Towards Experiential Critique of the Capitalocene.
Rethinking Immersion in Moving Image Installations by Rachel Rose,
Sondra Perry and Hito Steyerl

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Homerton, University of Cambridge
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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Prefatory declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics Degree Committee.
Summary

Geistė Marija Kinčinaitytė

Towards Experiential Critique of the Capitalocene. Rethinking Immersion in Moving Image Installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry and Hito Steyerl

The thesis examines moving image installations by contemporary artists Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl. It explores their capacity to generate space for an experiential critique of the logic of extractivist practices. The selected installations employ various screen-based and projection technologies to create an immersive experience, that can appear to be for the sake of sensory experience. However, throughout the thesis, I argue that these artworks possess the potential to reconfigure the concept of immersion itself, exploring it as a mode of experiential critique of the Capitalocene (a term defined in Chapter 1). I draw on Jean-Luc Nancy’s corporeal ontology to consider experiential critique in relation to his elaborations on sense and sensation that rethink sensory experience and the boundaries of self through the concepts of listening and touch. Nancy’s approach rejects the understanding of the body as a sensory experience modelled around the defined thresholds of sensation serving the neoliberal capitalist practices that turn existence into units of value for the purpose of abstraction, appropriation, and extraction. Throughout the thesis, I explore this approach and its applicability in relation to the artists’ configurations of immersive moving image installations. In Chapter 2, I draw on the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and Nancy’s ideas on resonance and threshold to discuss Rose’s early practice and her moving image installation, Everything and More (2015), which focuses on the limits of sensory experience in outer space. While addressing its material and philosophical layers, I argue for the artwork’s capacity to invoke ontological resistance by restitching relations and reweaving the edges of the self towards an embedded and embodied perception of the world as a critique of the techno-capitalist imaginaries of the future. In the following chapter on Perry’s practice, which resists the representational categorisation of blackness, Nancy’s notions of ecotechnics and expeausition work to demonstrate emerging tensions between the Typhoon coming on (2018) and the Flesh Wall (2016–2020) installations as a critique of the racialising logic of fungibility. The final chapter explores Steyerl’s installation This is the Future/Power Plants (2019), which opens a
broader discussion on the artificial intelligence (AI) industry and its impact on shaping a worldview that has political, ethical, and societal implications. Drawing on Nancy’s ideas on stucture and general equivalence, I approach this installation as an experiential critique of entrenched power structures driven by the ideology of the future, which entangle beings, environments, and machines on the planetary scale. For each artist, therefore, the relevant chapter investigates how they treat video production and post-production tools, the installation space, screens, and projection technology to create immersive installations that configure space for experiential critique of total vision, mastery, and deterministic projections of the future. Written at the time of the pandemic, the thesis brings Nancy’s philosophy and the selected artworks together to explore modes of resistance to the logic of profitability that renders existence into units of value. In this context, I develop a critical framework for addressing immersion as an experiential critique, which requires attending to the question of technology and how the artists employ it to activate and reconfigure a critical engagement with the present. Thus, the thesis contributes to an exploration of the role of art and theory in times of crises, while considering immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene, which takes into account relations and positions to imagine other modes of being-with.
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Ačiū!
Introduction

Mapping Contemporaneity

In its most extended sense, contemporaneity is the overarching temporal envelope of global crisis – it carries the temporality of crisis immanently within itself – because crises are principally expressions of forms of temporal disjunction.¹

What does it mean to map contemporaneity, which is defined as the disjunctive present consisting of multiple temporalities? In this research project, following the opening quotation by Peter Osborne, the act of mapping contemporaneity indicates attempts to trace the edges of the temporal envelope of global crises. The Introduction serves as a conceptual map which brings personal, artistic, and theoretical responses under one firmament to grasp contemporaneity as a number of unfolding crises of various scales. In the section ‘Research Context: The Pandemic’, I elaborate on the circumstances that shaped my interests and approach to designing this project as a platform to enable thinking about contemporary art and Jean-Luc Nancy’s corporeal ontology at their converging points of resistance. Instead of obscuring the events and affects that shaped my thinking, feelings, and process of writing at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout the thesis I acknowledge the uncertainty of the future that became more tangible during the global health crisis and a suspension of economic growth. Inevitably, such circumstances rendered this project a platform for exploring navigational devices to engage with the present from a critical and immersive perspective, since, as Mieke Bal puts it, one of the features of contemporaneity is ‘the participation in the political’.² This situation also opened an opportunity to explore academic writing as a process of reflection on the immensity of the violence that resurfaced during this time. In this instance, the act of writing itself becomes a gesture of weaving and folding experiential textures of contemporaneity within a discussion on moving image installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl.

In the last section, ‘Thesis Structure’, I will summarise key aspects of the selected installations in relation to my proposal to rethink immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene.

¹ Peter Osborne, Crisis as Form (London: Verso, 2022), p. 15.
I investigate how the contemporary artists Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry and Hito Steyerl explore immersive strategies that defy or interrogate the logic of extraction in the context of moving image installations. Experiential critique is thought about in relation to Nancy’s ideas on touch and listening that rethink the place of body and its meaning in philosophical discourse. His concepts of being-with, ecotechnics, and struction help with critically responding to the atmospheres and effects of the global crises produced by the ongoing logic of profitability. Through the critical lens embedded in these artworks and Nancy’s resistance to general equivalence – a reduction of existence into units of value – I invite you to zoom in to the areas of exposed planetary and bodily surfaces that undergo appropriation and exploitation. This perspective allows for an experiential critique that creates space for navigation and interrogation of the folds of contemporaneity – a temporal envelope of global crises.

**Research Context: The Pandemic**

The year 2020 was marked by a sudden exposure to vulnerability brought about by the global pandemic, when the virus stripped the body of the illusion of absolute immunity, self-sufficiency, and sovereignty of the self. This exposure generated a fabric of collective grief and shared vulnerability, which, as Judith Butler puts it, invites us to think about grief as a resource for ‘a sense of political community’ that brings ‘to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility’. Butler discusses mourning and vulnerability in relation to the dehumanising politics applied to the Other in the United States. However, this notion of vulnerability is also relevant to the time of the pandemic, which elevated violent tendencies of political ‘immunisation’ against the Other. Donatella Di Cesare, in *Immunodemocracy: Capitalist Asphyxia* (2021), considers the model of modern democracy adopted by Western and westernised countries as *noli me tangere* (‘do not touch me’), which reduces the system of democracy to the system of immunity. For the author, ‘the politics of immunization always and in every case pushes back against otherness’. Di Cesare observes that the moment of exposure generated by the virus, disrupting the logic of sovereignty, acts as an invitation to learn from shared vulnerability about ‘cohabiting with the

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5 Di Cesare, p. 48.
rest of life, in complex, overlapping, intersecting environments’. During this time, relations were reasserted through vulnerability as a point of reference to think about community and the world outside the logic of production, accumulation and growth. This event of global resonance forced us to think about ethics and politics in the twenty-first century in terms of opening towards the world and its incommensurable complexity and contingency. I embrace this moment of exposure. It reverberates throughout the thesis in the context of both Nancy’s philosophy and works of contemporary art that are pivotal to navigating the stillness of the world caused by the pandemic – stillness that enabled the entrenched structures of power and the power of nature itself to be perceived as planetary.

