it happens  
and it is devastating  
yet abstract  
and longed for

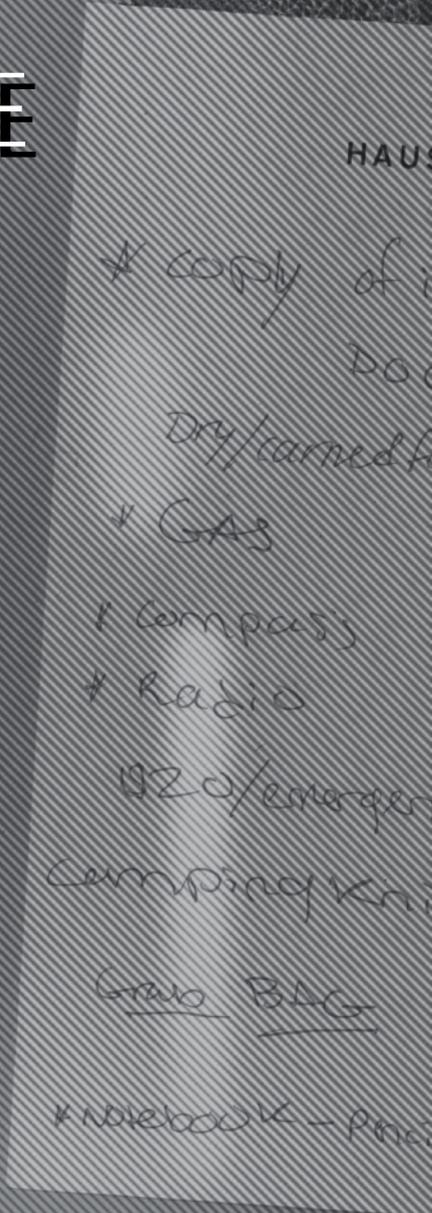
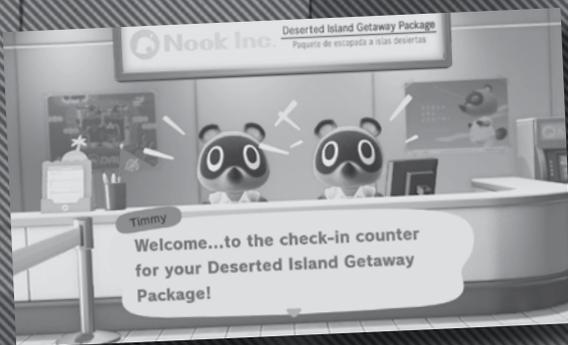
A screenshot from *The B-Side: Elisa Dorfman's Portrait Photography*, directed by Errol Morris, 2016.



*Let's wave to the future.*

# NEW HORIZONS: HETEROTOPIAS OF QUARANTINE

A.C.  
Smith



Facing, foreground: Screenshot from Nintendo's Animal Crossing: New Horizons. Background: Scan of personal notebook (detail).

## ON THE ISLAND

**O** *Day 1: Jack dies and Kate emerges as leader. Kate steps into Jack's storyline, except Saiyd takes on a doctor role with a medical background in the military rather than a torturer. Kate keeps a fugitive background. Kate has many partners and lovers on the island throughout the series (primarily with Sun, Anna Lucia, Sawyer, and Jack briefly before his death). Kate and Claire share a strong platonic intimacy towards the end of Claire's pregnancy. Kate acts as a doula through Claire's organic water birth in the moonlit ocean. Kate and Claire have a falling-out when Claire mistakes the platonic intimacy for romantic feelings. Kate maintains her polyamory and desire to not have children of her own. Kate wants to be a partner and a parent to everyone on the island. Kate disappears from the main camp too often on island-related missions and her dangerous lifestyle is not healthy for Claire or Claire's baby, Aaron. This is when Charlie steps up as a life partner to Claire and a father to Aaron. Later in the series, Aaron is revealed to be Charlie's own self as a baby stuck in a time loop (constituting a Back-to-the-Future-type mother/son relationship between him and Claire).*

