

Sun 20 Mar
4.45-6pm

Visualising the Ends of Growth

by TJ Demos, moderated by Angela YT Chan

Live transcript

While every effort has been made to provide an accurate written record of this event, some errors may exist in this transcript.

If you require further information please contact cmasters@nottinghamcontemporary.org

SPEAKERS

Canan Batur, T.J.Demos, Angela YT Chan, Theo Reeves-Evison

00:30 Canan Batur

So now we're in the last segment of this two day collective enquiry and discussion that we've been having with After Growth and we're completing today with T.J.Demos and Angela Chan's contribution. Titled Visualising the End of Growth, our keynote speaker T.J.Demos will speculate on what the symposium has been thinking about, what comes after growth. This is not the first time T.J. has been contributing or involved in Nottingham Contemporary's programme. The first time being with Uneven Geographies, Art and Globalisation in 2010, and the second in 2015, through the Rights of Nature exhibition as well as the follow up. Today T.J. will be joining us online with Angela Chan. And I'm just gonna read a bit from their bios for T.J. and Angela. T.J. Demos is the Patricia and Rowland Rebele endowed chair in art history in the department of history of art and visual culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and founding director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. Demos is the author of numerous books, including *Against The Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*, published by Sternberg Press in 2017; *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, again published by Sternberg Press in

msdnittoI Contemporary

2016; The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis, published by the Duke University Press, in 2013, winner of the College Art Association's 2014 Frank Jewett Mather Award; and Return to the Postcolony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art, again published by Sternberg Press in 2013. He recently co-edited the Routledge Companion on Contemporary Art, Visual Culture and Climate Change in 2021, was a Getty Research Institute Fellow and directed the Mellon-funded Sawyer Seminar research Beyond the End of the World. Demos was recently chair and chief curator, providing all the programming related to the 2021 Climate Emergency > Emergence programme at the Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology and he's presently working on a new book on radical futurisms.

Our moderator Angela Chan is an independent researcher, writer and an artist. Her work reconfigures power in relation to the inequity of climate change, through self archiving, rethinking geographies and speculative fiction. Her recent research-art commissions span climate framings, water scarcity and conflict, and she has held residencies with Arts Catalyst, FACT/Jerwood Arts' Digital Fellowship and Sonic Acts environmental research residency. Since 2014, Angela has produced curatorial projects and workshops as Worm: art+ecology, collaborating with artists, activists, and youth groups. She co-founded the London Chinese Science Fiction group, and co-directs the London Science Fiction Research Community. Angela is also a research consultant, having worked in international climate and cultural policy, and on climate and sustainability projects for major cultural institutions. Angela holds a joint honours undergraduate in history of art, and Scandinavian studies with Norwegian, and an MA in Climate Change: History, Culture and Society. So without further ado, I'll invite T.J. to the screen.

04:05 T.J. Demos

Hi, everyone. Hope you can hear me. Great. So thank you so

Nottingham Contemporary

much to Canan Batur and Theo Reeves-Evison. It's great to be back at least virtually at Nottingham Contemporary. Thanks, also to Angela Chan for moderating this session. It's really great to reconnect with Angela. So I'm just gonna share my screen now. And my presentation has two parts to it. One is more of a formal response to the prompt of the symposium After Growth, a symposium on post capitalist imaginaries. And then I'm going to offer some more informal thoughts that connect to the first part in terms of the kinds of art practices that I've been thinking about recently, and how I think they connect to discourse around growth and political ecology. And hopefully, that will make sense. And I look forward to the conversation in the q&a afterwards where we can pick apart some of the some of the stuff that comes up. Alright, so this is the first part where I wanted to, I want to respond to some of the material that this symposium puts on the table, which I think is really important and crucial to deal with right now. It's crucial to think beyond growth, especially when growth is understood as part of capital's fundamental law of motion, meaning producing evermore value, but devaluing those who produce it, including nature, and laboUr, which has served up both incredible social violence and disaster over decades and centuries. On the most fundamental levels, capitalism, we know is unsustainable, and as countless critics say, capitalism can't solve the problems of capitalism in the interests of capitalism. So how to imagine growth beyond capital? This question has a different emphasis than imagining a time after growth or speculating on the possibility of life after growth, which I think is ultimately not possible, at least not in all ways since life is growth. after all. I'm glad to hear some of the discussion at Nottingham Contemporary has already made this point clear, and I'm sorry for missing it owing to the time difference, but it bears emphasising so as to avoid, ultimately, depoliticising simplistic understandings of degrowth. Critics of degrowth such as Robert Pollin make this point clearly, as well as argue that degrowth as a climate stabilisation plan, is ultimately inadequate to decarbonise the global economy by 2050.

msldgnittoI Contemporary

What's really required is a jobs and justice program for system wide decarbonisation, or what's called a Green New Deal in the US that would help avoid the otherwise likely major economic downturn, resulting from reaching net zero emissions in three decades, a downturn, magnitudes greater than anything historically experienced and inadvertently, fueling the flames of reactionaries who, partly responding to existing precarity are already expanding eco fascist alternatives of authoritarianism and ethno nationalism. Others such as Mark Burton, and Peter Somerville, in the pages of New Left Review, add that we must degrow the unnecessary and wasteful, and grow the positive and just, doing so by delinking growth from decarbonisation across all sectors of consumption and production, as we transition to new technologies and renewable energy sources, which they argue could only really be carried out as part of a worker led socialist world building project dedicated to the needs of all rather than the greed of the few. Not that they see any global movement in this direction happening anytime soon. But their scepticism toward meaningful transformation occurring within current capitalist economies is, for me, a deal breaker with Pollin's plan, which is basically a recipe for green capitalism structurally continuous with colonial conquest that threatens to extend forms of extractivism in the demand for renewable energy infrastructure. In this sense, I would add that we have to be clear about the historical ends of growth; recognising how growth has entailed socio-environmental violence, in its deep historical intertwinement with racial and colonial capitalism. Opposing these ends of growth is the necessary goal of a decolonial anti-racist socialism, which actually requires at the same time growth in the name of equity, justice and freedom, including, for instance, the growth of affordable housing, decarbonised energy grids, free education, free health care, reforestation, multispecies flourishing. The most pressing question then is how we can collectively break from the current functioning of local and global governance that generally serves and guarantees the interests of capital in the ruling class. No techno-solutionism

