



**After La vida nueva**  
Book of Gossip / Libro de los chismes

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# ***Preface***

# ***Prefacio***

### After La vida nueva

#### Book of Gossip

Over there, where the other person lives, is not here where I am, though I can perhaps bring others close by soliciting them to build a story with me and so seek to close the gaps separating all of us by letting excitement bridge the distance.

—Judith Butler, “Solidarity/Susceptibility”<sup>1</sup>

*Book of Gossip* is the third booklet in the catalogue for *After La vida nueva*. The title riffs off the Book of the Gospels in

<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, “Solidarity/Susceptibility,” *Social Text* 137, vol. 36, no. 4 (December 2018), 4.

### After La vida nueva

#### Libro de los chismes

Allá, donde vive la otra persona, no es donde estoy yo, aunque tal vez pueda acercarse a otros si les pido que construyan conmigo un relato para así llenar las grietas que nos separan a todos, dejando que la excitación zanje esa distancia.

—Judith Butler, “Solidarity/Susceptibility”<sup>1</sup>

*Libro de los chismes* es el tercer cuadernillo que compone *After La vida nueva*. El título juega con los libros de los evan-

<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, “Solidarity/Susceptibility,” *Social Text* 137, vol. 36, no. 4 (diciembre, 2018), 4.

the New Testament, but substitutes the familiar moral and spiritual instruction with speculative records of future imaginaries. It includes conversations and texts that expand the questions, histories, and narratives taken up in the exhibition, serving both as an archive for the under-historicized moments represented in this exhibition as well an elaboration upon ways of being in the not-yet-here.

While *Book of Archives* contains historical documents and printed materials central to various activist movements, *Book of Gossip* extends upon this archive through oral histories. Cici Wu and Yong Soon Min discuss the relationship between art and politics, Asian and Asian American activism and solidarity, and the legacy of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Juan Queiroz talks about queer activism in South America, the creation of the *Moléculas Malucas* webpage and archive,

gelios del Nuevo Testamento, pero reemplaza la consabida instrucción moral y espiritual con registros especulativos de imaginarios futuros. Incluye conversaciones y textos que amplían las preguntas, historias y relatos recogidos en la muestra, y funciona como archivo de los momentos insuficientemente historizados que se representan en la exhibición, a la vez que desarrollan maneras posibles de ocupar lo que está aún por venir.

Mientras que el segundo cuadernillo se componía de documentos históricos y materiales impresos de gran importancia para distintos movimientos activistas, *El libro de los chismes* le suma a este archivo historias orales. Cici Wu y Yong Soon Min discuten la relación entre arte y política, activismo y solidaridad asiática y asiático estadounidense, y el legado de Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Juan Queiroz habla de activismo



and the politics of archival practice. Alan Michelson discusses the material and ideological aftermath of settler colonialism in the United States, the relationship between human and geological time and land, and the re-appropriation of Western artistic practices for decolonization. Rashaad Newsome reflects on the globalization of ballroom culture, the importance of affective bonds in community building, and the translation of the Black vernacular. Amelia Bande contributes a performance text reflecting on the tumultuous present at the crossroads of the Chilean protests that began in October 2019, the ongoing global disaster induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the surge of activist energy directed against police brutality and systemic racism.

Conducted over Zoom, WhatsApp, and email given the enforced conditions of social distancing—these conversa-

queer en Sudamérica, la creación de la página web y archivo *Moléculas malucas*, y las políticas de la práctica archivística. Alan Michelson discute las secuelas materiales e ideológicas de la colonización de los Estados Unidos, la relación entre el tiempo humano y el geológico y la tierra, y la traducción transcultural. Rashaad Newsome reflexiona sobre la globalización de la cultura del ballroom, la importancia de los lazos afectivos en la construcción de comunidades y la traducción del habla de la jerga coloquial de lxs negrxs. Amelia Bande colabora con un texto performático que reflexiona sobre la tumultuosa encrucijada de las protestas en Chile que empezaron en octubre de 2019, el desastre producido por la pandemia de COVID-19, que aún continúa, y el estallido de activismo contra la brutalidad policial y el racismo sistémico.

Estas conversaciones, que tuvieron lugar por Zoom,

tions lend a nuanced and intimate texture to political events, organizing, and activism. They also, as the reader will find, assert the crucial role of gossip as a means of communion and solidarity-building, mapping a network of connections and overlapping histories centered in and around New York. Often understood disparagingly as frivolous and idle talk, the practice of gossip (as these speakers reveal) opens up ways of relating outside of the patriarchal, hetero-normative, and capitalist regime.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Silvia Federici, "On the Meaning of 'Gossip,'" in *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 69–83.

WhatsApp y correo electrónico debido a la necesidad de mantener la distancia social, aportan una textura íntima y matizada a los acontecimientos políticos, la militancia y el activismo. Además, como podrán comprobar lxs lectorxs, afirman el papel crucial del chisme como forma de comunión y construcción de solidaridades, al trazar una red de conexiones e historias que se superponen, localizadas en Nueva York y sus alrededores. Con frecuencia considerada frívola y ociosa de manera despectiva, la práctica del rumor (como revelan estas personas) permiten formas de relacionarse por fuera del régimen patriarcal, heteronormativo y capitalista.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Vid. Silvia Federici, "On the Meaning of 'Gossip'" en *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 69–83.



Cici  
Wu

&

Yong Soon  
Min

*On Wednesday, April 1, 2020, we spoke with artists Cici Wu and Yong Soon Min about politics and poetics, activism and organizing in the 1980s and now, and the legacy of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's life and work. The following is an edited excerpt of our conversation.*

**Curators** Do you think of your work as political? What does it mean to be making political work?

**Cici Wu** For me, making a political work means that the artist would have their own definition and consciousness towards justice first. But more importantly, artworks should actually have the potential to engage with realities—meaning, as a catalyst to create real changes in a society. That is my reflection upon what it means for an artwork to be political. However, this is not my essential concern. I would rather be more interested in imagining and practicing an artistic life that inspires people to think about politics differently.

**Yong Soon Min** I got stuck with the first question, because the older I've become, the more I know and the less I know. I used to quote Godard a lot because he was eminently quotable, and he was my art mentor for a while in the 1970s. He had a quote, something like, "photography is not a reflection of what is 'the real' but the reality of that reflection." I thought that this was a kind of a truth that I adhered to, especially now, more than ever before, with so much disinformation and misinformation. It's crucial for us to strive for the truth, but also to strive for truth with power. It's the search for truth in relation to power.

I was included in the exhibition at SoHo 20 that was curated by Kellie Jones in 1986 that got a positive review in *The New York Times*. I was interested in bringing these Koreans that were part of Young Koreans United (YKU), an organization based in Queens that I had been working with. The piece that I made for that exhibit, *Half Home*, I dedicated to this organization because I learned so much from

them about Korea.<sup>1</sup> YKU were a militant Korean organization that was closely linked to the Min Joong movement and they had a great library that I practically lived at. I couldn't read most of the books, which were in Korean, but they had some English translated books that were important to me. A group came over to the gallery and when they saw the work, there were no comments afterwards. I gathered that they were indifferent to my installation, that the work wasn't agitprop enough for them, and that they had somewhat of a narrow view of artwork that had to be useful in their activism. YKU were involved with the activist side of the Min Joong movement that was useful for the rallies and demos and so on. That was one of the first instances where I realized that the work that I show in a gallery is not necessarily for everybody. I realized that there's a limit to how much I can reach out with my work in general.

**CW**

I was curious about the first time you had a clear moment of political consciousness. For me, maybe I would say very clearly and strongly, it's the recent social movement in Hong Kong. It really changed me a lot. I went through many emotional moments and learned how to fight collectively. Definitely an inspiring moment for me to think about the potential of art and activism in a different spectrum, because Hong Kong doesn't have a developed discourse and vocabulary compared with New York. I started to imagine a celestial map that features different dimensions and temporalities for artists to travel. One of the dimensions is the capitalistic dimension that is constructed by museums, galleries, biennials, almost everything visible in the existing art world. But at the same time, there can be other dimensions, for example, like the Gwangju Uprising, communist movement in the Philippines, or the Hong Kong protests, and all kinds of

1 Michael Brenson, "Art: 2 Looks At Cleve Gray's Work", *The New York Times*, January 9, 1987. <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/09/arts/art-2-looks-at-cleve-gray-s-works.html>

small or big movements for social justice and liberation that artists have participated in. When you participate, you're still an artist, but the things that you care about and produce, the productions that you make in that dimension, are completely different. You become anonymous. These dimensions can have their own time, speed, and value. I think it's very important to try to imagine these possibilities and share them with others, slowly.