## NEW HORIZONS AND HETEROTOPIAS

I downloaded Animal Crossing: New Horizons (ACNH) in August, 2020—late to the game trending since its release in March, 2020.<sup>2</sup> For the past seven months, I've been restarting my island, looking for very specific features assigned randomly by the game: pears as my native fruit, a river with an east or west outlet, and a green airport dock centered perfectly with the town's plaza. The game starts with Timmy and Tommy, twin *tanuki* raccoon dogs, welcoming you to your Deserted Island Getaway Package with Nook Inc. They speak (almost) in unison and guide players through the Nook Inc. Check-In Counter: choosing a name, birthday, avatar, hemisphere, and one of four island layouts randomly generated. On the island, players take part in an utopic lifestyle: catching butterflies, collecting shells, fishing, picking fruit, growing flowers, and crafting furniture. After a player's first night on the island sleeping in a tent, you are given a cell phone and a bill for moving costs by Mr. Nook, another *tanuki*, supervisor to Timmy and Tommy, and the proprietor of Nook Inc. For the remainder of the game, players remain in debt to Mr. Nook and work to pay an interest-free mortgage for home upgrades.

In mirroring the utopic vacation or living situation as "island life," ACNH exemplifies what Michel Foucault describes as

a “heterotopia” in his 1986 essay “Of Other Spaces.” Although utopias are “fundamentally unreal spaces,” Foucault writes, “heterotopias similarly present society in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down,” however within “real sites” or “locations in reality.”<sup>3</sup> Such as the case in ACNH, where players are invited to bring to reality an utopic island life fantasy.<sup>4</sup> While there is “no one universal form of heterotopia,” Foucault references a few examples of these locations: a house, a cemetery, a theater stage, a garden, a fairground, a festival,

but also to the game’s release at the beginning of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Initial quarantine periods in the United States act as “closed or semi-closed sites of rest” temporally and physically mimicking islands’ isolative heterotopic properties.<sup>6</sup>

[HTTPS://VM.TIKTOK.COM/  
ZMEXJVG4T/]

#### QUEER TEMPORALITY

Such as in quarantine, in death, in resetting your ACNH island: “the heterotopia begins to function at

full capacity when [people] arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.”<sup>8</sup> Initial quarantine periods queered, obscured, stretched, and squashed temporality by halting occupation, education, and opportunity for some—a collection or accumulation of time, while also a “transitory, precarious,” period of time.<sup>9</sup> Quarantine mandates and guidelines administratively queer temporality in an ambiguous (non)ending. This ambiguity of the end of quarantine

penetrable.<sup>7</sup> “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.”

a museum, a brothel, a boat. Not unlike Foucault’s boat-as-heterotopia, the ACNH island functions as a “place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea.”<sup>5</sup> I also connect Foucault’s example of “vacation villages” directly to ACNH; not only in the game’s simulation of “island life” and the politics of “vacation,”

manifests in the contrast between mandated state government restrictions and the privilege of certain individuals who are able to leave their homes, return to jobs, have early access to vaccinations, and take vacations. Building from Foucault’s example of the cemetery, the pandemic has queered the heterotopic time (and space) of death for those who have passed from the virus or otherwise. The time between death and burial is extended, morgues fill and delay, refrigerated trucks are purchased, funeral homes book up, funeral attendees are limited, cemeteries in states with cold winters wait for the ground to thaw, and memorial services are planned for a speculative future. In the case of my uncle’s death from cancer on April 1, 2020, his open-casket funeral was live-streamed through the Donnellan Family Funeral Service website and available to purchase or re-watch for free for a limited time afterward on FuneralVue.<sup>10</sup>

When I revisit, review, and rewatch early quarantine periods, I find solace in restarting my ACNH island. I froze the time on my Nintendo in August 2020 when I first purchased the game. I later decided to time-jump back to March 2020 because if I pick an island, then I will want to re-play and time-jump forward through 2020 in its entirety. In this way, I am able to relive a version of 2020 post-pandemic and suspend time reminiscent of the early stages

of quarantine, when time appeared to be suspended on a global scale. These temporalities of quarantine—enclosed, emergent, halted, elongated, ceased, bubbled, and penetrated—are queer and heterotopic in their disruption of a linear time that still enshrouds them. These queer temporalities of ACNH are similarly heterotopic because although Nintendo console’s date and time (and my sanity) remains in March 2020, time in the space surrounding these heterotopias continues to move forward. Time is, somehow, still real.