My approach to thinking about the planetary scale emerges from the moment of suspension when mobility and physical contact were reduced. It defined everyday life through porous boundaries such as skin touching the surface of the screen to absorb the atmospheres of the present. Suddenly, as the only mode of doing research as well as any kind of contact with other bodies was solely defined by the screen, my attention lingered on these material surfaces enabling contact and separation simultaneously. Stillness and lack of intimacy with the ‘outside’ world provoked a strange feeling of disembodiment, creating effects of distanciation and rupturing the boundaries between inside and outside. Thinking through these boundaries has inevitably shaped the way this research project was approached, considering the immersive and distancing effects of the global health crisis that contributed to exposing the material entanglements of the global economy during a period of time inundated with death. Thus, the structure of this thesis is based on such fluctuations that navigate physical and perceptual boundaries through the screen, the skin, and the notion of touch as an interruption of sense.

During the pandemic, the erasure of physical touch increased a sense of separation and distance, simultaneously exposing the world as a place of incalculable existence. Nancy’s thinking about exposure to the limit of sense permeates his entire oeuvre. However, in the book *An All-Too-Human Virus* (2021), dedicated to thinking about the pandemic, this thought becomes even more tangible because of the shared ‘experience’ of the pandemic. According to Nancy, although we are aware of warnings about migratory, ecological, financial, and political crises, they did not:

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6 Di Cesare, p. 117.
[...] generate the force of experience that a tiny parasite did, giving it the virulence of the unheard-of. Most often, we have already heard about what is unheard-of, but we have not perceived or received it. Experience forces us to receive it. To have an experience is always to be lost. We lose mastery.\(^7\)

Thinking about experience in terms of vulnerability – exposing us to being without mastery – is a starting point for shaping this thesis to explore modes of experiential critique in moving image installations. Experiential critique is thought about in relation to this shared experience of an opening towards the world as ‘emergence’ in the moment of global disorder and the uncertainty of the future.

For Nancy, the COVID-19 pandemic, which is also a product of globalisation, presented itself as humanity’s symptom of an inability to exist ‘beyond information and calculation’.\(^8\) He discusses the pandemic in relation to globalisation as the event that, although it generated a shared ‘experience’, did not unveil something unknown about the global crisis of immense inequality and division, but instead brought its urgency to light:

[...] it reveals, in a light that is harsher than ever, the exacerbated and unjustifiable gaps between regions, countries, classes and layers of a world that, in becoming more interconnected, is at the same time split asunder, torn apart by its own exponential growth.\(^9\)

The pandemic, by exposing the world as interconnected but also marked by fault lines of unjustifiable inequality, invites us to acknowledge the value and importance of knowing and thinking of ‘ourselves as exposed to death, that is, to the incompleteness of sense’.\(^10\) This exposure, for Nancy, is a reminder that our existential foundation should be a starting point to think about equality and value outside the logic of profitability. Although Butler and Di Cesare, as mentioned above, also approach vulnerability as a point of reference to think about relations between otherness and immunity in political and ethical terms, Nancy approaches mortality as a foundation for thinking about equality, which allows us to consider the world in terms of

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\(^8\) Nancy, p. xii.

\(^9\) Nancy, pp. ix-x.

\(^10\) Nancy, p. 66.
existences rather than calculations. As he states, ‘the world has no skin – it is not an organic entity – but its skin is made up of the relations between all of our skins. Of all of their distances, proximities, contacts, wounds or caresses’.11 Throughout the thesis, these tensions between mortality and calculation, which became even more prominent during the global health crisis, are the guiding elements for the analysis of the selected moving image installations.

The selection of artworks is based on issues that the pandemic brought to light: the urgency to think about the present and the future beyond the techno-capitalist logic of expansion, and accumulation based on extractivist uses of technology. Although the selected artworks were made before 2020 and do not directly respond to the context of the pandemic, my aim is to discuss the overlapping effects of the Capitalocene that constitute the crises of contemporaneity (the global health crisis being one of them). Throughout the thesis, I argue that these installations generate a critical and immersive space to adopt an onto-ethical perspective towards the world, viewing it as a place of material and entangled existence (I will define onto-ethics in Chapter 1). In the context of these moving image installations, immersion is discussed as an invitation for the meaning of experience to come through as an experiential critique – a loss of mastery, total vision, and linear trajectory of the future – thus activating imagination as a site of resistance. While rethinking immersion as experiential critique, I argue that the selected moving image installations map, expose, or reject the logic of profitability, instead activating space for other modes of being that create space to think about relations and positions.

The selection of artists’ works was motivated by a need to investigate how theory and practice can come together as a helpful tactic to navigate the effects of the Capitalocene. This project reflects on issues that have also re-emerged in recent curatorial projects, raising awareness of contemporary global crises. For example, INFORMATION (Today) (2021) at Kunsthalle Basel brought artists together to explore data-based capitalism, increasing surveillance, and the role of information in shaping a ‘post-truth’ reality. Back to Earth (2022), a long-term interdisciplinary project at the Serpentine Galleries, is dedicated to exploring art’s response to the climate crisis as a catalyst for environmental change. The Milk of Dreams (2022), an international group exhibition at Venice Biennale – curated during the pandemic and postponed because of it – attempted to interrogate the changing notion of what constitutes a human by

11 Nancy, p. 82.
inviting us to imagine more-than-human relations and interdependence. A renewed interest in the idea of art as resistance, meanwhile, was explored in a group exhibition entitled *Résister, encore* (2022) at the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne. This summary of just a few exhibitions from recent years is an indication of how art is increasingly perceived by art institutions as a channel through which they can communicate the urgency of contemporary crises to the public. However, there is also another side to this institutionalised communication – through art – of the idea of crisis. For example, the final section of the exhibition *Back to Earth* welcomes visitors into ‘The End of Capitalism’ – a shop of exhibition merchandise with slogans calling to act. In this instance, curatorial intentions, driven by a need to act and respond to the environmental crisis, appear as a shimmering surface of sustainability, which itself has become a marketing trick in greenwashing strategies. Although curatorial projects such as *Back to Earth* attempt to situate art as a ‘useful’ tool – a catalyst for change in the face of environmental catastrophe – it also obscures and abstracts the inextricable links between the art industry and capital. In this project, focusing on moving image installations, these interconnections will on the contrary be foregrounded in the analysis of the selected artworks that engage with the dissection and critique of the capitalist logic of extraction, appropriation, and abstraction.