**YSM**

The first clear sense that the Asian American movement impacted me was in New York City post-1981, the Whitney ISP, and after my first teaching job. I'm fond of saying that I cut my political teeth on that politics, and it all happened by chance. I got this position by referral from a friend as Administrative Coordinator for Asian American Arts Alliance (which used to be called Alliance for Asian American Art & Culture before they became an official 501c3 nonprofit) that used to be on West 13th Street where the Whitney Museum now resides. It was located inside a commercial printing place called Expedi, in the Meatpacking District. I had to walk through carcasses to my office, which consisted of a desk and filing cabinet that were constantly being moved around. Each year, we organized two multi-disciplinary programs, including "Roots to Reality," but shortly after our second year other organizations, like Asian Cinevision and Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, told us that what they really need was an organization that would provide advocacy and grants, not competitive programming. So we changed our name and our mission. It opened my eyes to a lot of issues, especially how important it was to foster the development of Asian American arts broadly, and to be collaborative with other minoritized groups in actuality and in spirit. The 1980s were such an important period for people like me. It was a matter of raising consciousness about identity within a certain kind of politics that dealt with looking at the whole art scene, like the Guerrilla Girls, and grasping how little representation of women existed in the arts and likewise that

there was virtually no representation of Asian American artists. That's how Godzilla came to fruition, too, although they never became an official organization. We had some events and some shows. It was such a diverse group... a lot of artists just wanted to get together on a social basis and share work with slide slams and so on. There was another group called Seoro (meaning 'together'), which was a Korean artist group that formed in the late 1980s. We were the ones who were responsible for the exhibition at Queens Museum called, *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Art of Korean and Korean-American Artists*. We targeted the Queens Museum because Queens has the larger portion of Korean residents of all the boroughs. We also picked Jane Farber to curate Korean American artists and Young Chul Lee to curate Korean artists. Not only did the exhibition travel to Korea, but historically, it was the first instance of a Korean diaspora exhibition. Another group of artists that I became involved with were Korean artists spearheaded by Mo Bahc.<sup>2</sup> He established Minor Injury, an alternative gallery in his neighborhood, Greenpoint. He and several other people organized the show about Min Joong art that was at Artists Space in 1988. We had invited a major curator from Korea to write about this significant exhibition.<sup>3</sup>

**CW** How did you and Theresa [Hak Kyung Cha] know each other?

**YSM** Theresa and I first met in 1975 at an exhibition at the University Art Museum (now Berkeley Art Museum) we had work in as a result of both being awarded a prize. Theresa was two years older than me, but because she had double majored first in literature, then art, she graduated at the same time

<sup>2</sup> Born Bahc Chulho, Mo Bahc was his self-identified name while in New York City. Later, during his Seoul years, he became Bahc Yiso.

<sup>3</sup> *Min Joong Art: A New Cultural Movement from Korea*, Artist Space, New York, NY, September 29–November 5, 1988. <http://old.artistsspace.org/exhibitions/ning-joong-art-a-new-cultural-moment-from-korea>.

as me with an undergraduate degree. I could tell immediately that she was so much more advanced. I mean, in the show, she showed a video while I showed etchings. We immediately latched on to one another as we were the only Koreans in that show, and in the whole art department for that matter.

She had been such a gracious person and was somebody who I respected. But at the same time, I was concerned that I was going to be sucked into her orb. I didn't want to copy her work, and I was still stubbornly trying to find my own way, my own artistic direction. So, in my work I kept my distance, but I also realized that I was very influenced by her. I also became a cinephile and started spending more and more of my time at the Pacific Film Archive. I knew most of the people, including Theresa, who worked there, so I got in for free to all the films. They had a great program of Third World Cinema as well as French New Wave. It was an amazing new world that opened up for me. I think that also influenced what I was doing, because for my thesis exhibition at the University Art Museum, I did an installation in 1979 called *Storyline* that was like a filmstrip. I know that Theresa saw the work, because afterwards she invited me to be in the annual exhibition at San Francisco Art Institute. That was also after both of our first returns to South Korea. I received a postcard from her and her brothers' trip in which she describes feeling alienated, always being stared at, and at the same time as if she was at "home." I shared that exact range of feelings and felt that she was like an older sister who I really admired.

When you ask about a community of artists in the 1980s, I wonder how her advanced artwork would reflect some of the identity politics that was very much in the air then. *Dictée* came out in 1982, and Asian American women artists and the critical sector didn't know what to make of it at first because they felt that the radical book reached out to an audience of avant-garde white artists, mostly. Then, *Writing Self, Writing Nation* came out in 1994. That was the first time that Asian



American writers and critics had spoken at a conference [about *Dictée*] and they addressed in what ways it did really reach out to them.<sup>4</sup> They understood it. The book was genre defying and far-reaching in such a way that a diverse community of people ended up responding to it. There is a book recently published by Cathy Park Hong called *Minor Feelings*, where she devotes a chapter to Theresa and how [*Dictée*] spoke to her because of [Theresa's] treatment of the English language (as well as French and Korean) and how she herself struggles and plays with that language, and Cathy felt that she could really connect because she also had a strange love-hate relationship with English.

**CW** How do you perceive Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's position as an artist in relation to activism?

**YSM** If we can use *Dictée* in a speculative way, I think she would be very involved. She made an outright decision to deal with women through the structure of [*Dictée*] which consists of nine Greek muses as chapter headings as if that in itself is a feminist stance and an intervention in the face of patriarchy. Under each heading, Theresa relates real women's stories, for instance, the martyrs Joan of Arc and Yu Guan Soo, who played a central role in the Korean liberation struggle during the Japanese colonial period. She also includes stories of her mother, who's life covers the colonial period as well as the Korean War and the overthrow of South Korea's first president. Her deep knowledge about European theory as well as Korean history is paramount in her ability to elicit and poeticize about women's struggles. Her Korean background shaped her orientation to life, and I believe that she would be very supportive of movements like the Min Joong movement as it largely democratized South Korea.

<sup>4</sup> See Elaine Kim and Norma Alarcon, *Writing Self, Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha*, (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1994).

**C** Cici, can you speak to us about why you were so drawn to Theresa's work? You studied filmmaking in school and much of your own work takes up a similar concern with structuralist materialist filmmaking. How has Theresa's work influenced or changed the way that you approach filmmaking?

**CW** I was drawn to Cha's work because I sensed familiarity. Also, I saw the difference between her and other diaspora artists in my generation. I wanted to bring her back, in a way, to provoke some reflection and re-think about how to approach cultures that were once interrupted. Perhaps it's not about her work as a result, but it's more about the way she approaches what was 'real' in those cultures. She is definitely an inspiration for a lifetime. Her influence, to me, is not limited to only one medium, such as film, but more about forming my own interpretation of deconstruction, or perceiving the film camera as a spiritual tool...

**C** Cici, your work as an archivist and archival researcher is a crucial part of your practice. How has Theresa's work influenced you and your archival process, and how you think about your archival work?

**CW** I started to work as an archivist, say, five years ago. Working as an archivist at Asia Art Archive in America opened a door to me, it was an introduction to recent art history in Asia. Because of the specific research projects that I worked on, I've especially learned more about recent Chinese art history. When I saw very interesting artworks made by artists who are no longer visible, I often imagined: what if I entered art education through studying their artworks and philosophy? At the same time, I question the archive in relation to authorship in general, meaning, the power and confinement imposed by institutions, and the human egotistical desire for visibility. I encountered [Theresa's] work through her poems and writings first, and then after I moved to New York in 2015, I learned that she had a piece, *White Dust*

*From Mongolia*, that was never finished. I started to look at [Theresa's] work through *White Dust From Mongolia* and then went back to her earlier video works and also her sketches. She always had this planning sketch of how the camera movement would work. She had this idea of in-camera editing, so it is always about setting up the camera position and making the work without post-production editing. I was also interested in this technique. There were a lot of other overlapping interests in terms of the visual language that she used—the atmosphere and the feeling that her work naturally has, that has always been intriguing to me. I had access to this piece, *White Dust From Mongolia*, because I contacted Berkeley Film Archive as an archivist, so I actually had the chance to see the piece for the first time in my office with my colleague. I think I started thinking about her piece through two lenses, as both an archivist and an artist.