#### AFTER THE ISLAND

*With Kate taking Jack’s storyline, Sun takes Kate’s storyline on the island as a sidekick. Sun and Jin (lesbians) switch backstories. Sun is an assassin for her father’s business, trying to keep her work a secret from Jin while also trying to provide her wife a perfect home life. Sun buys Jin a dog, Bpo Bpo, when they struggle to have a child together (the couple can’t find a sperm donor and are unsuccessful in their attempt at adoption). Bpo Bpo crash lands with them on the island and forms a feral pack with Vincent and other dogs from the plane. When Sun leaves the island for the first time with the Oceanic Six, she claims to be Aaron’s mother. Sun and Jin officially adopt Aaron the second time they leave the island (together in a submarine*

*that does not explode), after Charlie's death and Claire's break from sanity.*

#### SPACESHIP EARTH

Nostalgia constitutes: a homesickness, comparable to the sick-at-home qualities of early pandemic quarantine periods; a longing to revisit a place and time, such as my desire to suspend time through ACNH; and a sentimentality, already being expressed or predicted in digital spaces such as TikTok, where early quarantine culture and trends emerged. TikTok is a social media platform that gained new popularity similar to ACNH at the start of pandemic quarantine periods. TikTok reflects a specific heterotopic culture and space, as it is confined to the opening and closing of the application, a profile account, and the starting/ending of trends. Content creators on TikTok engage in early pandemic nostalgia, or a fabricated future nostalgia post-pandemic. Both reflect back on early quarantine trends, while also reaching forward to imagined future states post-pandemic, where they enact nostalgia for pandemic and quarantine periods. #WhippedCoffee #AloneTogether #TigerKing #Savage

In re-imagining the past, how do queer heterotopic temporalities re-imagine a future? When I reset my ACNH island and time-jump to March 2020, I am revisiting a past while also setting up the structures for an imagined future. This

experience could be compared to the Epcot Walt Disney World Resort attraction, Spaceship Earth, on which riders time-travel through the “history of human communication from the Stone Age to the computer age.”<sup>1</sup> The ride ends with a quiz on the interactive touchscreen in front of riders while moving through a simulation of outer space. Riders are then built a virtual/simulated future that reflects their answers. When I rode Spaceship Earth in June of 2019, the ride took a picture of me and photoshopped my head onto an avatar that traveled the world and ate salads in a city with my friend riding alongside me. Riders are presented with an experience “as if the entire history”—as well as future—“of humanity reaching back to its origin were accessible in a sort of immediate knowledge,” or timed space, such as the heterotopic amusement park ride.

**Welcome to Your Future!** A version of the simulated future from Epcot’s Spaceship Earth in 2013 shows how an imagined utopic future often includes the idea of “sky islands,” further isolating the personal home as a heterotopic space. These future utopian homes built on stilts in the sky also reflect a modern anxiety of (lack of) human space on Earth’s surface, as well as the role of health and hygiene in pushing modernity. Bighorn Sheep in the high Mojave Desert spend much of their time sitting on top of tall isolated



Screenshot from Webcast FuneralVue, April 2020.

rocks, sky islands in a type of personal quarantine for their own health and safety.<sup>41</sup> These spatially island-like heterotopias create what Sara Ahmed describes as bodily horizon, wherein “the normative can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action, which puts some objects and not others in reach.”<sup>42</sup> Ahmed’s bodily horizon could be described as physically walking to the bathroom and back to the living room couch throughout the day, as well as an access to in the “outside world” of the heterotopic quarantine: what you watch, what you eat, who you speak to, who you see.