such as geoengineering, particularly solar radiation management, offers any acceptable way forward, either in the practice of decarbonisation, or according to the imperatives of social justice, rather, fundamental political transformation is the only option with something like an indigenous decolonial and anti-imperialist Red Deal, linked to a radical anti-capitalist Green New Deal, offering the best steps forward. The cards are, however, stacked against us, given rampant militarisation, entrenched, corporate globalisation, algorithmic governance, endless consumerous distraction, and reactionary social formations; a kind of continuation of all this we're seeing right now, in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. So if art has any role to play, in the imagining of worlds beyond capitalist growth, then its ambitions must expand beyond the captured realms of institutional enclosure, where speculation becomes marketed as depoliticised liberal freedom and luxury consumer goods. Any radical position articulated in a work of art must connect with movement building, beyond ruling class institutions. Thinking growth beyond capitalism, in other words, entails not only a radical artistic imagination, in conceptualising radical futures, but also doing the actual work now of labour organising and social movement empowerment in abolishing the growth obsessed capitalist economy, including the dominant art systems economy, and participating everywhere in the building of multiracial working class solidarity with an eco socialist horizon. Okay, that's my position statement in relationship to growth, and the proposal of envisioning post-capitalist imaginaries. Now, I'd like to just go through a few examples of the kind of work that I'm looking at, which deals with I think these questions in a variety of different ways, in terms of practices of indigenous and Afrofuturism. So this is Thirza Jean Cuthand's piece Reclamation, from 2018, and it's a short video that imagines life beyond settler colonialism when in the near future, according to the video's narrative, settlers have left Earth basically, and gone to Mars to colonise the Red Planet, and leaving a Broken Earth, suffering from all manner of environmental destruction behind to indigenous survivors,

msldgnittoI Contemporary

and you can find this on YouTube. It's a really, I think, powerful and compelling piece that shows the world destroying conditions of capitalist, colonialist growth economy, and what it's done to forms of multi species extinction, environmental destruction, and all manner of social violence. There's shots in the video of, for instance, extraction sites like the tar sands in Canada, plastic pollution, and other forms of deforestation and environmental destruction. It in other words, shows us what many of us already know who are paying attention to ongoing environmental disaster. But it adds on to that the horizon of the postcolonial future in the time to come defined by an altogether different economy, of world caretaking and in many ways, a radical degrowth form of community. This is just a short clip of a couple of the speakers as they're interviewed as if we're seeing, as if we're moving through, a portal to the future and hearing what life is like in this time to come.

15:15 Reclamation Film

I was scared that they had done so much to this planet that there'd be no way for us to fix it it's a lot cleaner. Yeah, it's a lot cleaner. Like it smells good here and it smells like nature. It smells like we're making a difference here. We've cleaned a lot of this area up. This is what we do. We clean up things. We make sure the area is safe for barefoot walking pretty much. And this is just one of our bins, we have we filled up approximately 500,000 bins. This is what people left. Full time job cleaning up after these pukes. We see some garbage you pick it up. That's what everybody does around here.

16:20 T.J. Demos

Okay, hope you can hear that, it's a little soft on my end. But they're basically talking about how their work of world building in the aftermath of colonial capitalist violence in its 500 year project of climate emergency effectively. And in that sense we can talk about in relationship to the project, degrowth as being a matter of simultaneously degrowing the violence, the destructive, the senseless and growing forms of emancipatory practices, caretaking. relationality within the

Nottingham Contemporary

more than human realm, and forms of essential social reproduction as a kind of a form of life that is beyond colonial capitalism, extractivism and also hetero-patriarchy. They talk about a lot about how settler colonialism is not simply a matter of practicing environmental violence, but also social violence in terms of the way it regiments inter human relationships and imposes forms of patriarchy, sexism, heteronormativity, on a variety of different communities. So degrowth is the simultaneity of degrowing and growing, degrowth is decolonisation. Degrowth is multispecies flourishing. So the video project opens up I think, for me, at least this is what I'm trying to argue within this book project that I'm working on that's dedicated to this topic of radical futurisms that dedicates, it cultivates a radical imagination beyond the oppression of the present and this notion that we're caught within an economic, social and political regime, that it's impossible to escape from or even imagine beyond. So this is doing some of the crucial work of cultivating a radical imagination, where the future constitutes a rupture from the domination of capitalist realism and the present. Another example of this kind of work that I'm looking at, is Black Quantum futurism. They're an African American collective, based in Philadelphia in the States, where they're drawing on Afro-diasporic, cosmologies and theoretical formulations going back to, for instance, the Dogon in Mali, which have a really complex and rich mythological, cosmological conception all the way to current versions of quantum field theory and ways of thinking about critiques of linear temporality or chronologies that bear within themselves a kind of ideological form of historiography insofar as they support a notion of inevitability, as if the present is the necessary culmination of the past. So Black Quantum Futurism is trying to in their work, in a variety of different kinds of practices from publications and books to videos, to experimental music, including one of the co-founders Camae Awewa, who's also known as Moor Mother, they're committed to developing a chronopolitics to think beyond this kind of disruptive, linear temporality of

msdnittoN Contemporary

inevitability that Walter Benjamin for instance, once thought of in relationship to a kind of fascist historiography, and others, like Robin DG Kelley, more recently, in relation to the Black radical tradition, have mobilised Benjamin's conceptions of developing an emergency temporality that can serve our own political interests in all sorts of ways that resonate with the larger Black Lives Matter movement and international anti racist struggles. What are some of the things that people are struggling against? Well, today, one of the biggest risks or threats is a kind of techno-libertarianism, wherein increasingly we're dealing with technical systems, including on social media algorithms of recommendation, that attempt to transform the near future into a source of predictability, that can also be a form of investment and profiteering. This is maybe best exemplified in the emergence of billionaires like Elon Musk, who are transitioning to a renewable energy economy. And in that sense, might fall into some of the modeling of degrowth and growth of a Green New Deal, at least within the conditions of neoliberalism, but however, exemplify that the dangers of new resource economies, even when there are centred around renewables, which can bring ever new forms of neocolonialism. For instance, when Musk supported the 2019 coup in Bolivia, in part so that he could benefit with with his Tesla Corporation, in terms of gaining access to lithium mines in Bolivia, he sent out this famous, this infamous, quote on Twitter that we will coup whoever we want - deal with it. This was reversed in October of 2020 and the elections that brought MAS, the movement for socialism, back into power in Bolivia. So these conditions between neo-extractivism and the Global South, techno-libertarian interests in supporting anti-democratic politics, which would enable these kinds of extractive regimes to take place, and social movement struggles that are often led indigenous led to stop extractive violence and to to participate in a wider movement building project toward a non extractive socialism. Even though Evo Morales has lots of contradictions within the Bolivian context, this is really an important site of ongoing struggle today. So Black Quantum