When I was working on *Upon Leaving the White Dust*, my colleague and I were discussing mostly how reconstruction, as a particular kind of art practice, challenges the nature of authorship and copyright. More importantly, it constructs a subtle relationship between two realities, against the uniqueness of a work of art. I am interested in inserting myself into the past because I'm fascinated with the myth of time and built-in memory in one's body. Working with archives as an artist provides me the path to intervene in history, as much as inviting the past—human or non-human—to have a voice in the present.

**YSM** I just wanted to add here that when I first became aware of [*White Dust From Mongolia*] in the 1980s, it didn't register as anything particular to me. But when I went to Gwangju, South Korea, in 2002—to prepare for the biennial exhibition, *THERE: Sites of Korean Diaspora* that I curated—on one specific day, I couldn't see the sun at all as dust was everywhere. It had fallen on everything and you could scrape a bit of the dust from any surface outside. And I thought,

wow, this is real. I learned a bit later that this dust migrated all the way from the Gobi Desert in Mongolia to reach Korea. This migration happens regularly, and the wind can carry it all the way to California.

**CW** I was also fascinated by her statement about the piece, about how she perceived Asia as whole cultures. She has this really soft-hearted kind of perspective, of how she perceives cultural differences, where the end result of it is not to separate them, but to bridge them. From there, I think I understood that sometimes there might be no equivalents between cultures, and instead of trying to find equivalents, we may go to the bottom level of values, and seek what has been important to a culture; the way of life and its enjoyment. When cultures find there are no equivalents, they can start learning from each other.

**YSM** In a way, the dust can be a bridge that travels very freely...

**CW** ...through these internal histories between Asian countries, of course, affected by the Cold War. Yeah, I think she had a very unique view of approaching not only South Korea and North Korea, but also extending this view to the whole of Asia. I was very touched by her view. At the time, I was also longing for a view like that to support me in terms of being a person or an artist, an individual, in New York, because in a way, I did (and do) feel culturally very distant from my own homeland because of the Cultural Revolution.

**C** Can we ask one last question: you mentioned earlier the strong reception of Theresa's work by other Koreans. Do you remember anything else about that? Perhaps how you felt that people related to that work? Because, you said that initially when *Dictée* was released it was kind of seen as avant-garde and people couldn't really get it until *Writing Self, Writing Nation* came out.

*Dictée*, like the other published book of hers, was later recognized by her Korean community. I want to recall one performance that Theresa did in Steve Laub's grad class. The audience consisted of her fellow students in that class and me. I wasn't in that class. Her props were spare. She sat down and she had a plate and an apple and a knife. She proceeded to peel the apple. I was the only fellow Korean there, and I could relate to it on several different levels. It's a custom in traditional Korean culture that, after a family dinner, it's usually the woman's role to get the family together and she'd peel an apple a certain way before serving it. It was also a custom that the woman peels it all at once which means that you go around, in a continuous circle, and you try not to break that continuity. It was said that a woman who can peel it perfectly in that manner would marry well. It reminds me of a segment from an Ozu film, *Late Spring*, (which I appropriated for one of my videos, *Overseas / at sea*). The film tells a story about a father and daughter relationship, where the daughter has finally found someone and she's going to get married and the father is peeling the apple in a circular manner when the peeling breaks. It's at this point where he but also we, the viewers realize deep within that his daughter's going to be leaving him. That's all intimated by the peeling of the apple. Switching gears back to her performance, Theresa peeled the apple in a competent and controlled manner. Then she proceeded to cut it into all these quarters and then pass the plate around. Her pacing, calmness, and everything about it was so compelling, it had her audience in her thrall. Her silent performance brought out a certain kind of awareness of the extra meanings for me as a Korean. The effect was not necessarily about a nationalism where you're so glad to be a Korean above all, but a certain kind of sensitivity and an understanding. I think that's the impact that she had on other Koreans who experienced her other performances. The formal qualities, including her manner and the cadences integrated within the content of her work, resonated her

subtle references and struck a chord with them. I've seen her after some performances at Berkeley or in San Francisco where a cluster of Koreans approached her to let her know that they were with her and got it.

**Yong Soon Min (b. 1953, Seoul)** engages interdisciplinary sources to examine issues of representation and cultural identities and the intersection of history and memory. She is Professor Emerita at UC Irvine and has served on the Board of Directors of Asian American Arts Alliance, national Board of Directors of CAA, and Korean American Museum. Min is a recipient of the Fulbright Senior Research Grant, Anonymous Was a Woman Award, Guggenheim Foundation grant and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Visual Artist Award in New Genre. Significant exhibitions include *The Decade Show, New Museum; decolonization, Bronx Museum; the 10th Havana Biennial; and the 7th Gwangju Biennale*, curated by Okwui Enwezor. Min participated in the Whitney Independent Study Program in 1981.

**Cici Wu's** biography can be found in the first booklet of this catalog.



# Juan Queiroz

*The following dialogue is excerpted from conversations we had with Juan Queiroz—a queer archivist, activist, scholar, and editor from Buenos Aires—through email and WhatsApp audio messages in May 2020. The exchange took place in Spanish and was translated into English by Patricio Orellana.*

**Curators** How did you begin your archive and the web page *Moléculas Malucas*?

**Juan Queiroz** In 2015, I felt the need to create an archive that would preserve and rescue the memory of our lesbian, trans, and gay ancestors. I was doing research about the Frente de Liberación Homosexual in Argentina, visiting activists from the 1970s who still had ephemera and documents full of historical information about the movement, and about the vida marica [fag life] from the period of anti-homosexual persecution, when cops would repress our community violently. I saw a huge potential that was at risk of disappearing in the near future if nothing was done. But the archival drive had always been present in my life. I have been gathering materials related to my homosexual journey since I was 15—pamphlets, posters, books, magazines, and other documents of gay movements. Early on, I started to preserve and take care of them. In 1984, when I was 15, I came out to my father, who I was living with at the time. He was involved in politics, so our house was always full of left-wing activists, and homophobic comments, both by him and his comrades, were very common. He saw my coming out—his oldest son, a faggot—as an affront to his machismo. In part, that is what it was.

After that, my life turned into hell. He controlled me like a policeman. He didn't allow phone calls from my male friends. I had to cut off my contact with friends, some of whom were dying of Aids and I was not even able to say goodbye. And I want to point out that when I write Aids, I don't capitalize it, which I see as a symbolic gesture of

undermining the power of the illness, which was and is still causing harm and killing so many people in my community. When I said undermining I don't mean to minimize the disease but to treat it less respectfully, because it massacred my community. In that context, in a secret way, I started to collect ephemera about homosexuality—papers that I would get in my clandestine yires [cruises] through teteras [places for queer anonymous sex] and the streets of Buenos Aires. I kept these papers hidden in my room, in a tiny secret space between a drawer and the floor. The Argentine gay publication *Diferentes* (1984–1986), which I still have, was my way of escape—the only reading material that didn't make me feel that I was a weirdo. From a visit to the bathrooms of Retiro Station in 1982, I still have a dirty pamphlet addressed to gays that gave information about how to act in the event they were detained by the police. I was a kid, and that warning, about the dangers of being caught, left a mark of terror in my mind. I had not had homosexual relationships yet, but I was starting to understand that I was not simply confused, I was a homosexual. I kept that pamphlet as an omen. From that moment on, everything I saw that connected to gay, lesbian, or trans issues, I would keep it. That is something that I still do today.

Last year, in mid-2019, I returned to the idea of creating an independent archive, one that didn't depend on an institution. I feel an irresistible need to share these materials, to make them public. I think of it as archive-activism. At the same time, letting it be a personal endeavor which does not depend on any institution, I retain the right to refuse access to homophobic people or, to give a specific example, film or advertising production companies that want to poke around our histories but only with commercial interests. That kind of anthropologic cis-hetero gaze over our history upsets me. And the capitalist exploitation of our history of persecution is scandalous. It is something I saw when I visited New York during Stonewall's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. All the shops in Manhattan were full of pride flags. Every time I entered one

of them, I would say, “thank you for joining our cause, how many trans employees do you have in this company?”

On top of the project of the archive, I also had the idea of creating a publication about queer archives that I would call *Les Amoraless* (amoraless [amoral] was the term used by the police and the cis-hetero mass media when they referred to our identities). But when I was about to launch it, I found out about another project with the same title, so I changed the name to *Moléculas Malucas*, which comes from a small study and activist group created by Néstor Perlongher and Jorge Beloqui in São Paulo in 1982. In March 2020, we were surprised by the pandemic and the quarantine, so I decided to start the publication in virtual format—not only because of these limitations, but also because I wanted something that would have a longer life than a paper publication. I brought in my friend, the queer and feminist activist Mabel Bellucci, to be part of a collective editorial board, and together we've been calling LGBT scholars, journalists, trans sex workers, and activists to share texts and testimonies. Often we use images from my collection and other archives. Mabel's queer and feminist archive is absolutely crucial, containing collections of feminist magazines from Buenos Aires in the 1980s and 1990s, materials about the fight to legalize abortion, anarchist publications, and documents on the LGBT community since the 1980s.