Figure 1. Still from Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, video projection, sound, fans. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong, New York.
In addition, due to the timing of my research project coinciding with the pandemic, artworks made since 2020 – many of which directly responded to the global health crisis and other important events, such as the Black Lives Matter protests – have not been included. However, I would like to mention one such recent example of a moving image installation by Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39* (2022), presented at the Whitney Biennial in New York City, which exemplifies certain continuities between the artworks that constitute the corpus of this thesis (see Figure 1). Jaar’s installation attempts to bring visitors closer to events that took place on 1 June 2020, at one of the peaceful Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality. During this gathering in Lafayette Square, in Washington, DC, police started using violence against the protesters to make space for President Donald Trump’s photo opportunity to pose with the Bible. During this day filled with violence and resistance, Jaar witnessed the militarised use of two low-flying helicopters, which is prohibited by international human rights law because of the wind force it creates, putting in danger everyone below the helicopter. To bring this experience closer to the visitors of his moving image installation, the artist recreated this moment by focusing on the bodies of the protesters that resisted the wind gusts created by these helicopters flying just above their heads. Jaar’s process involved collecting videos uploaded online, paying their owners for the right to use the footage, and editing it into a slowed-down monochromic movement, which exposes resistance as collective and visceral. By hanging six fans – designed for use in cinema production – to create wind effects above the visitors, the artist attempts to create an affective bridge between the bodies on screen and the viewers in front of it. The fans switch on when the gusts of wind in the video become stronger, making this depiction of that day an immersive experience that attempts to question the use and abuse of power. Importantly for Jaar, in the context of the protests, the appearance of helicopters reminded him of the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. There, the helicopters were used for dropping bodies into the ocean: they ‘are for me a synonym for death flights’.


image installations can directly engage with the politics of the present. In this example, the effects of immersion itself are configured in relation to visceral resistance against entrenched racism and the abuse of power.

Affected by the global socio-economic and health crisis, throughout the thesis, I engage in a discussion of the efficacy of moving image installations to interrogate alternative modes of being in a world shaped by the needs of capital. As in Jaar’s installation, which rethinks immersion as a site of critique of violence and the abuse of power, I focus on installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl to approach the idea of immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene. Immersion here does not refer to transcendence to an illusory space but is thought of in terms of bringing us closer to the catastrophe of the present. Although the installations in discussion were made before the events of 2020, writing about these installations at the time of the global health crisis and its aftermath demanded engagement with the question of immersion on multiple levels. It encompasses thinking about digitality, neoliberal capitalism, and strategies of embodied navigation of contemporaneity marked by intersecting global health, environmental, and socio-economic crises, which resonates with the artists’ approaches to reworking established cinematic viewing conditions in their gallery-based moving image installations. These contexts, therefore, reverberate throughout the thesis as a reflection on being ‘immersed’ in the present – a present marked by a constant feed of information on unfolding crises, disseminated via screens during COVID-19 restrictions.14 This time is also marked by a continuous proximity to the absence of intimacy and loss, enveloped by a heightened sense of vulnerability. Thus, taking this context into consideration, the thesis approaches immersion on aesthetic, personal and political levels simultaneously, which also acts as a strategy for embracing the present and its material weight.

It is important to note that this project departs from attempts in film and media studies to evaluate the impact of the mediation of the pandemic, which suddenly required adapting ‘to new conditions of producing, accessing, consuming, sharing, and deploying media for the flow of information, labor, goods, policies, and culture’.15 Although my project does not directly attempt to track and analyse these changes, ‘the proliferation of media and screens as a means

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14 A sense of unfolding crises as instants lived or seen through screens is also well documented by Claudia Claremi in her short film Hailstone (2020), 3 min 27 sec, shot on Super 8 film, which solidifies a collective memory of 2020 <https://vimeo.com/claudiaclaremi/hailstone> [accessed 1 June 2023].

of crisis management’ had an inevitable impact on my approach to the project. The thesis does not attempt to analyse the impact of global disruptions, but the latter’s legacy reverberates in the structure of the thesis itself. For example, although my focus is to discuss modes of immersion as an experiential critique in moving image installations by selected artists, this global event had an impact on my approach to the works themselves, not least by demanding a consideration of the broader context of their reception. As a result, I moved away from a phenomenological approach that requires ‘entering’ the installation space to experience the atmosphere, mobility, and one’s body in relation to the projection and screens, sound, and duration. Instead of relying on my own subjective experiences of being in the installation space, I consider my position in relation to the personal device screen that enabled me to access these works, thus expanding the notion of immersion beyond the installation room and towards thinking about the global digital infrastructure that conditions this access.

My approach to develop an ‘expanded’ notion of immersion resonates with discussions of the immersive quality of everyday screen-based existence. To some extent, this project further extends Kate Mondloch’s ideas in her seminal book Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art (2010), which established a conceptual framework for a critical engagement with screens in contemporary art. It invites us to consider the growing reliance and dispersal of screens in contemporary culture and register this process through examples of media installation art. This is further elaborated in her later project that explores contemporary spectatorship alongside user-generated content that documents site-specific installations. For example, Mondloch’s ‘Installation Archive: A Capsule Aesthetic’ prototype allows a customised DIY search of social media videos uploaded by users across main platforms such as Vimeo, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, which engenders a different model of spectatorship studies. It transcends the conventional focus within art history as a discipline, moving away from the spectator’s in-person experience of a work of art towards viewer reception as a form of artistic production.

16 Keidl and others, p. 12.
is reflected in my own research, which was conducted at a time of restricted mobility and access, and hence relied on a multi-perspectival spectatorship. Although my goal is not to engage in a discussion on spectatorship models, the multi-perspectival spectatorship exemplifies a context of immersion extending beyond the installation space. This consideration of a broader approach to immersion, which takes into account ecotechnological entanglements, also resonates with Stéphane Vial’s account of network interfaces. These are approached as ‘ontophanic’ devices that change the way we perceive being in the world and our relationship to it. Vial defines our embeddedness in the world through digital interfaces in terms of ‘digital monism’ – ‘the real forms one-and-the-same continuous, fundamentally hybrid substance that is both digital and nondigital, online and offline, and on- and off-screen.’

Thus, while bearing in mind these aspects of screen-reliant existence and writing the thesis in the midst of the pandemic, I approach the digital screen as a source of philosophical engagement with the notions of immersion, experience, and critique in relation to Nancy’s philosophy of touch. This approach departs from the instrumentalising logic of sensation and sense that is prevalent in the digital media context and attempts to define touch in terms of its function to navigate a device. For Nancy, touch refers to a sense of shared embodied existence that emerges at the intersections of bodies, environments, and technologies. My approach to engaging with Nancy’s thought invites us to linger on the edges of the digital interfaces, to expand the framework for approaching immersion as an experiential critique.