Sky islands and spaceship earths both demonstrate how imagined utopias and mirrored physical heterotopias often reflect an “anxiety of our era.”<sup>43</sup> This anxiety forms “the space which today appears to form the horizon of our concerns, our theory, our systems.”<sup>44</sup> Foucault expands on this as an anxiety of the “problem of the human site or living space.”<sup>45</sup> This problem is not only of “knowing whether there will be enough space for men in the world– but also that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulating, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end.”<sup>46</sup> I read this problem of

WHAT ARE YOU MOST INTERESTED IN?

- HOME
- WORK
- HEALTH
- LEISURE

WHICH SOUNDS MORE FUN?

- UNDER SEA
- OUTER SPACE

WHICH TYPE OF PERSON ARE YOU?

- I’M A PLANNER
- I LIKE TO WING IT

WHICH DO YOU ENJOY MORE?

- THE JOURNEY
- THE DESTINATION

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE IN?

- THE FUTURE?
- THE CITY
- THE COUNTRY

WHEN ON VACATION, WHAT DO YOU WORRY ABOUT MOST?

- YOUR PET
- YOUR HOUSE

HOW DO YOU WANT TO TRAVEL IN THE FUTURE?

- SOLAR POWER
- WIND POWER

human living space in a global site as apocalyptic– a preparation, a means-to-the-end, a packing of a go-bag. Such is the case when you are preparing for an emergency and must decide which relationships are the most important to your humanity. This presents the heterotopias of quarantine as practice for the heterotopias created in a potential end-of-world scenario.

([HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=QFSD4XJKLEQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFSD4XJKLEQ))

#### BACK ON THE ISLAND

*In the end, Hurley remains on the island as a kind of “God” figure. Hurley is a trans man who retains his original history, but gains a more glorified island storyline. Once Hurley opens the hatch, he finds Jack alive (not dead). Jack appeared to die on day one because he followed the ghost of his father into the jungle and did not return. Jack’s father’s ghost froze Jack in age, and time-looped him to the 1970s. Jack joined the Dharma Initiative, and stuck himself in the hatch escaping the Others mass-extinction of the Dharma colony. When Hurley and Locke open the hatch, they find Jack has been in the bunker for 30 years, un-aged and unhinged. Jack takes on Desmond’s storyline and backstory. With this, Jack is married to Penny Widmore (except Penny’s character takes on the storyline of her father Charles Widmore).*

*Jack begins to pass on his responsibilities in the hatch to Hurley including managing the stock closet. Hurley recognizes this as hitting the lottery again and becomes over-controlling of the island’s resources instead of burning them. He dips into his greedy side, becoming a more 3-D character as he grapples with good and evil. Libby is not murdered by Michael and recognizing Hurley’s good side, becomes a kind of “Goddess” figure on the island. While Kate is a leader who often provides support away from camp (e.g. finding cell towers and confronting the Others), Hurley becomes a leader in camp, controlling their stock of food and toiletries in a quasi-currency-based system. In response, Sawyer creates a black market.*

#### HOME PLANET

Environmental alarmism links to post-nostalgia as we imagine a life without an earth, after we’ve ruined the environment beyond conditions conducive to human life. Our preparation for quarantine is comparable to our preparation to leave the biosphere. In this way, the pandemic and quarantine are not apocalyptic, but rather a preparation for the post-pandemic exit of the biospheric quarantine. It is a rehearsal for the end of a much larger quarantine, one of biodome, of habitat. An example can be found in the HI-SEAS (Hawaii Space



Facing, clockwise from top right: Spaceship Earth attraction at Epcot, Walt Disney World. Image from DisneyTouristBlog.com. HI-SEAS Research Station, Mauna Loa, Hawaii. Photo: Michaela Mustlova/HI-SEAS. Crewmates outside their HI-SEAS habitat in Hawaii in August 2013. Image from DesignIndaba.com/. Crewmates inside Biosphere 2. Philippe Plailly/Science Photo L.