**C** In the past, you've mentioned that an LGBT documentation center should not be handled by cis-hetero people, because although they can take care of the materials, to some extent they don't have the same bond with the material that you might, as a member of that community.

**JQ** Absolutely. I think that the bond you have with the materials impacts the type of care you can provide. Imagine a Black movement archive managed by white people, or an archive of the Jewish community managed by a Roman Catholic apostolic person. Imagine if the Lesbian Herstory

Archives were managed by heterosexual women. There is something there that doesn't seem right. I think that the sexually dissident subjectivity of the people that manage an LGBTQ archive is a crucial contribution; there is a type of knowledge based on personal experience, a sort of community and kinship one can form with the archives of people that have lived, and suffered, similar histories to one's own.

Going back to the question, I think that a document related to our history has a meaning, an echo that impacts us differently. Certain signs, representations, documents, or texts that articulate tensions and a history of oppression will never be understood the same way by a cis-hetero person. This doesn't mean that there are gays, lesbians, and trans people who can't have fascist ideas. There are also gays and lesbians who are transphobic. It also does not mean that a cis-hetero person in a public institution will always mistreat these materials. And, also, it does not mean that there are no public institutions such as universities or public libraries that can preserve our materials well. But they will definitely relate to the materials with the distance of a history that is not theirs.

In my case, I can understand the clandestine aspect of the dirty pamphlet I found in Retiro, and all the work and risk implied in distributing it, because clandestinity and fear marked and ruined a part of my life in my family home and, in a city like Buenos Aires, where our youth was marked by an eternal sense of affective precariousness, solitude, and orphanhood. When I was 16, for example, I was detained by the police because I was talking to a boy at night on the corner of Ayacucho and Santa Fe streets, a crucial point of cruising in Buenos Aires. In 1985, I was taken to the police station by the Morality Division of the Police alongside a group of locas [fags] after a raid at a club called Line. What that pamphlet said resonates so much with part of my history, and a cis-hetero person will not understand that, no matter how hard they try. They never had to hide or con-

ceal or disguise or make their sexuality clandestine, simply because they were beneficiaries of that regime of oppression against our dissidence. The relationship that I feel towards a document about the abolition of anti-homosexuality edicts cannot be the same as someone who only saw that reality in the distance, maybe as a witness, but not as a participant.

These materials have different inscriptions for us than for cis-hetero people. Some institutions that hold these materials distribute them with watermarks, which I think is a symbolic appropriation of our history—something I oppose categorically. Archives and institutions are supposed to take care of those materials, but not put marks that connote property. That is why I want to create an archive of materials related to our history that is accompanied and taken care of by people and scholars who are steeped in that reality from their personal experiences, or genealogically and emotionally related to the struggles of our ancestors.

**C** Is there any specific practice that you have in mind when you differentiate these modes of archiving?

**JQ** I classify according to the names of persons, movements, or publications. When it is a personal archive, I use their names, but only if the people themselves used their names when they were activists. Otherwise, I only use initials. There are cases in which we cannot fully confirm that someone was able to come out, or whether they would have chosen a different way of life. My instinct is to do all possible research, uncover all the information possible, because there might be a clue in what I discover that fits into the larger puzzle of our history, which is oftentimes so hard to piece together. So, sometimes I try to go as far as I can to find missing information, like last names—sometimes even Google can take you to interesting places related to our history when you begin by searching only for that missing name. But, on the other hand, I feel like keeping some obstacles in the archive helps preserve the nature of queer history,



because that is what gave it its identity—the omissions, the deletions, the silences caused by fear—and respecting those omissions is to some extent respecting our history. In part we survived our unlawfulness and persecution through enigma, and that enigmatic past shaped our history, a history of complexity. Sometimes I think that refusing to respond to external demands for transparency, clarity, and overexposure—all of which insist on revealing the keys of our silence—can be a form of resistance, a queer mode of archiving. As an example, it happened to me that one of the archives that I acquired was given to me on the condition that some of its documents (which include personal stories) can only be made public in 30 years, that is, when the person who gives the archive to me, as well as her siblings, will likely be dead.

I would also like to point out that, in my country, queer archives have a much lower survival rate than other social and political movements. They are much more fragile than any other archive. The genocide caused by Aids—due to the criminal inactivity of politicians and the complicit silence of society, the church and the mass media—took away hundreds of our ancestors. These were times in which same-sex marriage was unthinkable, and even less that we could have kids. Many times, if someone was sick, they would kick their partners out of the house. People were buried in an utmost solitude. All documents, photos, letters, ephemera belonging to these people were thrown into the garbage. In many cases (especially among the middle class) parents, siblings and relatives of those who died would keep only a handful of documents—house deeds, bank statements, car ownership titles. The rest of the papers were thrown out, as they were stains on the image of the family. There was also real terror, especially under military dictatorships, because having any paper that was evidenced of sexual deviance could send you to jail for months. People had to go into sexual exile, they had to travel with the least possible evidence of their sexuality. These are the reasons why our archives

have a history of destruction, and they speak about their fragility over time.

**C** Can you tell us about the Third World Gay Revolution group. How did you find out about them?

**JQ** I was doing research on the Frente de Liberación Homosexual in Argentina. In the only issue of a publication called *Homosexuales* from July 1973—which is a unique archival piece—they reproduce the TWGR [Third World Gay Revolution] manifesto, “Los oprimidos no se convertirán en opresores,” which was credited as authored by “Grupo de Homosexuales Negros y Latinoamericanos de Nueva York,” but in the end it said “Third World Gay Revolution.” That rather ostentatious name and the gesture of crossing borders caught my attention, so I started to look into its origin. Without it being my initial intention, I ended up tracing the group’s chronology, from its origin to its dissolution. I plan to publish this story on the *Moléculas Malucas* website soon.<sup>1</sup> Until now, nobody has bothered to write about that small group.

**C** How did those publications come to Argentina?

**JQ** There were two Argentine members that were key in the formation of the group, Juan Carlos Vidal and Néstor Latrónico. The group was short lived (1970–1971). Latrónico and Vidal came to Buenos Aires separately, though both in 1973, and then joined the Grupo Eros of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual, bringing along their experience in the TWGR and other groups in the gay movement both in terms of activism and graphic design. That experience influenced

<sup>1</sup> This story will be made available at <https://www.moleculasmalucas.com/post/el-third-world-gay-revolution>

the clandestine publication *Somos*,<sup>2</sup> which was based on an idea by Latrónico.

**C** Then the group morphed to one called, Latin Gay Revolution. How did that happen?

**JQ** The Latin Gay Revolution only lasted for a few months and was created simultaneously with the dissolution of the TWGR. Latrónico and Vidal created it, and it was them and other people from Cuba and Puerto Rico. They only produced one document, a public letter addressed to white American gays, where they questioned them about their blindness to the oppressions suffered by Third World *compañeros*, and to the repression of gays in Castro's Cuba. After that experience, some members of this group, in April 1972, produced *Afuera*, a journal directed by Latrónico and Vidal, with a clearer activist perspective, with texts about sexual politics, but also illustrations and poems. And there they published a statement by the FLH of Argentina, which they would join the year after, when they returned to the country.

**C** We're really interested in the use of the term "Third World." Were there more gay activists using it around the 1970s and 1980s?

**JQ** At least in Argentina, the only time I saw it used was in the texts by the TWGR. They also used it when they translated the lesbian manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman," written by Radicalesbians in 1970, which was published in the first issue of *Somos*, in 1973, translated by Latrónico under the name Revolución Homosexual del Tercer Mundo.

<sup>2</sup> *Somos* was a journal published by the Frente de Liberación Homosexual in Argentina between 1971 and 1976. Amongst their collaborators were Néstor Latrónico, who had been part of the Third World Gay Revolution group in New York (1970–1971), as well as prominent Argentine poet, scholar, and activist Néstor Perlongher.

**C** You also found letters written by Juan Carlos. Did you find anything interesting about the creation of the group in those letters?