Nottingham Contemporary

Futurism is participating in this, particularly in the US in relationship to contesting the terms of racial capitalism and the kind of techno determinism that secures the ongoing participation of certain people within the future but excludes others. So we can talk about a politics of defuturing that is part of a long history of extremism or genocide, the afterlives of slavery within the States, but also internationally, especially within the Americas. So this has led to projects like Alisha Wormsley, declaring that there are Black people in the future as a simple kind of demand that's been placed on billboards in the States, including in Detroit, like you see here, where the struggle in this case is over time, who gets to participate in the future? Who gets to secure an ongoing flourish and existence as we as we move through the present? Is it just people like Elon Musk who can declare the rights to reproduction in a chronopolitical sense, or is that itself necessarily a site of struggle against the conditions of extractive and racialised capitalism? This is, you know, this is ongoing in terms of struggles over history and heritage, whether monuments do the ideological work of continuing the conditions of white supremacy in the States that would be a matter of confederalism, ethno-nationalism, and with these kinds of monuments dedicated to the Civil War South and the Confederacy being gradually dismantled, challenged, transgressed against by all manner of racial justice protesters including the scenes like this in 2020, where you have these ballet dancers dancing, performing on the pedestal of this monumental statue to the Confederate General Robert E. Lee, which has subsequently been dismantled, but only after a substantial social movement struggle. So this movement toward radical futurism is occurring all over and in an international way, in terms of artistic practices within the visual arts, within filmmaking, literature, multimedia expressions of world building and futurisms, in all sorts of ways. So this is really, I think, an important symptom of our present when there's, at the same time, so much negativity, fatalism, debilitation when it comes to thinking about anything, that concerns a political future, where it's hard to

msdnittoN Contemporary

mobilise any positive energy or hopefulness in terms of what's to come, or any such world that is to come when we're gripped by all these multiple emergencies and catastrophes of the present, whether it's climate breakdown, or militarism, or this, the new renewed threat of nuclear catastrophe, multi species extinction, and so on, right, it's kind of like an intensification of what people like Bifo and Mark Fisher have called the slow cancellation of the future, pointing to what Frederic Jameson called decades ago, the impossibility of thinking beyond the conditions of capitalism today. So it's such that it's more difficult, it's easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to, to imagine the end of capitalism. Well, with these practices, there's an entire growing movement of creative practitioners who are thinking about radical alternatives to the present. And they're building on recent histories. For instance, the history of Afrofuturism, as it's been historicised and dramatised in a project like Black Audio Film Collective's Last Angel of History from the 90s. This of course, Afrofuturism, going back to the 60s and 70s, particularly within African American musical traditions, from Sun Ra to George Clinton to Lee Scratch Perry in the Jamaican context, we know this is also an international movement within Afrodiasporic cultures. In other words, to resist the ongoing exterminous politics of defuturing and to make a claim on who gets to survive, who gets to live into the future, this is an Afrofuturist politics or chronopolitics. Black Quantum Futurism is also continuing this tradition. What's really interesting about them is this isn't just simply a matter of a radical, speculative aesthetic. They're also working on the ground in Philadelphia in relationship to housing rights. So when they talk about Black Space Agency, this is not simply an attempt to highlight Black claims on new sources of technology, including those associated with space travel. But also the space agency that is a politics on the ground operating against, for instance, gentrification, against housing injustice, against the correlation of race and toxicity within many American cities in terms of an urbanism of climate injustice, or environmental injustice. And then they do

these projects where formally as you see in a work like this, just give it a second to play. Formally, you have these articulations of a kind of aesthetic exploration of chronopolitical emancipation. So that the past is something that is simultaneously remembered in terms of human rights and anti-racist struggles that are collective, and that go back decades, excuse me, and even centuries, but also an attempt to create and foster a source of manoeuvrability in terms of political agency, in terms of the present and near future. So this is really crucial in terms of a methodology of radical futurisms, that any futurism that we can think of, needs to in fact, must be, based within histories of struggle, or else we're dealing with the kind of emptying out of the radical dimensions of futurism. For instance, according to modes of techno-libertarianism and reactionary exterminist futurisms. So Black Quantum Futurism, they explore this not only in artistic projects, but also in on the ground laboratories of community futurisms, for instance, in Philadelphia, as I've mentioned, where these kinds of more speculative and artistic ways of imagining radical futures come together with actual on the ground, juridicial, political and community based grassroots projects dedicated to anti-gentrification struggles and anti-racist housing conditions within Philadelphia and more within the States. This one project brings out this juxtaposition, really, I think, compellingly where they cite a quote of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1966, who in the midst of, you know the Cold War competition to reach the moon between the US and the Soviet Union. He said, there's a striking absurdity in committing billions to reach the moon, where no people live, while densely populated slums are allocated miniscule appropriations. It's a an amazing and poignant quote that is extremely prescient as well, today, when we're seeing this billionaire space race. People trying to reach Mars or build space colonies. While at the same time today still, there are densely populated slums allocated miniscule appropriations. You could think also back to Gil Scott-Heron's *Whitey on the Moon*, in terms of how the racialisation of resources and economic inequality was