Exploration Analog and Simulation) IV mission, in which six people live in a simulated Mars colony in the Hawaiian lava fields. This mission is comparable to one the subject of a 2020 documentary titled *Spaceship Earth*, which looks at the organization behind the building of Biosphere 2 (now owned by the University of Arizona and open to the public).<sup>17</sup> The documentary follows a group of people as they work out what it means to build a community, on the thin line of a cult or commune. However, they acted more similarly to a corporation, similar to Nook Inc or Hurley’s stock market, where the heterotopic requires some kind of internal economy that connects to an overarching concept of capitalism (as a basis for “island life”). With this capital, the group built a boat, then Biosphere 2 with the end-goal of building a spaceship. Where Biosphere 1 references the Earth, this brings up the question or idea of sustaining life off of Earth or post-Earth.

The Biosphere 2’s mission to stay sealed for two years in their own Earth-bound enclosure without help from the “outside world” for points to the need of an “outside” for an inside or heterotopic space to exist. A climax of the documentary highlights public and media reactions (those outside of the heterotopia) to a dangerous rise in carbon dioxide levels that required oxygen to be inserted during Biosphere 2’s mission. A 1993 New

York Times article reflecting on the event writes: “Beginning in January, then again in August and September, project officials injected 23 tons of pure oxygen into the sprawling glass bubble to avoid a medical emergency.”<sup>18</sup> This event is even satirized (in the form of a wild college party) in the 1996 movie *Bio-Dome*. In the movie, Bud and Doyle, two stoners living in Arizona, get stuck in a Bio-Dome with members mimicking the mission of Biosphere 2. Bud and Doyle are trapped after mistaking the Bio-Dome for a mall when they need to use the bathroom (here is another comparison to a typical example of heterotopias, the mall).<sup>19</sup> Bud and Doyle’s mistake highlights the assumed architecture of a spaceship Earth— a simulated sphere or dome, typically constructed out of triangular structurals, mirroring the shape of our home planet. Here we see how an aesthetic of Earth is needed—architecturally, economically, biologically, psychologically—for (simulating) leaving an Earth and expanding to new horizons. People do not enter Biosphere 2 or the BioDome (or quarantine) because the apocalypse is happening, they enter the biosphere in preparation for the apocalypse to happen.

[[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=FRWSCHIPCNW+FEATURE=EMB\\_IMP\\_WOYT](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRWSCHIPCNW+FEATURE=EMB_IMP_WOYT)]

[[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/469794720](https://vimeo.com/469794720)]

## NEW HORIZONS AS THE FINAL FRONTIER

Even in instances of leaving Earth or post-Earth, people appear to be preparing to stay close to “home,” not exiting Earth’s orbit or our solar system, moving to an Elon Musk colony on Mars or the Moon. Other instances of entering space as “the final frontier” in science fiction space-travel (where the frontier starts to act as a new horizon), obscure the idea of a “home planet.” Multiple iterations of Earth (Sol III or Terra) appear in *Star Trek*, and no type of Earth-like-planet exists in *Star Wars*. In a series satirizing *Star Trek*, *The Orville*, one episode centers around a spaceship inhabited by a population whose home planet was destroyed. Living on a spaceship in isolation and floating inter-generationally for centuries, the spaceship’s inhabitants have lost a sense of history and origin in their displacement from a home planet. This opens onto the idea of the end-of-world scenario, the apocalypse, final frontiers, and new horizons as heterotopias. Once we leave home, can we ever return? While playing ACNH, am I home or on an island vacation?

I relate my personal anxiety in choosing an island to my fetish of disaster preparation and survivalist reality television (*Survivor*, *Amazing Race*, *Alone*, *Life Below Zero*, to name a few). In the event of an apocalypse, my family (half-joking) plans to

meet in Idaho at ski resort town where generations of my family have vacationed (my family comes from a long line of WASP resort town-goers and owners: Sun Valley, the Les Cheneaux Islands, Circle Z Ranch). I then imagine our family traveling together north to an undisclosed location in the Salmon-Challis National Forest. My car is always packed with camping supplies and extra water. As I prepared to move to Los Angeles from the east coast, I made an emergency kit that forced me to research, rank, and decide what is most essential. I am primarily prepared for an earthquake (the Big One is coming).<sup>20</sup> My emergency kit did not include face masks, toilet paper, or hand sanitizer—I was not prepared for a pandemic, but quarantine has now conditioned me to know exactly what I want for my island: pears as my native fruit, a river with an east or west outlet, and a green airport dock centered perfectly with the town’s plaza.