**JQ** Juan Carlos Vidal and Néstor Latrónico arrived in NY in 1968. First they lived in the Lower East Side, where they had friends from Puerto Rico, and were in touch with members of the Young Lords. Then they moved to Brooklyn, where Juan Carlos had a silk screen machine, and he started doing serigraphy works for the Young Lords, which he did from 1969 to 1971. Actually, "What We Want, What We Believe" (1970), their first proclamation with the Third World Gay Revolution group, is based on similar platforms by the Black Panthers from 1966 and the Young Lords from 1969, but adapted to the realities of gay, trans and lesbians people. In his letters from New York to his family from 1971, Juan Carlos announced that he was creating a group with revolutionary artists and writers from Latin America and that they intended to publish a magazine. That magazine is *Afuera*, which they published the year after. Juan Carlos thought that true change could only happen with a popular revolution, and he supported explicitly armed struggle. The visuals he made for the TWGR makes this posture clear.

**Juan Queiroz (b. 1969, Buenos Aires) currently co-manages the online publication Moléculas Malucas (moleculasmalucas.com) and is gathering an archive with documents related to sexual dissidences.**

# Alan Michelson

*This interview was conducted with Alan Michelson over email in June 2020.*

**Curators** Linear perspective, which is a Western invention, can also be seen as a technology of domination. Much like surveillance technology, vision itself can be said to be a certain kind of technology and, historically, has emerged alongside the military-industrial complex. How does your work destabilize the tenets of linear perspective and perhaps lend itself to an evocation of what Jolene Rickard calls “visual sovereignty”?<sup>1</sup>

**Alan Michelson** Linear perspective is a centralizing system of representation that privileges the single viewpoint. Its political analog would be monarchy—its psychological one, narcissism. It is a technology developed during the Renaissance, also the era of European exploration and colonization which helped finance it. Like Cartesian projection, perspective is a cultural mapping of space that renders it uniform and quantifiable, facilitating its exploitation or expropriation. From the nautical chart to the land survey, such projection was a major tool of Western colonialism, and in its military application—artillery, for example—assisted in the projection of deadly force against non-European peoples.

I am drawn to the extended horizontal format of the panorama, one shared by the wampum belt, the Haudenosaunee/Eastern Woodland cultural feature employed in diplomacy. Panoramic art complicates and expands perspective, as does the art of diplomacy. In some of my works, I inject Western panoramic space and media, including video, into Haudenosaunee templates of space and relation, like the Two Row Wampum, which graphically symbolizes an ethical model for sharing space. A wampum belt is a woven matrix of purple and white shell beads arranged in a culturally

<sup>1</sup> See Jolene Rickard. “Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (2011): 465–482.



legible design—an Indigenous analog to digital video’s matrix of pixels. I suppose you could say that my work destabilizes the tenets of linear perspective by eschewing it—and the destabilizing effects of colonization it has helped foster—in favor of a visuality anchored in Haudenosaunee philosophy and materiality, which certainly comports with Jolene’s notion of visual sovereignty, who included my work in her essay on the subject.

**C** Since 2001, your videos, and more recently your augmented reality, or AR, work has used technology as a means to surface the multiple, layered temporalities embedded in a site and to critique the conditions which contributed to their erasure in the first place. In these works, light is often used as both material and subject, again thinking about light as a mechanism of domination and also a fundamental, perhaps universal, tool in art. Can you talk about your turn to video in 2001 and to AR and your usage of light in these works?

**AM** *Mespat* [2001] was my first video installation and consisted of panoramic video projected onto a large screen of white turkey feathers. More recently, in *Hanödaga:yas (Town Destroyer)* [2018], I projected video onto a white replica bust of George Washington and, in *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (Theatre of the World)* [2019], onto four white globes. Projecting video onto still solid objects creates tension between the object’s materiality and video’s materiality, which is moving colored light and sound, and also between the object’s iconography and the video’s content—dialectical tensions I exploit. Each informs and distorts the other. Setting up that tension is a creative strategy of mine, and I’ve used it over a range of media, most recently in two AR works with Steven Fragale in my Whitney show. Through its technology, nothing short of magic, AR allowed me to manifest in the museum what Manifest Destiny destroyed or rationalized, a Lenape tobacco field in the lobby and Washington’s scorched-earth campaign against our Haudenosaunee home-

lands, which became the bulk of New York state, in a fifth floor passageway.

My first experiment in using light as a medium was in *At Sea* [1990], a site-specific installation at Snug Harbor Cultural Center, in which I installed a pair of diapositive photomurals and dozens of colored acetates in the two rows of windows of an architectural hyphen between two historic buildings at the former home for sailors. One mural was an enlargement of an 1893 image of the sailors seated on the benches in the hyphen and the other was a contemporary photograph of a group of homeless people on benches in Tompkins Square Park. It was a contemporary version of stained glass, referencing the nautical paintings on glass in one of the buildings, and created a chapel-like effect. Because the murals were transparencies, they took on the color and texture of their external surroundings—the yellow brick of an adjoining building, for example, and the changing light of day. I used light similarly in *Third Bank of the River* [2009], a much later public art piece, a large, transparent, etched-glass mural, which is also both front and backlit and changes with the daylight.

Light was used as a metaphor in American landscape painting, including that of the Hudson River School. In *Shattemuc* [2009], a video panorama commissioned for the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson’s exploratory voyage that was shot at night from a boat, I trained a marine searchlight onto the riverbank on a section where Hudson’s crew had a bloody skirmish with the local Native people. It was a powerful light whose square beam illuminated the passing landscape, seeming to paint it out of the darkness. I was referencing the Hudson Night Line boats which once plied the river and illuminated monuments for tourists, but also the sinister aspect of light as a tool of surveillance and control, aspects heightened by the fact that our boat was a former NYPD patrol launch skippered by a retired state trooper.

**C** You mention the distinction between human and geological

time and how you're interested in bridging those different temporalities. How does your work intervene in these distinctions and what is the role of duration in your video work and, as a concept, in your practice in general?

**AM** Geological time is the cosmic history of the Earth—measured in millions of years, dwarfing human time. In many of my works, I am surfacing the unmarked and unexpected history of a particular site, history that's possibly instructive. One such work is *Earth's Eye* [1990], which addresses the death by pollution and burial by landfill of Collect Pond, a large, deep, spring-fed pond in Lower Manhattan in the early 1800's. A pond created by geologic forces eons ago, which sustained many Indigenous forms of life for generations, settlers ruined in barely two hundred years and built a notorious prison and execution ground known as the "Tombs" on its infill. That sequence, from pond to Tomb, I find heartbreaking and noteworthy. On Manhattan Island, and all over America, "progress" transformed the landscape beyond recognition, levelling hills, converting streams into sewers, damming and polluting rivers, and wiping out wetlands. We are all paying for that progress now with climate change and other environmental disasters.

The temporal is always present in the spatial, even if only latently so. Through its ability to photographically capture time, space, and sound, and its compelling immediacy, video is an effective medium with which to ponder and translate history. Duration is built in, and can express real time, or through editing, whole periods or cycles. In *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (Theatre of the World)*, shown in Venice last year, I compressed five hundred years of colonial history into less than twelve minutes of video.

**C** Although your works sound bold condemnations of settler colonialism and critiques of art history and institutions, they seem to also have a special attention to sensorial pleasure. The gesture of evoking or registering things with, say,

the camera or the reliefs, carries a sense of both denunciation and beauty. In a work like *Shattemuc*, for example, there is the reference to the violence of settler colonialism, its continuation through tourism, and also art history (e.g. the Hudson River School)—but the images and the music give the viewer an eerily pleasurable experience. How do you see the tensions between the critical and the more alluring or sensorially pleasing aspects of your artworks?

**AM** Art can express both, which is one of its unique powers. Watching a Shakespeare drama, one simultaneously registers the beauty of the language, both verbal and non-verbal, the actors and the set, and the depth of tragedy unfolding. The beauty establishes grounds for the tragedy and conveys its pain in visceral ways that engage and move audiences.

**C** Can you talk about how you are appropriating and transforming Western artforms, genres, and practices, and what these modes of appropriation effect in your work? For example, you reference the Hudson River School in your work *Twilight, Indian Point* [2003] and moving panoramas in *Shattemuc* and *Mespat*.

**AM** I love many Western art forms, genres, and practices, but not the ideology they often express, even by default. Hudson River School painters bought into Manifest Destiny. Their luminous, ethnically cleansed landscapes, like those of photographers who succeeded them, romanticize the Americanization of the continent, dismissing as collateral damage the expropriation and genocidal removal of Native people from their homelands. Moving panoramas—landscape or sea-scape paintings on miles of canvas unspooled for paying audiences—were a proto-cinematic, virtual form of tourism to exotic locales colonized by Europeans or Americans. In-visible in both of these genres is the violent, tragic, criminal history underpinning them, something that my appropriation of them reveals.