msldgnittoI Contemporary

something that really marked space travel as it was imagined according to state resource allocations back in the 60s and 70s. So degrowth is housing justice, degrowth is abolition, targeting police and state and military violence, but more the abolition of not only the the techniques of the securitisation of capitalist interests, but also the abolition of capitalism itself. Degrowth is racial justice, these are the politics of growth as they emerge, I think in relationship to Black Quantum Futurism. I want to talk about one last project, which is the Otolith Group, the London based collective, who've done this film, Infinity Minus Infinity in 2019. Maybe some of you have seen it, where it's a feature length film that provides a kind of multi scalar genealogy of the racial capitalist scene in over 500 years of extractivism, slavery and its and its afterlives, indigenous colonisation and genocide. Where something that they're showing, I think, really importantly, crucially, according to a climate justice position, according to a speculative political ecology is how it's absolutely necessary to connect the kinds of abstract statistics of climate transformation to forms of social violence and racialised inequality. And you see that just in the still image where they're superimposing a familiar graph of CO2 concentration in the atmosphere over the last few decades, over a picture of sea ice on which you have this multi headed speaker that figures prominently in the video, who's talking about the history of what's called the racial capitaliscene, which is a term people like Francois Verges, and others have used in terms of providing an alternative to the Anthropocene, which for many, is a geological word that is all too abstract and universalising in terms of generalising the conditions of causality that produced anthropogenic climate change and ignoring the differentiated impacts that result with climate breakdown. So the racialised capitaliscene gets this better. And it's more accurate and provides political traction in terms of identifying the causality of climate breakdown and a long history of racialised capitalism or colonial and racial capitalism. And points to the differentiated impacts that this brings. So this is something that the Otolith Group is focusing

Nottingham Contemporary

on, simultaneously, about a politics of growth that is about colonial and capitalist spoils, basically, that have sacrificed not only geographies, but also peoples.

36:35 Film

The invasion of Europeans in the Americas resulted in a massive genocide of the indigenous population, leading to a decline from 54 million people to approximately 6 million. This led to a massive reduction in farming and the regeneration of forests and carbon uptake, leading to an observed decline in Antarctic ice cores and CO₂ in the atmosphere.

37:15 T.J. Demos

So again, that was very soft to me, but hope you can hear that, but it's, the film is talking about how the beginnings of the earliest moments of the Anthropocene are coincident with the conquest of the Americas, which was an incredibly violent period around the time of 1492 and 1610, when there was some 50 million indigenous people who died during this time, owing to colonial conquest, and the spread of disease, forced labour, outright murder, militarised domination. And that led to a regrowth of the forests because those lands that were once cultivated, no longer had people to manage them. This was really the origins then, not simply of the Anthropocene, but of the racial capitalist scene and the Otolith group explores this history in ways that connect also to the present in terms of Brexit, politics, the kinds of xenophobia and racism that circulate, including this Friday fact that the Treasury put out in 2018, about the end of slavery and how this was paid for through British citizens going back to 1833. So this was a kind of celebration about how the cost of slavery was finally paid off in 2018. And then everyone who has paid taxes recently, can be proud that they have contributed to the end of slavery. What the Otolith group is getting at, in bringing this up is, is really the incredible hypocrisy of this kind of claim. When what really the British citizenry ended up participating in is the financialisation of the debt of slave owners rather than the burden and costs of slavery itself. So, between 1833 and 2018,

msdgnittoI Contemporary

it was the cost of paying off the slave owners for their property that was repaid over that time. So this is one small element of Infinity Minus Infinity which deals with how the voraciousness of racialised capitalism sacrifices bodies, at the same time, as it offer, as it defines kind of world shifting climate breakdown. They bring this into a conversation with the work of Denise Ferreira de Silva, and how valuation is conducted within the European enlightenment around race. That's a really it's a fascinating essay, they bring this up and this leads to these formulations, these math themes, that the collective uses in relationship to thinking about Blackness today, in contradistinction to the way Blackness has been evaluated within the scenes of racial capitalism, during slavery and its financialised aftermath. And ultimately, the film, really complicated, but the I think the ultimate proposal is to provide an aesthetic experimentation in what the transvaluation of Blackness would look like, beyond the conditions of racism, as it's been historically defined. Again this connects to thinking about growth and degrowth, not in abstract terms of atmospheric carbon, but rather growth and degrowth in terms of questions of biopolitics, of racialised populations, of genocide, and the growth of some at the cost and expense of others, which is crucial to think about also in relationship to wider questions of growth as they're happening today within environmental politics, so that we don't get caught within a narrow definition of what environment is, but we think of degrowth also, in terms of an anti-racist politics, as an anti-capitalist framework. As a matter of also multiracial solidarity. These are, I think, are crucial terms if we're to imagine and work toward realising any kind of post-capitalist radical future, then we have to think about this kind of political ecology of growth and degrowth. I think I'll stop with this last slide, just to emphasise that this can't just be something that takes place within you know, increasingly, it seems rarefied commercialised artistic institutions, but has to connect to movement building politics, labour organising, and forms of politics that are occurring within everyday life, locally, and at all scales regionally and globally, in terms of participating

Nottingham Contemporary

in the building of a new world. So I think all of these artistic practices that I've mentioned, Thirza Jean Cuthand, Black Quantum Futurism, the Otolith Group, all of them connect in a variety of ways, some directly, some more indirectly, to this kind of organisational model of political transformation. So to just to conclude, we need both radical imaginations. As well as we need to commit to doing the work of organising to bring these possibilities into being despite all indications that we're moving actually in the opposite direction. I'll stop there. Thank you so much.

43:54 Angela Y.T. Chan

Thank you, TJ, I'm sure everyone, just like me, are just absorbing all of the case studies that you've brought to us today. And they're really rich, there's also a lot of material, a lot of themes that are running through them. And hopefully, in the next about half hour or so, we can start to tease out some of these questions that are floating around in our minds as well. And so for people in the audience, or maybe online, if you have anything to ask TJ or to kind of prompt a conversation between the two of us, please feel free to raise your hand I'm sure there's a roving mic around as well. And also want to point out to, you know, to people who don't necessarily feel like they tend to take up space in conferences to feel welcome to, we have the patience for you to articulate your comments and thoughts with us as well. I'm getting a little bit of feedback, so I'm going to mute the auditorium screen now. But do you raise your hand or I'll get a signal from Jim to have a roving mic around. Yes, thank you, TJ. It's, it's with, I guess, happiness that I am sharing this space with you, because I guess your work and your research has been probably one of the earliest, most long lasting impacts on the way that I research and think about environmental politics in contemporary visual cultures. So it's great to see, you know, throughout the years to kind of connect with you at certain points, but this is the first time that we've really had a chance to chat like this. And I have so many questions, so many things I want to speak together with you. And one of the