While drawing on Nancy’s philosophical framework, the thesis departs from associations of touch with haptic aesthetics in the digital media context. For example, Mark Paterson discusses the meaning of touch, which remains within the logic of approaching sensation in terms of interiority, as ‘a fleshy feeling’. Susanne Ø. Sæther, who discusses the impact of a screen-based mediated environment that constantly demands touch – and which is reflected in contemporary moving image artworks – approaches the artworks within the framework of the haptic. Relying on public forums online, alongside other user-generated material, Michele White explores how touchscreens shape sensations through a direct link between physical

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touch and feelings. My approach to the notion of touch in the context of digital technologies, therefore, departs from the haptic aesthetics of the digital and engages with touch as withdrawal and as spacing that resists its own functionalisation in digital media systems. Rather, this project resonates with Timothy Murray’s exploration of net art and media art in *Technics Improvised* (2022), which discusses five decades of media-based practices in the context of his curatorial projects. In this book, among his discussion of other French philosophers, Murray also reflects on Nancy’s engagement with ecotechnics and touch in a discussion of the installation *The Transfinite* (2011) by Ryoji Ikeda. By bringing Nancy’s philosophy and Ikeda’s practice together, Murray approaches digital technology as an ontological question that explores the possibility of ecotechnics in the context of digital sovereignty. In addition, it is important to note that Murray starts his book by describing discussions between contemporary artists on the impact of the pandemic and how it encouraged them to ‘re-turn their attention, to the [I]nternet as a renewed site of expansion’. This renewed focus represents an engagement with it ‘as an improvisational public space in the political present’. For example, Murray discusses how for some artists, the pandemic enabled them to rethink the space of presentation of their work in post-pandemic conditions. In my thesis I do not focus on artists’ renewed interest in the Internet as a site for intervention. Nevertheless, I engaged with this networked environment at the time of the pandemic as a theoretical site for rethinking the concept of immersion by turning to the material conditions of research and its impact on my approach to moving image installations made before the pandemic. The political present is reconfigured here in the twin acts of writing and researching, which were conditioned by global health and socio-economic crises. Whereas Murray engages with Nancy’s conceptions of ecotechnics and touch in the context of media art, I explore the idea of immersion in relation to Nancy’s philosophical framework, which rejects the logic of self-sufficiency, profitability, and mastery, and I apply this in my analysis of moving image installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry and Hito Steyerl. Overall, my approach focuses on a discussion of immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene.

24 Murray, p. xi.
Thesis Structure

Thus far, I have situated my research context in relation to personal, curatorial, and theoretical responses to global crises in light of the pandemic. This context demands to reflect on the modes of creative and philosophical resistance to the capitalist logic of profitability. I approach this project as a site of embodied resistance to stasis, while at the same time discussing the concept of immersion as an experiential critique, explored in relation to the selected moving image installations. This approach is integral to developing the project at a time of restricted mobility, which demanded an immersive and embodied perspective inseparable from the structures of digital systems. A prevailing critique of the concept of immersion in contemporary visual culture is entangled in the context of digital technologies and regimes of neoliberal capitalism. This critique of immersion is often approached from the point of view of coercive embodiment, spectacle, experience, and attention economies.25 However, in this research project, I consider immersion in relation to the analysis of moving image installations while reflecting on this networked existence to enable an approach to the self in terms of environment, technology, and relations. By extending the realm of enquiry in relation to the digital context, my approach contributes to the growing scholarship on Nancy’s influence on visual culture.26 I consider moving image installations that engage with the context of digital technology to rethink immersion as an experiential critique. This approach contributes to expanding Nancy’s philosophical framework on visual arts, thus contributing to his existing oeuvre on film, painting, drawing, photography, and sculpture. Although in each chapter I engage more directly with the technological context, I also reference Nancy’s writings on painting, which are helpful for rethinking the meaning of a threshold in relation to immersion, which I will discuss in Chapter 2.

The first chapter, Dissolving Thresholds, will set out a conceptual framework for the analysis that follows, which draws on Nancy’s philosophical framework to conceptualise the notion of experiential critique. Nancy’s philosophy contests notions such as corporeality, community, technology, and finitude in relation to the logic of self-sufficiency and absolute identity. His

philosophical framework is useful for delineating my engagement with contemporaneity as a temporal envelope of global crises, which demands an ethico-political enquiry. In this context, I approach the notion of immersion as an experiential critique by considering Nancy’s exploration of sense and sensation, which rethinks sensory experience and the boundaries of the self through listening and touch. Nancy’s approach rejects an understanding of the body as a sensory experience modelled on defined thresholds of sensation which serve extractivist practices embedded in the digital systems. These capitalist practices turn existence into units of value for the purpose of abstraction and profitability. Departing from the context of digital systems where the haptic is associated with an interface, I consider Nancy’s notion of touch as a mode of interruption for thinking about existence as being-with, which defines the notion of experiential critique of the Capitalocene. This chapter also introduces the concepts of ecotechnics and struction, which are explored in relation to the artists’ works and their capacity to evoke resistance to the logic of profitability and self-sufficiency.

After articulating this conceptual framework, in the second part of Chapter 1, ‘Towards Experiential Critique’, I situate my engagement with Nancy’s anti-ocular philosophy in relation to the idea of immersion. Here I develop the idea of immersion as an experiential critique in relation to both the ‘oceanic turn’ and Nancy’s wider conceptual framework. In the moving image installations under study, outer space, the digital Atlantic, and the future are referenced in relation to the oceanic. In the context of global neoliberal capitalism, these zones are exploited by the economy’s promise of unlimited potential for growth. However, fluidity – a common visual and conceptual reference throughout all these works – refers to the limit of mastery, total vision, and the logic of self-sufficiency in each instance. These installations reference the oceanic as a nonterrestrial dimension, offering a radical shift in perspective while configuring outer space, the digital Atlantic, and the future as zones for enacting an experiential critique of the Capitalocene. In this instance, the oceanic is explored as a site of resistance to the capitalist logic of extraction, appropriation, and abstraction. Thus, by approaching the idea of immersion as offering a nonterrestrial point of view, which simultaneously challenges the logic of self-sufficiency, I will consider experiential critique as a site for approaching the limits of mastery and knowledge; the latter are both based on scopic regimes that guide our orientation in the world and shape how we relate to and locate ourselves within it. While working within this theoretical framework and in relation to the selected installations’ conceptual and material architectures, I approach subjectivity as relational. Here, the immersive environment is
conceived in relation to a shift towards a non-optics of perception that lingers on the threshold between inside and outside, evoking an onto-ethical approach towards the world.

The following chapter, Rachel Rose. Feeling the Surface of Contemporaneity, is written in relation to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the events of 2020, which resonate with the themes explored by Rose, such as mortality, ecology, and technological pervasiveness. To consider her works in this context offers a fruitful case study for mapping the meaning of the edge and self in relation to Nancy’s philosophical framework and a broader set of contemporary issues. A discussion of Rose’s earlier works, and her use of digital video editing techniques such as compositing, provides the background for analysing her Everything and More (2015) installation. In this work, Rose explores the limits and conditions of sensory perception from the perspective of outer space based on a story told by an American astronaut, David Wolf. In the context of this installation, video editing is a tool that allows Rose to navigate questions concerning the boundaries between life and death, thresholds, and the meaning of an edge. I bring in a discussion of the events that took place at the time of writing, which opens up space to explore vulnerability as a potential point of resistance against the measure of value and calculation, thus allowing for relations to emerge as a fabric of self. This wider context is discussed in relation to Nancy’s ideas about resonance, tone, and intensity as a tension of being, which are also formally expressed in Rose’s approach and the use of a projection screen in the exhibition space. Here, the tensions between gravity and a sense of weightlessness – pivotal in Rose’s installation – are explored in relation to the events that took place in 2020 during the pandemic, such as the SpaceX mission, which marked a new phase of space commercialisation, and the Black Lives Matter protests. I explore the installation space as a territory where potentialities of onto-ethical existence are negotiated experientially, and where the surfaces of screen and image become spatiotemporal sites that collapse micro- and macro- worlds and processes, thus destabilising dominant scales of measure. In this case, resonance plays a pivotal role in reworking the idea of corporeality to turn away from an ocularcentric paradigm built around vision and mastery, thus bringing forth senses that constitute an alternative approach to relational existence. Chapter 2 hence opens up a discussion on resonance as immersion, to enact the process of landing in the oceanic environment – so challenging established perspectives and points of view about the world, being, and self.