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2. “Animal Crossing: New Horizons for Nintendo Switch - Nintendo Game Details.” Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://www.nintendo.com/games/detail/animal-crossing-new-horizons-switch/>.
3. Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowicz. “Of Other Spaces.” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.
4. Villagers speak slowly as if on “island time,” unless players hold down the B button to speed up their speech.
5. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 27.
6. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.
7. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 26.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. “Ronald Norman Hoffman Obituary - Visitation & Funeral Information.” Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://www.donnellanfuneral.com/obituaries/obituary-listings?obId=12594793>.
11. “Desert Bighorn Sheep: Connecting a Desert Landscape (U.S. National Park Service).” Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/desert-bighorn-sheep-connecting-a-desert-landscape.htm>.
12. Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham; Duke University Press, 2006), 66.
13. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 23.
14. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 22.
15. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 23.
16. Ibid.
17. “The Biosphere 2 Experience | Biosphere 2.” Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://biosphere2.org/visit/the-biosphere2-experience>.
18. Broad, William J. “Too Rich a Soil: Scientists Find the Flaw That Undid the Biosphere.” *The New York Times*, October 5, 1993, sec. Science. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/05/science/too-rich-a-soil-scientists-find-the-flaw-that-undid-the-biosphere.html>.
19. Dialogue from the movie, *Bio-Dome*.  
Doyle: “Check out that mall.”  
Bud: “Bi-O-Dome.”  
Doyle: “Do you think it goes both ways?”  
Bud: “I don’t know but I do!”  
*Bud and Doyle make “noogie noogie” noise while sticking their tongues out and face each other as if they’re about to french kiss.*
20. Champion-Nicks, Arwen, Misha Euceph, and Mary Knauf. “The Big One Is Coming To Southern California. This Is Your Survival Guide.” Southern California Public Radio. Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://the-big-one.scprr.org/stories>.
21. “Spaceship Earth | Epcot Attractions | Walt Disney World Resort.” Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/attractions/epcot/spaceship-earth/>.
22. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 26.

# Queer and Trans Club Life as Queer World- Building

Courtney Loi

Spaces of infinite play, the alternative, and joy can be found in nightlife for Queer and Trans (QT) people. It is often within these spaces that we feel like we can be our authentic selves in the presence of others who we may consider our community, if only for the night. It is in these spaces of community, accompanied by loud (queer) music, substances, and colorful lights where QT folks are allowed to move freely in their bodies. This is a clear contrast from the policing of QT bodies that we experience on a consistent basis. QT people have been historically excluded from common communal institutions and public life such as church, media, and even public bathrooms. As such, QT folks have had to conceptualize and create spaces of living and being for ourselves. Although it may not seem obvious at first, queer clubs, nightlife, and performance are key factors in queer world-building.

What makes QT clubbing special is its innate air of rebellion—of existing despite historical violence inflicted on QT people, of centering joy and fun instead of QT suffering. Through social dancing, conversation, and expression of the body and its capabilities and limits, QT folks are able to communicate their past, present, and future to others and facilitate community and establish individual liberation. Queer clubs become unlikely spaces of healing from the trauma of solitude, from feeling somehow “wrong,” having to deny and hide major parts of oneself.

When I first visited a gay club, it was only months after I understood and acknowledged my queerness and transness. I went with my QT friends from work, and upon arrival I felt an immediate disparity between my feelings in a gay club and straight clubs from my past. When I thought I was a cisgender straight woman,

my experience at straight clubs was contingent to my self worth. Was I getting hit on by men? Will a man want to dance with me? How many of the men in here want to fuck me? They were nights of constantly questioning my own femininity, worthiness, sexuality, with cisgender straight men always being in the center of my anxieties.