msdgnittoI Contemporary

first things that I actually want to bring up is that you talked a lot about the methodologies towards radical futurisms. And specifically, I'm quite interested in the way that you're talking about documentary as a technology form for entering this type of radical imagination, and also beginning the work that is necessary in terms of social climate, radical racial justice organising. And so specifically, you I quote you that, documentary provides a technology for opening portals into futures alternative to the now. And I guess this might come across as slightly contradictory, a bit counter intuitive because when we think about documenting something, it's almost as if we're witnessing, we're observing, something is the subject is already out there for us to take a snapshot of. And so there's a slight kind of, there's something to kind of tease out in terms of speculative documentary. And the way that I interpreted it is that with all of the projects that you've shown us today, there's a lot of it that is, there was a specific phrase in my mind, but that's just kind of lost me. What I want to say is that there's a way of counter narrativising that is actually the portal itself. Sometimes if you think of a portal in a science fictional term, you might just kind of dismiss it as something that is a door, you walk through it, and you're there. There's no journeying which I'm you know, which is the thing that actually is building up the infrastructures for radical organising, committing to that and being able to have the foundations for a new politics that is actually equitable. And so portals, speculative documentary, I wonder how you kind of think about these as counter narratives to the hegemonic history books that, you know, are a type of fiction in a way, perhaps these counter narratives, these portals are highlighting that well, what's out there is already fiction, let's just document it. You know, speculative documentary is maybe the truest form of truth. So if that is something that you have thought about.

48:22 T.J. Demos

Yeah, thanks, Angela. That's a really good question. And there's lots in it. I think there's lots of complexity. And room

for more thinking. Yeah, for me, the some of my past projects have engaged with documentary quite a bit. And, you know, thinking about documentary as a politics of truth, where we know by now that documentary is not something that simply factual, right, it always involves and even if you go back to the origins of documentary, as a practice, as a term, it was always negotiating the seeming opposition between truth and fiction, between something that was self evident or positivist and the fact that that self evidence was always captioned or framed or rendered in a particular perspective, so that we can't simply talk about the self evident, as factual but also as constructed, as contingent, as dependent on a particular narrative or framing or captioning. And so it's, you know, this doesn't mean that we're opening ourselves up to kind of relativism, and nor does it mean we're abandoning truth. So I think that this is the really important theoretical point about politics that this kind of documentary has practiced. And the challenge as well, today to continue to think with this kind of modelling of documentary, that it's not simply, it doesn't simply mean we're entering into a post factual representational condition where we're dealing with, you know, fake news, we know where that goes. This is a kind of, it leads to a kind of quasi-fascist, cynicism and manipulative instrumentalisation of historical experience. So denying that I think we have, we can think we can continue to think about politics, the politics of truth is something that always requires a form of struggle, is based within invited historical experience, is a matter of argumentation, rhetoric and affect. And lots of you know, artists are investigating this in all sorts of ways. So it's not such a shift, to think about documentary in the past, and to recalibrate its temporality. So that kind of approach to the politics of documentary, as a matter of not simply recovering a ready made meaning that expanded within what's already been, but actually, you know, bringing into being a truth that has yet to be, I think that like this temporal transformation, which is also something that's that's actually theorised and empirically investigated within quantum field theory. Like if, for instance, if you read the work of Karen Barad, they

msldgnittoI Contemporary

they're doing a lot with thinking about quantum field theory's troubling of chronological time. And the assumption within, say, Newtonian physics, that you can only be in one place at one time, right? Quantum Field Theory is disrupting a lot of those assumptions in really fascinating ways. And a group like Black Quantum Futurism is really interested in this and mobilising these possibilities for re situating past and present and future, re-shuffling those cards in order to open up possibilities of future that are different from the present. So that can begin within, at least within my argument, with a reconceptualisation of documentary. So it stresses the fictionalising world building possibilities of projecting onto the future in a way that can be prefigurative, that isn't simply about re-presenting something that already exists so much as actually doing the work, even if on an aesthetic level to begin with. Bringing that truth into being. So there's a generative and constructive element within that prefigurative act of thinking about documentary futurism or, you know, the aesthetic as a portal into a new world. It's not just about fabricating something that is imaginary, but initiating a process of bringing it in to actual materialisation. And that's part of the struggle, that's part of the like imagining the aesthetic as a site of struggle that actually can transform chronologies as we move from present to the world to come.

54:15 Angela Y.T. Chan

Thanks, TJ. And yeah, what you just said really stood out for me in terms of not having these prefigured for us in a way that it's not re-presenting, it's made me think about research, research itself, what are we researching here, and it very much comes down to who's actually doing all of the RE plus verbs. I guess a real world example of research being something that's hugely colonial and problematic in the case study that I was hearing about at COP-26 was that Harvard University are kind of embracing the campaigns to research as ways to further explore different types of solar engineering on indigenous lands, particularly in the Sami regions in Sweden, and the indigenous Sami people are campaigning

saying that no, our you know, your research is only going to devastate these local ecologies and have irreversible impacts to communities that are dependent on it. And so the right to research in this sense, is something that is the rights to name who is disposable, and to name what kinds of methods can be, I guess, masked by the academy, as something perhaps noble, perhaps, you know, for the greater good of humanity, but is colonial to an extent. And so I think, no matter how many re plus verbs we're going to go through in terms of the ways that we're thinking about, I guess, reassessing all of the frameworks that we're going to be making radical futurisms sincerely, and foregrounding communities who are already facing impasse, it really is down to who's having the agency to do that in the first place. Which I guess like brings me to want to ask you a bit more about the vulnerability towards being de-futured, to be to have your future taken away from you, without any negotiation, and to have things just with a full stop, finished for you. In so much of storytelling, we take the final chapter and the final sentence as an ending. And in a lot of the work that I do with young people, with youth groups, for example, through speculative fictioning and talking about intersectional politics, and climate change issues that saying, well, you finished reading this article, or you finished, you know, reading the song lyrics of this rapper. Do you agree with it? Do you see yourself represented in it? But how about we take away that full stop, and we finish off that story ourselves? How about you rewrite that ending? And I guess it's it's a lot of is thinking about how unfinished histories are, how unbegun histories are as well. And to think of a kind of after growth, or, you know, a post colony. You know, who's deciding that, and who's, you know, suffering the impacts of that decision. So maybe I'd like to invite you to speak a bit more about that book ending. And the danger of doing that, in terms of maybe kind of like, creating academic or curatorial terminologies. And I want to also reference Dr. Max Liboiron in her book, which has fantastic footnotes, the most accessible footnotes I've ever experienced in an academic publication, the book being called Pollution is Colonialism. And she talks about

msdnittoI Contemporary

the importance, as someone who's indigenous, to have allies who are standing with, but standing over there, and knowing where that line is to stand over. And so, yeah, I'd like to invite you to speak a bit about that solidarity building that is understanding the unfinished and unbegun histories that were inevitably swirling around in.