**C** In the sixties, land artists became known for their ambitious interventions into natural settings. Your public artwork *Mantle* [2018] references Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* [1970], but unlike Smithson your work takes into consideration the history of the land and the symbolic importance of the form of the spiral, which in *Mantle* is based on the spiral shell embroideries on the historic Powhatan's Mantle [c. 1608]. Works such as *Earth's Eye*, *Cult of Memory*, and *Permanent Title* address issues of land ownership, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation via industrialization and urbanization specifically in the setting of Lower Manhattan. Can you talk about how you approach land and how that's distinct from the practices of canonical American land artists?

**AM** *Mantle* references the spiral as an ancient Indigenous form and the form of the shell embroidery on Powhatan's Mantle, thought to represent the nations of his confederacy. As a large contemporary earthwork embedded, via cut and fill, in the slope at the foot of Richmond's Capitol Square, *Mantle* references Native mounds. Despite the prominence of *Spiral Jetty* in contemporary art, it is a secondary reference at best, since Smithson's work and the work of the other land artists owes an obvious but unacknowledged debt to the Indigenous mound builders.

Their practices are ahistorical and despite a dystopian undercurrent, largely formal. I approach land from the standpoint of an Indigenous artist, honoring its beauty, lamenting its history, decrying its theft and abuse, and the ongoing abuse of Indigenous people by settler colonialism.

Standing up for the land is another form of beauty.

*Alan Michelson's biography can be found in the first booklet of this catalog.*

# *Rashaad Newsome*

*The interview below is compiled and edited from two conversations with Rashaad Newsome in 2020, one on March 6, in person, and another on May 19, over Zoom.*

**Curators** Two weeks after our studio visit in March the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York and events previously scheduled to take place moved to virtual platforms. Within virtual space, what has been exciting to you and what models or platforms do you think people could be utilizing?

**Rashaad Newsome** I've been thinking a lot about the idea of livestream. I'm finding myself in many conversations about livestream. People are trying to reproduce reality-based experiences. Why?! What is "live" in this time? Reality isn't offering much in the way of hope, at the moment, so I want to explore the imaginative possibilities of augmented reality. It is the world of the imagination and I'm trying to go as far down that rabbit hole as possible.

This project [at the Shed] is an exercise in playing with that.<sup>1</sup> My friend [April] DJ-ed live on Instagram Live and filmed it. One of my dancers, Legendary Monster Mon\_Teese, used the PHANTASM lens that I created in Snapchat last year to film himself dancing, the vocalist Precious went on Facebook Live to do their vocals and filmed it. All of these livestreams were then given to me and I collaged them into one video. They were all done live, separately and at different times, and then the amalgamated video will be screened live on the Shed's Instagram. That live video seamlessly flows right into a live DJ-set by April. Was it live when we each did our thing? Is it live in the moment the video is being premiered? It's really playing with this idea of what

<sup>1</sup> *Go Off! Joy in Defiance*. Creative direction by April Hunt (DJ) and Rashaad Newsome (artist), with Legendary Monster Mon\_Teese (performer) and Precious (commentator). The Shed, New York, NY, June 14, 2020. <https://theshed.org/program/157-april-hunt-and-rashaad-newsome-with-legendary-monster-mon-teese-and-precious>.

is live in this time of livestream. The experimentation with these various platforms results in a transmedia experience.

But then, there's also the whole idea of avatars—after coming off of creating *Being* and starting that project with this idea of making this physical robot and then thinking, why does it need to be physical?<sup>2</sup> There's that maker-side where you want to make something physical, but if you're not bound by physicality, isn't that more interesting? You can be anything at any time. For instance, on your phone, you can be a unicorn or a chicken (*laughs*). It's really as far as your mind can go. I'm thinking a lot about that and what is truly possible in that space.

**C** So many people are just trying to recreate reality right now, and recreate what existed prior to this moment.

**RN** This moment is about reimagining everything that wasn't working before, and I think there's something to the gatekeepers no longer having the power they used to have. People are finally looking at the stain of white supremacy on the world and having conversations in a way that I have never experienced before, this is really exciting. What does the contemporary art landscape look like when everyone is being held accountable for their bad behavior?

**C** It becomes a question for us around how online-space is its own space and has its own kind of reality—and different functions that also require their own kind of treatment. There's no easy translation.

**RN** I've been having conversations with friends who are talking about how they want to go out and have a good time. I'm

<sup>2</sup> *Being* is a cloud-based artificial intelligence humanoid created by Newsome and programmed with the works of theorists such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Michel Foucault.



thinking about how to make the virtual premiere of *Shade Compositions* (Pittsburgh) a kind of outing.

Premiering the project this way seemed to me like a cool way to reimagine the viewer's live-art experience. When talking to potential partners we discussed that maybe we could have a virtual cocktail reception in advance of the screening where people could get dressed up, and have a drink together from the comfort of their own home. There could even be a red-carpet type situation where people can share what they're wearing. Rather than even thinking about a reality-based version of that, what if you just use avatars and you can come to an event literally dressed as an avatar of your own design, whatever you want. It was an imaginative way of having an evening out that could never be matched by reality.

**C** That's also a nice departure from capitalism and thinking about brands, only to still be able to get dressed up, have a night out, and not think about it in terms of what brand you're wearing but rather the other possibilities of what you could be, or other beings you could be.

**RN** Right now I'm working on this year's King of Arms Art Ball, which is going to be virtual, taking place July 10. When I was doing this event before, a big part of it was trying to use the architecture of ballroom to get people to think critically about the world they live in and lean into their imagination—rather than acquisition as a way to comment on [the world]. I'm excited about this one because in some ways shelter-in-place forces people to be creative in ways they may not have known they could be. They will also have access to resources via their phone like face apps, augmented reality lenses, and such. It's going to be more about who can be the most inventive, not who can acquire something.

**C** In our last visit, we talked about the changes you've witnessed in the global vogue community, which prompted you

to begin work on your forthcoming documentary. When did you start to observe these changes, and what has that evolution looked like?

**RN**

I started to see it in 2014. I lived in Paris for a year in 2005, off and on, and when I was there, there was no ballroom scene. Then when I went back in 2014, which is when I started to make this film, there was this huge scene and it was like it had always been there. It was just as big as New York. I went to, like, three different balls when I was there and there were tons of people, I was so amazed at how fast that happened. Ballroom [in New York] is a Black and Latinx queer experience—but there, it was all different types of folks and it wasn't just queer, it was all types of sexual identities. There were also many Paris chapters of US houses. The first new house that I met was the House of Ladurée, which you see in the sample clip when they asked me to be the godfather.

From a performance standpoint, I see them as being a little more creative because the culture is so new that people are really excited and they just want to do it. A lot of that, too, has to do with a socialist system where the government takes care of everyone in that country to a certain extent, in a way that in America that's not the case. So the realities of day-to-day lives expenses are a little bit heavier on people here, so people do really need to get something out of what they're doing which I think can often affect one's creativity.

One thing we're exploring in [the documentary] is also the rise of cisgender women in the scene. There is a huge group of cisgender women, particularly white women, who have entered the scene, and I'm very interested in how these folks are thinking about what they do. There are some women who are amazing. They come in and people don't think that they're going to be able to do it. It's such a weird thing to see—the fact that they're there and voguing becomes a spectacle—and people go crazy for it. You'll see a [white

cisgender] woman battling, let's say, a Black trans woman who is equally as amazing, if not way more amazing, but somehow it will be eclipsed by the spectacle of a white woman voguing in that space. I'm wondering in what ways that is reinforcing certain racial stereotypes, and in what ways the Black community has internalized white supremacy and is enacting that on themselves, or how queer community has internalized homophobia and is enacting that on themselves. That's something I really want to explore in the film.

When I started making the film, I wanted to show a global picture, but because the culture is growing so fast we're rethinking the decision to stick to certain countries and territories. Now, we're also thinking about hitting other places because there are interesting stories. For example, in Russia there's a whole scene. It's a challenging film to make because it's about my work, so it's a process film, but my medium is people. These people have experiences and stories. Then there's this culture that the people are participating in, so there's multiple stories being told. We're trying to figure out how to tell all those stories in a feature-length format.