In Chapter 3, Sondra Perry. Immersed in the Digital Atlantic, I approach Perry’s practice as an ontological critique of the racialising logic of fungibility, which is discussed in relation to
digital technology and critical race theory. The chapter focuses on Perry’s two site-specific moving image installations: *Flesh Wall* (2016–2020), shown in Times Square in New York City during the pandemic in 2021, and *Typhoon coming on* (2018), presented at the Serpentine Galleries in London. Chapter 3 is organised around the emerging tensions between the two installations, while focusing on the ‘migration’ of Perry’s digitised skin across platforms, from the gallery space to public digital displays and digital devices. This migratory aspect is considered as a generative case to approach broader issues of racial capitalism in the context of digital technology, and of the reverberating pasts of the Middle Passage in the present moment. Drawing upon Nancy’s notions of ecotechnics and expeausition, this chapter proposes that Perry’s work should be considered as an ontological critique of the representational categorisation of blackness, exploring its radical and technological potential to counteract entrenched racialised systems of visibility. For Perry, the abstract space of post-production is where such issues can be addressed in relation to the image surface – a site of resistance, reimagination and potentialities, which becomes a source of experiential critique towards the imposed modes of in/visibility configured by processes of algorithmic recognition. Chapter 3 also deals with the tensions that emerge between Perry’s practice and Nancy’s conceptualisation of skin in reference to existence as being exposed, which attends to the limitations of this conceptualisation in the context of critical race theory.

In my final chapter, *Hito Steyerl. In Search of a Future Garden*, Steyerl’s installation *This is the Future/Power Plants* (2019) is explored in relation to Nancy’s ideas of struction and general equivalence. *This is the Future/Power Plants* is approached as an invitation to consider the entrenched power structures that entangle beings, environments, and machines on the planetary scale. I explore this installation in relation to a broader discussion of the cultural context of the artificial intelligence (AI) industry and the ethical and political implications of the ideas of totality driven by it. In analysing this work – which is made of moving images produced by Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) – I interrogate the role of prediction algorithms in shaping the idea of the future based on past data, which narrows down the space for multiplicity and potentiality of the present. Considering the installation’s spatial arrangement in relation to the narrative unfolding in the video, I approach this work as a site of recon/struction, which rethinks immersion as an experiential critique of the ideological and extractive projection of the future while simultaneously reflecting on the role of the AI industry in shaping the trajectory and idea of the future itself. Chapter 4 explores this through a ‘conversation’ between
Nancy’s ideas on the present as resistance to the catastrophe of general equivalence and Steyerl’s critique of the constructionist paradigms supporting techno-capitalist systems.
Chapter 1: Dissolving Thresholds

Introduction

21 June 2020

Dear A.,

Where exactly do the edges of the screen lie? Are our bodies inside or outside its rectangular border? Or are they both? Neither? What agency do we have in our physical relationship to these screens? These questions seem more pressing now, during lockdown, than ever before.27

In 2020 there began a sudden closure of space, the disruptive limiting of physical interaction and mobility brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The time of the lockdown – as indicated in the opening quotation from a conversation between the visual anthropologist Alyssa Grossman and artist Selena Kimball, written at the start of the pandemic – highlighted a need to re-examine our changing relationship to screen-based mediation. Screen time in the absence of a counterbalance with daily face-to-face interactions inevitably raised questions suggestive of perceptual shifts and transformations, all marked by sudden changes in how we relate to the self, the other, and the world.

Solely relying on the screen for information about the development of the pandemic and navigating the events taking place across the world has contributed to a sense of dissolving thresholds between the edges of the screen and the self. This merging between the two, and the containment by a rectangular perceptual space, furthered one’s sense of dissociation from the immediate surroundings while simultaneously being enveloped by the affective space of uncertainty. Although, in the filmic context, this type of intensity is usually achieved by carefully shaping affective relations between a viewer and the cinematic space, in this moment, the everyday presence of the screen acquired a similar spatiality, absorbing the body into the affective mediascape. While it may be that the imbalance between different modes of communication had made it more perceptible, this increased reliance on mediated relations also

facilitated observations on the conditions of embeddedness and embodied existence arising from the glossy and flat surface of the screen.

As noted by Grossman and Kimball, a longing for intimacy prompted questions about the role of borders of the screen. This led them to experiment with online communication tools such as Zoom, which frames participants in individual boxes, to explore physical spaces between the projected rectangular images of the self and the screen. Their idea of experimentation with such boundaries lies in the act of shifting perspectives, for example turning the camera towards the sky instead of facing it, or pointing it downwards towards the ground. Changing the perspective from the self towards the immediate environment generates a different kind of intimacy, which interrupts the grid-based presentation of bodies on screens (see Figure 2). This shift in perspective, therefore, was motivated by the need to disrupt the transparency of the digital screens and platforms that condition everyday communication.

![Figure 2. Digital screenshot of the Zoom faculty meeting (Parsons School of Design), 2020. Photo: Selena Kimball.](attachment:image.png)
A heightened sense of urgency to engage with the spatiality of shared embodied existence, which interrupts the effects of framing devices, has also led me to focus my research on experiential modes of resistance. Embodied resistance to the ‘flatness’ of the screen surface and its acts of framing, or to the process of flattening ‘being’ into a transmittable representation itself, has shaped my research methods. It has led me to consider experiential critique as an invitation to rethink sensory experience as a site of resistance to the practices that seek to define and capture, and that turn experience into a unit of value. Experiential critique, therefore, attempts to question the appropriation of sensory experience that is entangled in the immersive mediascape of neoliberal capitalism. My research seeks to open a discussion on sense and sensation, one which rejects the idea of the body-as-sensory-experience that is modelled around the defined thresholds of sensation to serve capital, thereby turning the sense of touch into a measurable unit (for example, the use of digital biometrics for identification or an application of sensors to detect touch which enables direct interaction with a touchscreen).