58:55 T.J. Demos

The question of agency is crucial. And it applies to the question who has the right to produce the future? Who has the right to think about it? And who has the space to do so? Certainly, you began your question with with COP26. And I think that that's a kind of bookending. COP26 exemplifies the institutional power that determines who can propose what in terms of what kind of future we collectively imagine. And it controls what kind of resources go into it. And I think this is the condition of, you know, the institutional determination of ultimately, capitalist realism, a term of Mark Fisher's, but I think, you know, it's useful, it lives on in significance. Basically, the framework we're given that's reiterated at COP26 forecloses certain narratives and certain alternative imaginings about what the future might be. That anything that is imagined that comes out of COP26 and all the other UN climate summits, basically is thinking within the terms of a market based economy. So any climate solution has to be market based. It's a matter of cap and trade, it's a matter of decarbonisation technologies. It's a matter of investment in renewables. It constitutes a massive, maybe even one of the largest historical world financial transfers that we're looking at that's happening right now, in terms of shifting from a fossil fuel economy to a renewable one. But without changing any of the kind of political and social forms of regimentation and inequality, economic, political and social inequality that we're living with. And that has just massive impacts, in terms of limiting many of our imaginations to operating within those terms. Certainly, I think the university does that as well, all institutions that are defined by and funded by the situation that we're living within, of the dominant economics

Nottingham Contemporary

of neoliberalism. And capitalism more broadly, is doing that. So to talk about alternative radical futures is really going against the grain of institutions, whether it's art institutions, or educational ones, or transnational UN convened climate summits. So I think, exercises in cultivating individual agency in terms of thinking beyond the futures that are foreclosed by dominant institutions, and more broadly, the dominant economy are crucial. But they're not enough. We need to go beyond the cultivation of individual agency, we need to think about collective formations, modes of solidarity. Liboiron, I think, is helping with that in some ways, I really liked the formulation of Pollution is Colonialism because it helps look at environmental violence through a colonial framework, which is crucial. And that's something that I very much agree with. So we can definitely stand with that project. In terms of the the standing over there. I'm a little, I have questions about that, I have questions about the participation of that project within a kind of divisive identity politics, that leads to modes of kind of like essentialism of identity, and separatism within different social formations, indigenous, Muthi, otherwise. And I think this is something that is really extremely politically debilitating, even though it's understandable, historically, why some would stress historical vulnerability and the violences that they and their communities have suffered over the years. And why it's certainly important to point out inequalities and privileges in terms of who can speak and who can't. But I think ultimately, the challenge is how to find not our politics in our identities, but our identities in our politics. This is a lesson for me, that you get in groups like the Combahee River collective, the African American queer revolutionary formation, that that was in the States on the east coast in the 1970s. And there's lots of others, but thinking about multi racial solidarity, how can we reconstitute that today, I think is absolutely crucial. And for that, I don't think a formulation for the political horizon ultimately is stand with but over there. I think it's, we have to stand together across all of our differences and somehow reconstitute the conditions of a kind of anti-racist anti-colonialist socialist project.

msdnittoI Contemporary

1:04:47 Angela Y.T. Chan

I absolutely agree with those points, but just to specify that Liboiron's I guess, reference to stand with but over there was to mean that, to ensure that there are enough safer spaces where people of shared demographics and identities, can gather and organise, as well as those with the multiracial, multi class based and wider. And so it's ensuring that there's a multiplicity of inclusive spaces that are available. And I think I have one more kind of explorative question to ask before maybe anyone in the room would like to join in. And it kind of picks up on some of the science fiction and speculative fiction aspects that you've mentioned, as well, as part of the London Science Fiction research community that I co-direct with seven others. Our last year's academic theme was activism and resistance. And this year, we're carrying on with extraction, as our kind of main research theme. And we started our reading groups, monthly ones, with actually watching *The Last Angel of History*. And I wanted to point out for December, for our installment, we looked at *The 6th World*, which is a 15 minute short film, one that you probably know of, by a Navajo director, Nanobah Becker. And this film is actually quite, it's quite humorous in parts. And it talks about how the Navajo astronaut Tazbah Redhouse is the pilot on the first spaceship that's sent to colonise Mars. And she's told by her people that this is the new imagined homeland, and corn, continuing with the indigenous tradition, is actually key to their survival. And on board of this spaceship there's this Omnicorp laboratory that has a wildlife scientist who argues with the general space director, who wanted to bring on some indigenous corn to give the commander Tazbah to grow on Mars. And eventually, they realised that the lab engineered corn is failing, it's rotting, and that the only way that they can survive is to try the indigenous corn. And eventually it works. And they're able to sustain themselves on Mars. And maybe in a way this acts as a portal that we were talking about. The corn itself is a portal to continuing histories. But it's something that's not even, you know, technology as such,

Nottingham Contemporary

it's the most organic thing that you can be holding, and you know, embodying through ingestion and laying on the ground to grow. And I guess this ties into the way that we think about growth itself, what we allow to grow, and what we get rid of, and the way that the scientist, the lead scientist of this lab was adamant that other seeds that weren't GM couldn't come on board the ship, was something that is, you know, holding up a barrier, holding up the whole border to a way of futuring. So maybe you have something to add about what gets chosen to grow. I also invite the room to join in with us. There are so many different types of speculative, and science fictions that have long talked about environmental, racial, social, injustices. And I think that through fictioning, we can really bring about quite radical ways of self reflection and organising.

1:09:03 Audience member

I just I wonder whether you saw anything of Glasgow's People's Summit, which was the alternative COP26 across the road, with a very different agenda. I was very moved by a session which was ostensibly about a global Green New Deal, but the power of it was to hear voices from across the planet. And from peoples that are living, and one was from Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. A worker in in a corn factory, that this worker was a trade union leader that was aware of all the big climate questions, but was speaking from her setting. While we were, you know, in some comfort, back in the UK, I'm staring at the screen, but I thought it was really powerful that these voices were coming from over the world - what they didn't have was an opportunity to start projecting futures. So what what did the future look like for them? And how would they imagine a future from within their settings and to share, have some sort of sharing process that brought people together. I thought what you said earlier about a documentary or something about their projections and their vision feels powerful.

