

Of Other Futures // MENU

The Age of New Babylon // Lethaby Gallery, London N1C 4AA // 24-11-2018

Mise en place // Of Other Futures is a discussion dedicated to exploring the potentiality of otherness within the frame of contemporary art practices. You are invited to rethink ideas of identity beyond representational models and to investigate the role of transnational connections and technology in reframing our understanding of otherness. This is an opportunity to consider different ways of engaging with the diverse nature of art histories and future potentialities, which can often get marginalised in the academic setting.

Les hôtes // *The Age of New Babylon* is the Lethaby Gallery's first student-led exhibition. Curated by Central Saint Martins alum Samboleap Tol and final-year student Sara Gulamali. **Cédric Fauq** is Assistant Curator at Nottingham Contemporary. His independent practice focuses on developing exhibitions and performances aiming at complexifying the relationship between display / blackness / representation. **Paul Goodwin** is a curator and urbanist based in London. Paul's trans-disciplinary research, writing and curatorial practice revolves around exploring the creative potential of both cities and exhibitions as sites of aesthetic, socio-cultural and political intervention. **Annie Jael Kwan** is an independent curator, writer, researcher and producer based in London. In 2012 she founded the curatorial initiative Something Human to focus her practice-led research on cultural identity politics and explorations surrounding movement across borders. **Abbas Zahedi** constructs multifaceted situations that explore the psychopolitics of contemporary reality. Often taking his own life as a performative point of departure; his proposition of neo-diaspora for the Diaspora Pavilion in Venice (2017) sought to disrupt notions of origin and settled identities.

Amuse-bouche // We wish to expand the idea of an image to encompass anything which activates the imagination – whether that be a visual work or a piece of sound or text. Traditionally, such images were a way of organising the world into fixed cultures and histories. However with the rise of new technologies, images have gained the ability to multiply and spread, allowing them to slip out of their frames and gain new life as performative beings. As a result, an ever-changing fluidity displaces things that were previously seen as fixed – such as the recurring nature of selfies compared to a definitive portrait. Our use of the term **live-archive** is a direct reference to this dual nature, which gives the images of today their seductive openness; highlighting the endless remixing of our bodies with visual, linguistic and poetic objects. We believe that live-archiving can help to reframe our understanding of otherness by conveying the multiplicities contained within ourselves and the networks that we inhabit. This approach helps us to understand that things are in constant flow and flux. It shows that without a clear centre and periphery, everything has the potential for difference and (de)centrality at one and the same time. (*Exhibition text, The Age of New Babylon, Lethaby Gallery, Central Saint Martins, UAL 2018*)

Soup // In reference to today's title, we are suggesting that attendees familiarise themselves with *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* by Michel Foucault; this text examines cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'other': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside.

*"Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that **the boat is a floating piece of space, 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** and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their **gardens**, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development, but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates."* (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986)

Hors d'oeuvres // "Several years back, if I made the statement, "We demand the right to opacity," or argued in favor of this, whoever I was speaking to would exclaim indignantly: "Now it's back to barbarism! How can you communicate with what you don't understand?" But in 1989, and before very diverse audiences, when the same demand was formulated, it aroused new interest. Who knows? Maybe, in the meanwhile, the topicality of the question of differences (the right to difference) had been exhausted...But difference itself can still contrive to reduce things to the Transparent...If we examine the process of "understanding" people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency... In order to understand and thus accept you... As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to become cornered in any essence; I shall also pay attention to not mixing it into any amalgam. Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it... Human behaviors are fractal in nature. If we become conscious of this and give up trying to reduce such behaviors to the obviousness of a transparency, this will, perhaps, contribute to lightening their load, as every individual begins not grasping his own motivations, taking himself apart in this manner." **(Glissant, E. Poetics of Relation 1997)**

"Here, I would like to put forth a question What is at stake in the act of curating a critically engaged group exhibition? To be more precise, after all the uprisings, economic and social turmoil, strikes, political battles, protests, and deaths of this eventful epoch - in which a fairer sociopolitical world stage seemed near at one point but now seems so far away - what is at stake in curating such exhibitions, or what question(s) does the act of curating such exhibitions make evident? My proposition is that the challenge is to envision - through the thoughtful curating of group exhibitions - thinking of political and ethical judgment without the notion of communal will. In other words, it is the challenge of making political judgment and positioning felt without reverting to the use of a universal subject. **(Bassam El Baroni, Universality without a Universal Subject)**

"Perhaps the outrage meriting a name like Anthropocene is about the destruction of places and times of refuge for people and other critters. I along with others think the Anthropocene is more a boundary event than an epoch, like the K-Pg boundary between the Cretaceous and the Paleogene. The Anthropocene marks severe discontinuities; what comes after will not be like what came before. I think our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge. Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge.

If there is to be multispecies ecojustice, which can also embrace diverse human people, it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species. Bacteria and fungi abound to give us metaphors; but, metaphors aside (good luck with that!), we have a mammalian job to do, with our biotic and abiotic sym-poietic collaborators, co-laborers. We need to make kin sym-chthonically, sym-poetically. Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with—become-with, compose-with—the earth-bound." **(Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene,: Haraway, D. 2015)**

"History has forced the status of outlaws upon both, upon pariahs and parvenus alike. The latter have not yet accepted the great wisdom of Balzac's "On ne parvient pas deux fois"; thus they don't understand the wild dreams of the former and feel humiliated in sharing their fate. Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of "indecenty," get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted." **("We Refugees" Hannah A.)**