Another reason why I feel a certain sense of urgency around making [the documentary] is because of the legacy of Black cultural production being co-opted and then sold back to Black people. We saw that with rock 'n' roll, with jazz, with hip-hop—and vogue culture at this very moment is on that precipice because it's being taken on by so many different people globally. At a certain point, the people who created it will be erased from it. There's already so much language out there. When the work has been cited, there's some reason that people need to cite Madonna or *Paris is Burning*... like it needs to center that white interpretation of this culture to access it. Vogue is at the precipice of that moment where it's going to be co-opted and those people are going to be erased. This film has to be made to rebut that and get [the history] from the mouths of the practitioners.

I don't think that culture has fixed boundaries. Culture is supposed to grow and expand, and that's what is so fantastic.

People can interact with it and do different things, but it's problematic when it's being done in an inequitable society.

**C** Your role in this film reminds us of *Shade Compositions*, where you've spoken about your role as that of a conductor of an ensemble.

**RN** When I think critically about the orchestra and connections to a Eurocentric practice, I also see [the ensemble] as a choir, which is a lot more diasporic, for example, when you think about the Black church. I see myself as a conductor of a gospel choir, and I play with that, too, in terms of my wardrobe.

[The documentary] made me realize how the role that I play in all of my work mirrors the work of a director. As a director, you're working with large groups of people and you have to know how to balance being in control so that something can actually be produced, but also leave room for people to have a voice and to enhance what is trying to be produced while also pushing people beyond their limits so that when it's done, they can actually be proud of it.

**C** Do you think there's a difference in how the mechanisms at work in *Shade Compositions* play out in live performance as opposed to watching a video of it?

**RN** Absolutely. Because you're in a gallery or your own home, you're safe. It's a safe way to consume without being challenged at all. In the live performance, the audience must deal with the gaze of the performers as they attempt to consume them. I think my physical resistance to being consumed in live performance has a different effect as well. It came from thinking about [whether it's possible to] create counter-hegemonic work in historically hegemonic spaces. One could argue that's impossible. Having my back to the audience makes it harder for me to be consumed. I'm focused on the performers and they are focused on me, to some extent. The looking relationships are always in opposition

to the audience as a way to complicate the consumption of our Black bodies.

**C** What is your thinking around the usage of repetition, which is a central device in *Shade Compositions*?

**RN** That's my way to get to abstraction. When you see that front row [in *Shade Compositions*], for instance, making a gesture (*does smack gesture*), you're like, "I know that," but after a while, you lose sight that they're smacking and it becomes rhythmic. It becomes hypnotizing, you lose sight of the act of what they're doing, and you get lost in the sonic experience. That's where the repetition comes in.

They are also improvising, which is deeply connected to the Black American experience. It's what we have done and continue to do in the face of our complicated history. It's how we make something out of nothing. In this case, nothing is a gesture that produces a sound. They create an array of narratives that bring forth that gesture. Those gestures then become music and that music then becomes both the method for our survival and an object of study for us as we try to understand our survival. I believe what's happening in the streets across the country is a form of improvisation. People are fed up with the corrupt, unfair, untrustworthy, and violent government systems in America. They don't know what to do at this point, so they are improvising.

One thing that I always noticed that happens for the group is that there's this moment when they get to this place where they transcend entirely, after making this gesture for a very long time, and at a certain point they start to move like a machine. Like someone will be like (*smacking gesture*), and then the person in the middle will be like (*smacking gesture*), and then someone else will be like (*smacking gesture x 3*), and their bodies are moving in the way that the rhythm is going and you see this kind of movement going through the sections. That's the moment when I'm like, okay, they're in it, and the improvisation becomes de-

liberate, and that's when I start to go off with the effects because now I know they have completely let go and can handle anything I throw at them. It's the most exciting part. I'm close, so I see it in detail, but I've also seen how the audience sees it. This moment is also something that I think translates into the video version as well.

**C** We wanted to ask you about the relationship between the archive and abstraction, specifically in the context of vogue. Are you thinking about your work as an archive that you're trying to build? What is the level of abstraction that you bring into it?

**RN** It's already in the realm of abstraction. What I've been thinking critically about lately is erasure. I'm thinking a lot, lately, about erasure regarding abstraction. *Being* looks the way they look not because they are Black, or because I'm trying to make a Black robot, but because when I was thinking about *Being*, I was thinking that they are beyond a body, beyond a physicality, they don't need to look like anything, and that's what's incredible. So, I'm like, well, how do you engender an image that is entirely non-binary?

Where does the aesthetics of abstraction come from as we know it in the West? African art, Cubism, Surrealism. When you start to think about abstraction, it is a diasporic practice. I'm thinking about abstraction as something that is not only in art practice but also a way of life. The existence of the African-American is rooted in abstraction, too. The African-American experience is a collage.

All of the work I'm doing could be considered an archive of the dance form [vogue], but I'm coming back now to this idea of the archive through *Being*. During my residency at the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence we are thinking about what the archive looks like in the diaspora, a griot. I see *Being 2.0* as a digital griot. This fall, I am creating a small motion capture studio to capture the movements of vogue practitioners proficient in styles

ranging from Old Way-vogue Femme and all their subsets. We will apply this data to the *Being* avatar rig and animate it. Also, I am writing a script for *Being* to perform a lecture/dance workshop to function as a reimagining of a Black queer archive. I hope to make the archive publicly accessible to bring forth new possibilities for research and an enhanced academic experience.

**C** It feels like *Icon*, which was in your Studio Museum show, serves as a transition point between the videos you were making documenting performances, and your videos working with technology.<sup>3</sup> How were you thinking about computer technology, video programming, or animation in *Icon*?

**RN** I wanted to move away from analog collage. I had a lot of training in post-production, so I wanted to do collage but in a video space—thinking again about that idea of abstraction, and how, in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, abstract artists flattened the surface to depict different sides and angles that suggested three-dimensionality. Within the digital space, I wanted to bring back the depth and this idea of the work being a window onto a scene. I was coming off of all that work that was using heraldry as a way to talk about the culture of domination. I was thinking of the beginnings of heraldry, which is part of ornament, which is a part of the Baroque. When considering the beginnings of the Baroque, I came to the Basilica. Ornament and heraldry are often used as a framing device on this type of architecture. I was also considering architecture's place within the culture of domination, and how it's often used between cities and nations as a source of power. Architecture became the starting point for the work. I inserted the Black body because there's this connection between the body and baroque architecture, the Vitruvian

<sup>3</sup> *Rashaad Newsome: THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO SEE*, organized by Amanda Hunt (Assistant Curator), The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY, March 24–June 26, 2016. <https://studiomuseum.org/exhibition/rashaad-newsome-what-i-want-see>.

principles, the ribbed vaults, etc. Black bodies were erased from this era of art.

Recently I did a talk at the Getty, in conversation with the show they did about Balthazar who was one of the original kings that were present for the Christ child's birth. He was Black, but historically, in painting, he's been painted white. They had gathered all of the paintings of him as he really was. Again, you think about how the Black body is erased from history or put on the margins, so I was thinking, let me pull that body in and make it present. It's a reclaiming of that body.

[In *Icon*], you see the body in that architecture engages in a dance of freedom. As the environment tries to impose limitations on the body, it continually expands the space. You're sort of going into these new worlds that resemble video game aesthetics. That choice came from thinking about the whole idea of levels—(laughs) There's levels to this shit—and how you're continually trying to decolonize and how that's a never-ending task. You're always just going to another level, but you never really win the game. It's about just staying in the game.

**Rashaad Newsome's biography can be found in the first booklet of this catalog.**



# Amelia Bande

## *El Estallido / The Outbreak by Amelia Bande*

On October 14, 2019 protests erupted in Santiago, Chile. For five days, public high-school students protested the rise of the subway cost by organizing massive fare evasions. By October 19, the uprising had gone beyond the subway price and the students. The entire city was in the street protesting. No specific political group took credit. It was a combination of exhaustion, fury and nothing else to lose. The facade of normalcy, of 30 years of democracy since the end of Pinochet's regime in 1990, was broken. Latin America's "strongest" economy showed the many leaks and failures of its capitalist experiment. My friends were in the street. My mom sent me and my siblings several reports via WhatsApp audio messages—we all live abroad. This one is from October 20:

*Mis amores, here I am back home, what do you want me to say, yesterday was an unbelievable day. Everything started as just another protest and it ended with Santiago in flames. What else can I tell you? Piñera [the president] went to eat pizza with his grandson in Vitacura [a rich neighborhood], while Santiago burned away to then return to La Moneda [the government palace] and ordain a State of Emergency, sending the military to the streets. This is how things are. Very strange, very intense and today is a pseudo calm day, we are already with the emergency over us. We will see what happens. Everything was very surprising and people's anger was evident. I hope you are very well, I send you thousands of kisses, I love you very much, and I will see you all soon. That's it. Bye mis amores.*

It didn't calm down. The whole country erupted. Buildings, car dealerships, subway and bus stations were burned down; toll plazas and highways were blocked; supermarkets were looted around the entire country. For the first time since 1987, a curfew was installed. Back then we were still under Pinochet. I was 10 years old and having the military in the

street was a daily occurrence. An ocean of barricades was the landscape over which my mother drove me home from school. Somehow those fires were never scary. I knew the barricade was on the right side of history.