While touching the screen with my fingertips, I conceptually trace the edges of the screen to explore how it can take place as a surface, a site, or a reference point for rethinking self in terms of environment, technology, and relations. In the section ‘On Touching the Screen’, I explore these questions in relation to Nancy’s philosophy of touch, which introduces the notion of existence through the idea of touch as exposition, withdrawal, and spacing. In the context of digital media, Nancy’s thinking on touch as a conceptual and sensual configuration allows us to engage with the idea of self in terms of exteriority and the space of the screen as a site of exposure. This approach leads to the introduction of other concepts such as being-with, ecotechnics and struction that refer to the interruption of a totality of sense, knowledge, and self-sufficiency. After introducing these concepts that reverberate throughout the analysis in the following chapters, in the ‘Towards Experiential Critique’ section I explain the parameters of the concept of experiential critique in relation to immersion. This section introduces Nancy’s other conceptualisation of being as resonance. Drawing on this theoretical framework that maps out an approach to a discussion around experiential critique in the time of crises, in the following chapters, I explore this proposition in relation to rethinking immersion in the moving image installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl.
On Touching the Screen

In the twenty-first century, insofar as it is defined by the omnipresence and reliance on screen-based technologies and their visual economies, the landscape of dissolving thresholds demands approaches towards the notion of self in terms of environment, technology, and relations. To map this proposition, I will explore the theoretical implications of touch in relation to contemporary technological conditions in this section. Nancy’s philosophy provides a useful conceptual framework for approaching the screen as a site to consider existence in terms of exposure, which directs us towards a critique of the logic of self-sufficiency and absolute identity. I attempt to develop an approach towards experiential critique drawing on Nancy’s notion of touch, which contributes to thinking about one’s position within the complexity of global processes. This allows me to explore Nancy’s thought in relation to the experiential critique of the Capitalocene, which rethinks the terms of immersion in the context of moving image installations by artists Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl. The onset of the pandemic has contributed to this approach by limiting experiences of being in the gallery or museum space, replacing it with zooming into the space of installations through personal device screens. According to Martine Beugnet, the gallery viewing of video installations:

[…] breaks the “illusion” of transparent, unmediated representation, […] allowing the exhibition visitor to remain aware of the apparatus and context of display […]. On the other [hand], the reception of film and video in the gallery and museum has been compared to forms of zapping, swiping, and window shopping. In the gallery, one often cannot, literally, swipe or scroll through, but one can always stroll amongst images.28

With this mobility in mind – one integral to the experience of being in the exhibition space, which during the pandemic was reduced to the gestures of scrolling, zooming in, and swiping on a digital screen – and the framework of Nancy’s critique of appropriation and extraction of sense and sensation in the digital context, I explore the selected artworks while ‘immersed’ in the global network.

Touch

In Nancy’s philosophy, the shift from representation towards the untouchable in terms of spacing exposes the limitations of the phenomenological tradition that privileges ‘the pure presence of appearing, to seeing’. The phenomenological approach tends to define mediation through vision in relation to pre-established positions of elements fixed in space. For example, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological thinking, the body that sees and touches is the main mediator between the self and the world: ‘every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile place’. This approach fuses touch and vision together, describing the experience of being in the world as grounded in ‘the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing [which] is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity’. For Merleau-Ponty, this chiasmic approach to embodied perception is embedded in the ontology of flesh:

The thickness of the body, far from rivalling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.

In this case, Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of flesh is defined as a sense of deeply penetrating matter through which the world is disclosed as an embodied existence. Although the concept of flesh is itself an attempt to overcome mind and body, spirit and matter dualisms, it does so through the point of view of interiority and intentionality.

The concept of flesh is a problematic framing and measuring device that situates perception within an onto-theological understanding of the body, approached in terms of proximity as fusion and appropriation. In contrast to this idea of corporeality, for Nancy, the body is always exposed as a threshold and at a threshold of intersections, which allows us to move beyond the established onto-theological conceptions of fleshy matter, substance, and of a body as a material object. He approaches embodied existence through the notion of touch – a contact-separation which allows for a reconfiguring of embodiment as a site of spacing. It opens a

31 Merleau-Ponty, p. 135.
32 Merleau-Ponty, p. 135.
world through suspension rather than projection of an ‘incarnate sense’ of the world. This is clearly indicated in his book, *Noli me tangere. On the Raising of the Body* (2008), where the significance of touch is thought in its non-assimilative and non-appropriating gesture, which introduces sense and sensation through the idea of exposure:

the touch detaches itself from what it touches […] Without this detachment, without this recoil or retreat, the touch would no longer be what it is […]. It would begin to reify itself in a grip, in an adhesion or a sticking, indeed, in an agglutination that would grasp the touch in the thing and the thing within it, matching and appropriating the one to the other and then the one in the other. There would be identification, fixation, property, immobility.33

By moving away from the onto-theological understanding of corporeality, which permeates the phenomenological tradition and privileges assimilation, Nancy’s notion of touch refers to a contact with exteriority of the inside, as a dispersal of self-identity and corporeal propriety. His consideration of embodiment as a site of spacing rejects an incarnation of spirit and incorporation of the other in the chiasmic intertwinement. In Nancy’s post-phenomenological approach, he demonstrates an attempt to rethink embodied existence through the notion of touch, which indicates withdrawal and spacing rather than the appropriative and assimilative quality of a tactility fused with vision and knowledge.

In the context of film studies, Laura U Marks also renders a fusion of tactility and vision in its non-appropriative capacities, considering a more bodily relationship between the image and the viewer she refers to as the haptic. The haptic here means ‘to move along the surface of the object rather than attempting to penetrate or “interpret” it, as criticism is usually supposed to do’.34 Although Marks’s approach to haptic visuality offers an embodied engagement with the textures of the image rejecting a scopic regime, according to Laura McMahon, the idea remains invested ‘in touch as a repository of intuition, knowledge and truth’.35 Jacques Derrida describes Nancy’s concept of touch as an attempt to depart from this haptocentric tradition by

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focusing on the spacing and distance that Nancy’s interruptive conception of touch offers, which for Derrida is ‘a *différance* in the very “inside” of haptics – and *aisthēsis* in general’. ᵃ  Contrary to Marks’s account, Nancy’s thought on the interruption of contact is mobilised through McMahon’s elaboration on a relation between cinema and being, which complicates the ‘psychoanalytical and phenomenological accounts of spectatorship’ and moves ‘beyond subjectivity, propriety and interiority’. ᵃ  Following Nancy’s ideas, I also engage with the notion of touch here to move away from tangible presence towards the ‘pathic’ moment – affectability itself – that opens onto a heterogeneity of sense; it is a rejection of the continuity of essence, otherworldliness of the spirit or a totality of sense. Instead, an event of spacing, disclosure, and suspension reveals existence as an open-ended exposure between material bodies – an ‘infinitely open-ended relational spacing or sharing’. ᵃ  Thus, drawing on this open-endedness of relational spacing, I approach contact with digital screens as a site for rethinking shared, embodied existence.

Nancy approaches sensory perception (*aisthēsis*) outside the realm of transcendence and immanence. A reformulation of sense and sensation offered by Nancy is a move towards a sensory perception that is considered not merely as measuring one’s interiority but as a co-appearance of *corpuses*, configuring embodiment as a site of spacing: ‘all bodies, each outside the others, make up the inorganic body of sense’. ᵃ  This inorganic body of sense is thought to be a material fragmentation and fractality, referring to the plurality of sensible existence. Here, Nancy’s approach is helpful for reformulating a sense of self – one emerging at the intersection of various bodies, environments, instruments, and technologies – which carries an embedded ontological critique of the logic of absolute identity and self-sufficiency.