1:10:29 T.J. Demos

The Glasgow People's summit that occurred during COP26,

msldgnittoI Contemporary

and hearing from people around the world, in relationship to their own current struggles with environmental and climate disaster, I think is really crucial. And from my understanding, this has been, this kind of people summit has been going on for a while, in the shadows of the main UN summit that's kind of like strictly controlled in terms of the separation between recognised state and NGO, and fossil fuel corporation delegates, on the one hand, and social movement participants and activists and organisers on the other. So this has been, you know, going on ever since I've been following the COP summits closely like beginning in 2009, with COP15 in Copenhagen. And often they're the scenes of real police violence in terms of keeping community organisers and people, activists dedicated to climate justice out of the formal sites of the COP negotiations. So I think it is indeed really crucial that this continues, and it's a place of from my understanding, as well, of real democratisation, geographical inclusion, and often political radicalism. Radicalism, not as in extremism, but radicalism as an anti-capitalist realism, in making the case that the only way that we're going to provide any kind of meaningful proposals for dealing with climate emergency is discussing how to get beyond the dominant economic regime, and its political formation to shut down all democratic possession and inclusive people's participation like the people's summit. So I think that's crucial and we have to think about this question. In terms of the futures, the futurism that might arise from that place, or from people's experiences all over the world. This raises another question for me that I'm trying to address in my book project, which is how do we deal with a future of many futures, in the same way that Zapatistas in Mexico, are struggling with a world of many worlds, how to bring into being a world in which many worlds fit, instead of dealing with the oppressive domination of a single world-world, for instance, the world of global capitalism? How can we imagine a world in which many worlds fit? And similarly how can we imagine and live in a future of many futures? And what does that mean? How can we prevent one future from overtaking and dominate

Nottingham Contemporary

another future? How can we come up with and imagine a kind of chronopolitical diplomacy, where we can negotiate equitably between different conceptions of futurity and have multiple chronopolitics in operation at the same time? This is the kind of like speculative question I'm really interested in. Because we don't want to simply insist on a single kind of dominant temporality, which is itself could be associated with a colonialist domination of forms of diversity. But on the other hand, how can we somehow imagine the democratic and equitable bureaucracy of temporality that could help diplomatically negotiate between different conceptions of your future in a way that stresses equality and inclusion? This is the kind of speculative question I'm really interested in that that question made me think about

1:14:58 Angela Y.T. Chan

I would add that the COP26 Cities Coalition did an amazing programme that was really empowering to me to actually have my first year of do some work on international cultural policy, which is not something that I think is, is not moving fast enough, it's not inclusive enough, and to go from publishing that report, to go into the events that the coalition ran, the coalition in a network of global justice activists, who were looking after so many parts of ensuring that people who couldn't actually get to Glasgow, you know, the rate of rent, the accomodation is expensive, it was during pandemic, at the height of the pandemic, and you know leaders, COVID tests, all of these were barriers for entry for activists to hold the state people accountable. And so for that coalition to also then bring about, to allow them to do that work, but to make Glasgow city centre a place where so many people's activisms were opened up with innovation. One of the quite inspirational talks that I went to was one on UK arts trade as the neoliberal economy will call. So one of the speakers actually was talking about the way that she said that knocking on doors with pens didn't get any answers from people who were building around the UK that actually created the weapons that are used in Palestine, until she started using

msdgnittoI Contemporary

a hammer. And so I think that that is going beyond futurism that's, you know, that's taking into action to do something now. And locally to Nottingham, I'm between Nottingham and Leicester, there's so much we can do right now in the next town to come join the fight. TJ, actually showed in Nottingham, just a week before COP, which was really, really great show, really filled a way that we need to have multicultural multilingual spaces for supporting people who live. Do we have any other questions going around? No one's kicking us out yet maybe we can have anohter.

1:17:58 Audience member

Hi, it's very odd that you can see us but we can't see what you can see. It's lovely to see both, lovely to see Angela, lovely to see TJ. Thank you so much for your talk. And something that we were talking about a little bit earlier, I suppose even that Angela and I've talked at great length about is how we sustain ourselves in this work. That obviously looks different for all of us, depending on our position on where you know, where we reach the work, work reaches us. But for all of us doing this work around ecology, sustainability and sustainable substances, our mental emotional, and economic well being comes really essential to being in, to carrying on and how we support each other. So I'd love to hear a little bit more about how you're thinking through this kind of ecology of care or economies of care we picked up on earlier in practical ways as well as in kind of all political coalition building ways. How you grow in care.

1:19:14 T.J. Demos

Thank you. It's a really good question. Lots of people are asking it, it comes up a lot. I think, for me, it strikes me within a larger reality of social exhaustion within the terms of 24/7 capitalism and the kind of demands that are endlessly put on us as workers, as students, as people who are just trying to live and how to deal with the demands of everyday life. You know, whether it's meeting the rent or paying the bills, buying the food, you know, just the conditions of survival, as well

Nottingham Contemporary

as within social media and the endlessness of social media demands that are placed on us. So, with the pandemic, this all this has been made categorically worse. And, you know, people, people are talking about the great resignation these days, multitudes of people refusing to do the work of bullshit jobs, as David Graeber once called it, and refusing to submit to those conditions, insofar as they can, insofar as they can figure out alternative ways of survival, or not. So I think, you know, like, how do you do the work of avoiding exhaustion? And that's a really, you know, that's a really crucial question, there are artistic practices that I see that are dedicated to this at times, like there's a collective project called The Nap Ministry. Nap as in sleeping. It's an African American collective dedicated to cultivating sleep, as a collective practice of nourishment, and regeneration. And as they say, which, you know, in a formulation that I love, you know, they say that, we have to, if we're going to dream, if we're going to dream radical dreams, we have to sleep. And certainly, this is a struggle, sleep itself has become a struggle. It's become a site of pharmaceutical intervention, and all sorts of self care practices that are neo-liberalised and commodified, which for me, just symptomatises the larger crisis of work, and exhaustion, which makes doing the, committing oneself to politics even difficult. So, on my end, in terms of my particular situation in California, I'm, you know, a member of local organisations, and one of the closest to me is the DSA, Democratic Socialists of America ecosocialist working group, and we're meeting weekly. And a big part of what we do is really a kind of emotional check in, and mutual aid, which has to be integrated into the conditions of doing the work, what the work means, the work has to begin with self-sustenance and care for the other. And it's, you know, it's based on a notion of solidarity, where solidarity can be defined as the socialisation of debt, the socialisation of vulnerability, so that we're not dealing with vulnerability, with threats, with dread, the kind of dread of everyday life and it's endless demands that are placed on us. That when that dread is socialised, we refuse allowing it to be privatised, where it becomes a source