By November, Chile was still up in flames. We saw videos that showed cops staging the fires and the looting. And so many videos of military and police shooting and abusing people in the streets, with reports of torture, rape, and people being illegally arrested.

A friend was shot on the face by police with a rubber bullet. We used to work together in a theater more than ten years ago. I wanted to know how she was doing. She sent me this audio:

*Beautiful Amelia, I was in really bad shape, but I'm coming out of it. People send me so much love and that is a very concrete thing that nurtures you and saves you. I started the procedures in the National Institute for Human Rights. I'm documenting my injuries with the National Medical Association. I'm doing better every day, I'm going up like a plane. But I was not doing well. They were facing me and then they shot me, I saw it, it's a big trauma. I'm gonna press charges. That's what I'm doing. The situation is complex here, Amelia, if you could see it. You would not believe it. The imagination is not enough to see what I am seeing. But oh well. Okay. Let's fight with everything. Thank you my friend for thinking about me, you don't know how much it helps.*



The protests in Santiago take place in Plaza Dignidad [ex Plaza Italia], a geographical circle with historical markers of class divide. Important avenues run from the Plaza south, west and east. The subway station Baquedano rests below,

usually a combination point between two of the main lines that direct workers back home, far out, to the city's periphery; it's been closed for months. On the top floor of a building by the Plaza there is an art gallery, Galería Cima. During those first days of protests back in October, they started filming the Plaza from up high. It became a 24/7 live broadcast on YouTube. When I was still in Brooklyn, their channel was a fundamental way of staying informed. After teaching my last class of the day, I would use the classroom's projector to connect myself to the protest, watching the multitudes of people, the smoke, the singing.

In December, after the semester ended, I flew to Santiago. Before going down to the Plaza I would always check on Galería Cima's channel to get a sense of the situation. I would text with friends: *Cops are not letting people come down / Looks like there's way too much teargas / They've regained the square! ok, see you there in 30!*

Galería Cima's daily archive—they are still filming and keeping all footage, even though the protests have been mostly interrupted by coronavirus quarantine policies—has served as an audiovisual document of the many clashes between cops and protesters. It's possible to study in detail the movements and strategies of cops in their effort to reduce the crowds. Like when they approached from all sides forcing people to jump to the Mapocho River. Or when they used that extra strong tear gas that made everybody throw up, the one that left clouds of green and yellow smoke. Or the time they water cannoned an ambulance, delaying the rescue of injured protester Abel Acuña, who ended up dying. From above, the camera provides a miniature record, a choreography of resistance. We see protesters raising their organization and defense mechanisms to maintain control of the Plaza regardless of police violence. Running through the alleys, throwing rocks that hit police trucks, people open up the doors to their houses. They are not scared of strangers.

The mob was suddenly a friend of the city, because it was the city who had come out to the streets to tear it all apart.



On March 4th I landed in Los Angeles, California. A short visit becomes a long term life change with the arrival of COVID-19. I know very well I fit in the high-risk category as someone with advanced lung disease. The priority is to keep myself as far as possible from exposure to the virus. Within this framework, I turn toward an extended shelter-in-place with no end date.

My friend goes to my room in Brooklyn and packs all my things to take to storage. She video calls me and we go through my paperwork. I need to decide what I want sent to me, but I don't know what things will matter.

I speak to my doctor. She recommends I postpone the start of an immunosuppressant treatment we had planned. I create a fictional balance where I tell myself I'm safe by not going to the hospital to get my routine tests. My health insurance does not cover me out of state. In reality I know I'm being told to neglect the treatment of this chronic illness. My window of tolerance is a mirror to other people's situations. I am one person facing certain consequences. I know these are amplified for others with less resources than me, or sicker than me. Deaths begin. They precipitate and mount vigorously, COVID-19 related or not.

I'm staying in a big house where my lover lives. We joke about being stuck with each other. Coronavirus propels our story forward without much of a choice. One day I fell to the floor from so much laughing, a good sign. If one thing, I will not reject love, not now. I surrender to this sweetness, allow myself to be cared for.

I find it difficult to track down traces of how I move over each surface. Who in the house went where and what were they in touch with? Are we going to keep a tab of everybody's intimacy footprint? I touch my face too much.



The mask appears. While I was in Chile, we wore masks and protective eye wear because of teargas and rubber bullets. I had all these masks with me from the protests there. Back in November, Chilean congress passed an anti-hoodie law, giving longer jail sentences to anybody covering their faces while disrupting social order. Now, it is required to cover our faces to go outside. A few weeks ago, a young mother in New York was arrested for *not* covering her face correctly.

As I finish writing, there are buildings up in flames in Minneapolis, following the massive outrage for the racist killing of George Floyd at the hands of four cops. Quarantines are being lifted nationwide and a new wave of infections is projected at some point. In the streets of Los Angeles, New York, Denver, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Phoenix, and Washington DC, people gather with signs and anger. Exhaustion is palpable. Social media is exploding in avalanches of campaigns and inspirational quotes on systemic racism. Cops in riot gear spray chemicals, military grade tear gas, shoot rubber bullets. Protesters protect themselves with make-shift shields. Lots of them wear masks. PPE is a new normal in times of a viral pandemic. My hope is that the mask will make it impossible to recognize their faces. I was worried yesterday seeing photos of young unmasked demonstrators celebrating the Minneapolis 3rd Precinct coming down in flames. That's always the silent aftermath of a protest, the arrest and later conviction of the protester for destroying property, public and private. Even if the fire was started by an undercover cop. Governments are juggling through different absurdities

of control. In the dissolution of categories, it's always the underdog who is killed.

The virus gives permission to restrict how much closeness is allowed and under which circumstances. Still, cops will use all bodily force to subdue a citizen if they decide their movement is disruptive. I see a cop throw a black man to the ground for not following social distancing practices. The cop wears no gloves, no mask, a definite arrest, an invasion of skin, risk of contagion, all to teach a lesson. It is painful to watch him enforce policies of public protection during a health emergency by breaking all the rules himself.

Safety and risk are a spectrum in which we exist and make decisions. I left the house one day to see a friend and I hugged her. I don't owe anyone an apology for this behavior. Maybe we spoke about what kind of practices we've both been following in order to minimize our exposures, maybe we didn't. It seemed safe to hug, I wanted to do it.

Health and sickness are a continuum too. There are no clear-cut borders between the healthy and the sick. We are all both things, at all times, in different stages of thriving or decay. The more visible my disability becomes, the less I can escape a public assessment of my health.

When the *estallido* happened in Chile, those fighting the police directly were called *Primera Linea*, a First Line of bodies against reprisal. These revolts were happening simultaneously in many places worldwide. When the pandemic came, we had to conceive of our bodies differently, still in a type of warzone. Medical workers tending to the coronavirus are called First Responders. Both the protest and the hospital are scenarios of body exposure. In such physical vulnerability, interdependence is what propels us into awareness and survival.

I've been curiously rubbing my heart against the limits and texture of nostalgia, things I've lost in the past few months. I don't know if this is productive. When the violence we encounter is systemic and global, we become fugitives, running away from the threat that keeps biting our feet in all places. What I know is that self-care alone won't keep my neighbor alive. I want to say *hi* to you and ask, *what do you need, how can I help?*

There's an empty spot, it gets activated when we text each other. A reaction of closeness, despite actual distance. We create lines between us, to remain together, not only for storytelling or anecdotes, more like electric signals of connection, a photo you took of some dish you made, a song I sing on a Zoom call, a package that arrives from the pharmacy with my medication, all of that money donated to the bail funds, the dykes everywhere and their mutual aid, our acts of solidarity not being enough, to drive your friend to the testing site, the flowers you picked up for me on your walk, and the flames, the burning, all those buildings coming down, the fear, the rage, our faces, our love for each other.