**Opening**

As discussed earlier, Nancy’s approach to existence in terms of exteriority, exposure, and surface through the notion of touch critiques the logic of immediacy and presence that has been

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³⁷ McMahon, p. 32.
ascribed to it in relation to certainty and appropriation. In the context of digital media technologies, Nancy’s rethinking of touch as a sense experience per se is useful for addressing the functionalisation of touch and its integration into systems of digital mediation that absorb gestures such as swiping and scrolling. According to Mika Elo, such systems ‘tend to represent touch as a sense that works in synchrony with vision and offers support for optical intuitionism’. Haptocentric processes of formatting attempt to harness the sense of touch, assuring certainty through its representational, programmable, and manageable appropriation within digital systems. Here, it is useful to consider Mark Paterson’s observation tracing the beginning of the technologisation of touch in the context of psychophysical experiments from the nineteenth century. Such experiments attempted to measure sensation as an inwardly directed perception, which ‘was activated initially through touch’. Contemporary processes of ‘datafication’ that convert the qualitative dimension of sensation into numerical data are based on such earlier scientific experimentations of measuring and mapping the body. In the context of digital technology, the measurement of sensation, which attempts to establish a consistent unit between bodies, continues as a process of reducing sensation to biometric data accumulation via the touchscreen. Therefore, Nancy’s approach to thinking about touch as a sense experience per se, as an ontological plurality of existence emerging at a threshold that cannot be measured or appropriated, resists rendering touch as a differential threshold that can be measured and reduced to a unit that flattens sensation to data, and existence into a measurable object.

The ostensible immediacy of tangibility, dominating the contemporary digital media landscape, conceals the very encounter with alterity, a foreignness of the sense itself. Drawing on the work of Nancy, Elo argues that this encounter lies in the realm of ‘something felt’ and ‘always escapes the control of the self. […] With touch, thinking faces the paradoxical challenge of concreteness: what is most tangible is the foreignness at the heart of the familiar’. Elo’s approach in rethinking haptocentric mechanisms embedded in systems of digital mediations introduces an important aspect for conceptualising touch in relation to media aesthetics. In existential and experiential terms, this unstable relation between proper and metaphorical senses

41 Elo, pp. 33-58 (p. 54).
43 Elo, pp. 33-58 (p. 47).
of touch ‘reflects the intimate connection between affective and tactile aspects of touch and the vulnerability of embodied existence’. The pathic moment is perceived by Elo as pivotal in the constitution of the structure of experience itself because of its susceptibility to ruptures. This vulnerability is addressed in relation to the act of touching, which always takes place at the limit, given that the pathic moment of touch relies:

[…] on a foreign element, which necessarily remains beyond reach, untouchable, not as “the untouchable” in general but as something that a singular touch encounters at – or as – its own limit. The pathic moment cannot be pointed at, it needs to be felt.

Nancy’s philosophical shift from optics to the untouchable in the context of digital media systems therefore signifies the importance of touch as a sense experience per se – an openness to the world and towards encountering foreignness that unsettles a self-identifying subject. Touch, instead of evoking fusion and appropriation, is for Nancy a figure of withdrawal and spacing that opens onto the heterogeneity of the world. The inorganic body of sense that emerges as intersection interrupts the boundaries of the self, which unsettles ideas of bodily integrity, self-sufficiency, and absolute interiority. While thinking through the limit or a threshold, Nancy helps us to rethink our tactile interactions with screens and technology that, although entangled in the web of neoliberal capitalist relations, also present the idea of being as contact and circulation.

Erich Hörl, however, notes that from an early philosopher of technology such as Ernst Kapp to more recent media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan, ‘the technological transformation of sense […] [which] allows for inoperativity to become the fundamental event of our being, born from the technical operation that can never again be closed or completed’ has been conceptualised in terms of negativity. These thinkers approached ‘the human being as a being of lack’, which characterises ‘all artifactuality as prosthetic compensation, a question of a supplementary organology’. Hörl raises the question of whether this tradition of thinking continues in its radicalised forms as ‘the figures of the outside, of the opening of openness’, which are not only found in Nancy but also in Derrida’s and Bernard Stiegler’s thought, as

44 Elo, pp. 33-58 (p. 49).
45 Elo, pp. 33-58 (p. 51).
47 Hörl, 11–25 (p. 20).
This critique is important to take into account when considering Nancy’s understanding of a shared embodied sense of existence which emerges at the intersections of bodies, environments, and technologies. However, I contend that Nancy’s conceptualisation of sensation and sense beyond the logic of self-sufficiency is useful for approaching screen-based ‘immunisation’ facilitated by digital systems. According to Pasi Väliaho, ‘the codes and strategies by which the world today is made visible are embedded within processes by which bodies and persons become captured in the sensory fabrics of the global neoliberal order’. The screen-based individuation of bodies captures them in the dominant patterns of sensibility that configure hegemonic modes of sensing and thinking. According to Väliaho, these dominant patterns follow the code of biopolitical immunisation, violating the other through self-abstraction out of the material universe. This mode of self-abstraction is based on the ‘imaginary domains of sovereignty […] predicated on the illusion of self-possession and self-sustainability’. The global network capturing life in its sensory fabrics therefore requires an approach that would allow us to consider proximity as ‘anti-immunising’. The digital systems that create conditions for a non-relational interiority and self-abstraction through functionalisation of touch such as swiping, zooming, and pinching can be critically exposed within the parameters of Nancy’s idea of touch. Here, touch is instead approached as a shared embodied sense of existence, which carries an ‘anti-immunising’ interruption of self-sufficiency and absolute interiority, opening towards the world, and resisting the parameters of measure and calculation.

**Navigating (Dis)order: being-with, ecotechnics, struction**

During the pandemic, when intimate touch was made absent and reduced to the immediacy and presence of the screen, various physical and conceptual borders became even more apparent, presenting their structuring and enveloping modes of being. The unfolding event of the pandemic, marked by a shared yet differential exposure to vulnerability, opened thought towards an emergence of the world that unsettled parameters of measure, calculation, and extractive value. As discussed earlier, Nancy grounds his understanding of corporeal ontology

48 Hörl, 11–25 (p. 20).
The notion of being-with, which signifies a singular plural existence, conceptualises this understanding of being as shared co-existence. Being-with refers to an inoperative community of shared finitude, as Nancy puts it: ‘finitude comperears, that is to say it is exposed: such is the essence of community’. He continues the argument by considering the community as outside the domain of work, given the latter does not contribute to a creation of community and rather ‘[…] one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude’. For Nancy, it is essential to consider a possibility of community to be thought outside the terms of operative existence in order to be able to reject and critique an approach to ‘the common being’ as ‘objectifiable and producible’. This definition of community also rejects totalising exclusions, which any ‘operative’ community would generate. By approaching being-with as a shared exposure to finitude, one outside calculation, production, and self-sufficiency, Nancy articulates existence as shared and groundless.