msdgnittoI Contemporary

of, you know, endless wallowing in pain and suffering that can be incredibly debilitating, as many of us know. So, when it comes to doing political work, I think we have to, as many people are, we have to think about how to practice forms of solidarity based on mutual aid. It's not about taking and extracting, and emptying ourselves of energy and capacity. But somehow, through the act of collectivisation and sharing vulnerability within the conditions of everyday life, we can sustain ourselves and grow the capacity to do more than comradesly mutual aid, but actually engage in campaigns and direct actions and projects to stop the incursions of forms of, say, state and corporate violence. So, you know, really this you know, this has to do with doing very personal check ins, looking up, and, you know, helping out with stuff when it comes to comrades in need. It also involves doing work in relationship to the most vulnerable among us - those who are living in a way that's incredibly rent burdened, where people are having to choose between paying the rent and eating, trying to cultivate more collective practices dedicated to the vulnerability so that we can empower ourselves to develop the capacity to continue our political work. These are all, I don't know if this is the answer. But these are all stuff that we're thinking about locally, that I'm thinking about, in relationship to the very, the extremely difficult work of negotiating the endless demands of work, whether it's professional work, university work, political work, social work.

1:26:11 Angela Y.T. Chan

I would agree with both of those points. And to add that it is exactly that diversity of involvement with your wider community, I think there's this air of like, morality, that the art holds itself with, that is very dangerous when it comes to sidelining those who are the most exploited within the arts industry, we have to face it is an industry, it's a sector that is built off of, you know, art workers who are not paid enough, you're on zero contract hours or freelancing without the pension supports of PAYE staff at major institutions. And to curate, to think, to philosophise, must always be in line

Nottingham Contemporary

with practice. I mean, there's a lot of ways to philosophise practices, and it can always be a ripple effect of inaction. And I think that it's really important to look out for each other, there needs to be, you know, new infrastructures of transparency, whether that's economic, whether that's labour time, whether that's through the resourcing of other types of materials that art workers need to sustain themselves. And then going back to my first point about actually having a diversity of, you know, involvement with your community, it is the political work that we need to be involved in. It's the direct action site in the next town that we need to be doing, or, you know, coming into another town to do, you know, support work for refugee charities. This is the real work that actually within the arts, we can actually stop philosophising and theorising about and, you know, do something useful. I had a conversation the other day that really stuck with me thinking Angela, not all art needs to be useful. And that's, you know, by choice, and not everyone has a choice of privilege, to say that art doesn't, you know, need to be political, art is maybe a lifestyle and my lifestyle is to actually do and to be involved and to politicise, and it would be great, if, you know, there were more allies within the arts who agree with that, and who live that as well. So, thank you Ama for that question, because it's, you know, from people like you that I, you know, always check in and check in with others, to see how everyone's doing, to see what kind of, you know, areas within the cultural sector, the arts industry, feels like a safe area to be political. And if it doesn't feel like that, then that transparency whether it's as an institution, or curators can actually lead to more open conversations that are generative. And you know, small change making steps are always good, are always, you know, always steps towards larger changes. So, yeah, so I'm an advocate for politicising arts. I'd like to thank you, thank everyone, for joining us for the final session. And thank you again, TJ, for your early morning, presentation and discussion with us. Thank you to the organisers for pairing us together to have this connection and sharing with you. And I'll pass it on to the organisers to wrap up for the rest of the day.

msdnittol **Contemporary**

1:27:00 T.J. Demos

Thank you, Angela. And thank you everyone. I've really enjoyed it. Great questions. Important to continue thinking about. So thank you again.

1:30:07 Canan Batur

Thank you so much I can't think of a better way of summarising what we have discussed the last couple of days. Thankyou T.J. Thankyou Angela. I mean, I know that if this was a cinema, you would just jump up and continue the credit segments would be going but just bear with us for another few minutes while we're saying our thank yous to everyone who supported us today and all our contributors for their brilliant contributions today as well. Yeah, this wonderful moment shouldn't go unmarked. We've been together for two days, and today has been very different contributions from different continents and localities, we have been presented with a range of different readings and artistic propositions, by way of the experimental. These interventions emerged as a source of a larger global context of questions and mentioning that new technologies where we can rethink planetary boundaries, but also emphasise making for cultural, social, ecological and biological sensitive futures.

1:31:16 Theo Reeves-Evison

Yeah, I mean, I won't take up much more space, because I think everyone's kind of ready to get out into what's left of the sunshine. Thanks again to everyone who contributed, Thanks TJ and Angela, and thanks Canan for all those conversations we've had since you started the job here. And thanks to all the kind of technical team and front of house team who were here, first people here this morning, probably be the last people here tonight. We will have beers ready for you!

1:31:54 Canan Batur

Yeah, thank you so much Jim, Helen, Shannon, Nicole, Craig, Neil, Tom Chamberlain, Tom Harris, thankyou all.

Nottingham Contemporary

1:32:07 Theo Reeves-Evison

And just to say, jumping off from what TJ and Angela were saying about cultural events and certain social movements, and building infrastructures, and kind of journeying towards worlds after growth. I think it'd be great to continue these conversations, actually have some kind of infrastructure building through this institution, but also outside of it. Feel free to get in touch with either of us. There were lots of resources that have already been mentioned over the last two days, such as the disnovation postgrowth toolkit and some other things out there, organisations such as the Landworkers Alliance, Land in our Names and others, really. So, thanks for coming.

Colophon

Curators: Canan Batur and Theo Reeves-Evison

Assisted by: Helen Hamilton

Technicians: Jim Brouwer, Tom Harris and Craig David Parr

Assisted by: Neil Dixon and Tom Chamberlain