This contrasted heavily with my later experiences of queer clubbing and nightlife. Of course, the presence of sexuality was always there. However, they took a backseat to my bonding with other QTTOC as well as unfamiliar positive feelings about myself. Blaring iconically queer music that would never be played in straight clubs, my friends and I were able to find unknown community even amongst each other. Why did we all have such a special connection to Lady Gaga and Beyoncé? These songs that would be replaced with Top 100 hits in straight clubs brought for us memories of our queer/trans pasts, of listening to “gay icons” in secret. Here in the present, we are able to express our long repressed love for queer culture, which is soundtracked by both ironically and unironically designated gay icons of music. It was in this space that I was able to freely celebrate and embrace my queerness and transness while also being able to observe and engage with the queerness and transness of people around me. There was no longer a pressure to be sexually alluring, at least not to a cisgender straight man, which is both ridiculously easy but also extremely internally destructive in its own way. Instead, the focus is on having fun with my friends, building community with other QTT folks around me, and expressing celebration for important parts of myself that I ignored and hid for a majority of my life. It is in these spaces of

QTT joy and community where we are able to imagine and build worlds where our safety is never in question and perception from heteros are an afterthought, in favor of carefree fun and expression of self and true liberation.

Above: A photo from my first night queer clubbing with my coworkers from my undergraduate university. We created a fictional sorority for ourselves, calling ourselves “Gammias,” to make fun of our university’s attempts at “diversity, equity, and inclusion” in sororities, which were made up of predominantly white, straight, cisgender, and wealthy people who, more often than not, were racist, homophobic, and transphobic due to the problematic nature of sororities as a concept.



Right: A photo from a few months into my coworkers’ and my regular gay night outings. Again, we make the “Gamma” hand symbol to make fun of white (aligned), homophobic, transphobic, and racist university sororities and its members. My friend adds the caption “SPRING RECRUITMENT #DIVERSESISTERHOOD” to again mock diversity attempts from sororities.



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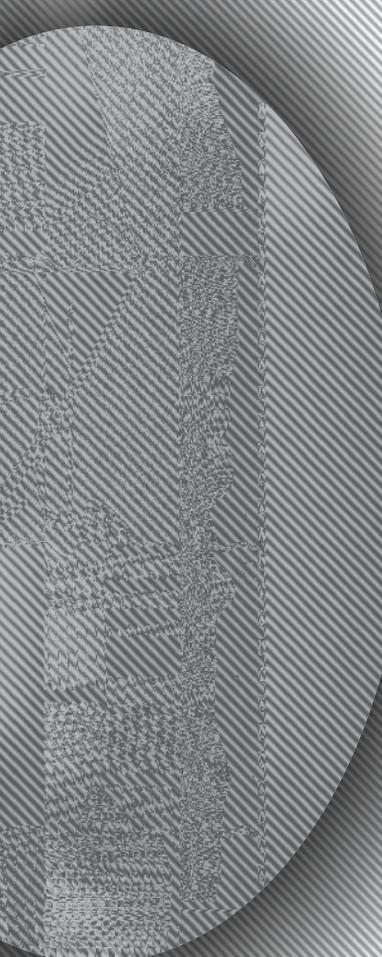
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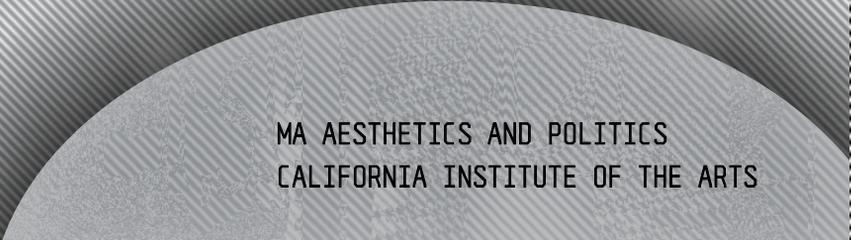
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