Nancy’s consideration of bodies in terms of their limits and fragmentation is useful for modelling a notion of being as becoming-planetary, as opening towards the world. As discussed earlier, his reconceptualisation of corporeality uniting mind and matter through the notion of touch – relation and separation taking place simultaneously – exposes sense and sensation beyond the idea of interiority and allows us to consider being in terms of exteriority, exposure, and surface. This approach undoes a prevailing dichotomy that structures the limits between the inside and the outside: ‘every being is fully exposed, turned inside out. In its exposition, every being is “all there is” such that the world of bodies consists only of surfaces, folded in various ways’. For Nancy, this exposure is an opportunity for a philosophical thought to register reality in terms of its ontological plurality, which refers to a process of continuous creation and challenges fixed relations between subject and object positions. This process of creation is here understood through contraction and expansion, simultaneously singular and

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53 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 31.
54 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 31.
plural, thus proposing that ‘the world or worlds, unfold, diverge, or intersect in us and through us’.\(^{57}\) Nancy’s approach to being-with, which is also extensively thought in relation to the technological condition, leads us back to the relation that is exemplified by the digital screen and the notion of touch. In this context, being-with is approached in relation to technics and its role in the constitution of being itself. In this case, the preposition *with* signifies the technological opening onto the world, where technological being-with is considered the thing-in-itself, or being that ‘becomes indissociable from technics’.\(^{58}\) As Francis Fischer notes, technology has ‘globalized the question of an existence exposed to sense, and opened the connection of bodies and their ‘appearing-together’ to the world’.\(^{59}\) Therefore, this consideration of co-existence as being-with also includes a dimension of global circulation of sense skin-to-skin, which is conditioned through touch, passage, contact, and intersection making up a composition of the world.\(^{60}\)

With respect to the ongoing process of global (dis)order – which also marks the end of fixed points of reference such as ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’ that render the world as globe, image, territory, and natural resource – Nancy approaches ‘globalisation’ as a twofold process. It proliferates inequalities across the global population; however, in the presence of ecological catastrophe, globality also unsettles former visions of the world and humanity. For Nancy, ‘this network cast upon the planet – and already around it, in the orbital band of satellites along with their debris – deforms the *orbis* as much as the *urbs*’.\(^{61}\) This quotation refers to ‘globalisation’ as a stand-in for the destruction of the world – reducing the world to a proliferation of the ‘un-world’ (*immonde*).\(^{62}\) The idea of ‘un-world’ is marked by inequalities, wars, and ecological catastrophe, which reduces the capacity to think about the world as creation. However, for Nancy, this encounter with the limit of humanity and the world as we know it gives an opportunity to consider the world and its ‘emergence’ outside constructionist paradigms. Nancy considers the other side of ‘globalisation’ as *mondialisation* (world-forming). Confronting the idea of destruction demands recognising the end of paradigms that have shaped the world until now, and it exposes a horizon where human relations are held in common.

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57 Nancy and Barrau, p. 6.
62 Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p. 34.
Nancy argues that ‘globalisation’ signifies a passage through which the end of a ‘world’ brings about the birth of an unknown future and demands openness to it. However, it only emerges in the process of the world – dominated as it is by global market relations – destroying itself. In the quotation below, Nancy elaborates on this idea of world-forming in relation to finitude:

> globalization makes world-forming possible, by way of a reversal of global domination consisting in the extortion of work, that is, of its value, therefore of value, absolutely. But if globalization has thus a necessity – […] that consists in nothing other than the creation by the market of the global dimension as such – it is because, through the interdependence of the exchange of value in its merchandise-form (which is the form of general equivalency, money), the interconnection of everyone in the production of humanity as such comes into view.63

Nancy’s approach to ‘globalisation’ as more than ‘the effect of techno-economic development’ allows us to grasp the other side of this (dis)order: the world is undergoing a process of ‘reshuffling – a putting back into play – of the world itself’.64 This interconnection opens a horizon for thinking about world-forming in contrast to the capitalist idea of globality defined by economic value and work. For Nancy, world-forming signifies openness to finitude, in other words the spacing of the world itself. As such, the global (dis)order is understood by Nancy as facilitating ‘the birth of something other than a world, for which we have no name’.65

Nancy proposes we consider this double sign of the world – as ‘globalisation’ and ‘world-forming’ – through the notion of ecotechnics (écotechnie). In his essay ‘War, Right, Sovereignty – Technē’, he elaborates on this term in the context of the unfolding Gulf War in 1990, observing that the global world of ecotechnics offers a critique of sovereignty, technology, and economy.66 For Nancy, ‘ecotechnics obscurely indicates the technē of a world where sovereignty is nothing. This would be a world where spacing could not be confused with spreading out or with gaping open, but only with “intersection”’.67 Here, Nancy indicates a shift in thinking about technology as techno-logie, which no longer refers to ‘the technical

63 Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, pp. 36-37.
64 Nancy, *The Fragile Skin of the World*, p. 86.
means to an End’ but is considered ‘the technē of finitude or spacing’.\(^6^8\) Nancy reflects on the proliferation of planetary technology that, despite its entanglement within the logic of capital, also introduces the possibility of thinking ‘globalness’ as world-forming without ends or means. Technology thought as technē, in the context of globalisation, ‘raises the necessity of appropriating its meaning against the appropriative logic of capital and against the sovereign logic of war’.\(^6^9\) Therefore, the concept of ecotechnics introduces a different understanding of being that is not self-enclosed, where ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’ lose meaning, opening the idea of the world as ontological plurality of intersecting existences that are non-equivalent.

Following Nancy’s approach to thinking about technology as technē – the originary technicity of being – the world is introduced as creation itself. Nancy’s approach to technology as ‘the mode of our existence’ with ‘no more ends or means’ acts as a call to rethink the contemporary condition in terms of the idea of struction.\(^7^0\) The latter comes from a Latin word struere, which here is considered ‘in the sense of heaping up [amoncellement] without putting together [assemblage]’.\(^7^1\) It is representative of the disordered contemporary world, which according to Nancy appears as ‘the crumbling of the constructivist paradigm under its own weight, the collapse of a building that has literally become unsupportable’.\(^7^2\) Over-construction, signifying technological innovation and modernity as progress, has eventually led to struction: an opening of the ecotechnological planetary landscape with no more ends or means. According to Nancy, the trajectory of over-construction introduces the real and ‘Being’ outside the logic of the ‘in-itself’ and construction. Instead, it is approached here in terms of ‘copresence and coappearance’: “‘Being” is no longer in itself, but rather contiguity, contact, tension, distortion, crossing, and assemblage’.\(^7^3\) Nancy’s idea of struction thus allows us to approach the process of rebuilding the world outside the order of ‘Supreme Constructor’ even if we are navigating and living in a time of fragmentation, ruin, and perpetual crises.\(^7^4\) An invitation to consider the contemporary condition from the point of view of (dis)order introduces the idea of struction as a conceptual device to navigate the ruins of the catastrophe of the present.

\(^{68}\) Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 140.
\(^{69}\) Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 140.
\(^{71}\) Nancy, After Fukushima, p. 35.
\(^{72}\) Nancy and Barrau, p. 83.
\(^{73}\) Nancy and Barrau, p. 50.
\(^{74}\) Nancy and Barrau, p. 11.
Towards Experiential Critique

Thus far, I have discussed Nancy’s approach to corporeal ontology through the notions of touch, exposure, and surface that refer to co-existence as being-with, introducing modes of withdrawal and spacing as opening a sense of self towards the world that ‘invites us to think’.\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, opening to the atmospheres of the pandemic in 2020, then followed by the full-scale offensive in Ukraine in 2022, has generated a space for vulnerability to be perceived as a source of resistance, marked by an urgency for an existential shift towards relation that encompasses different scales of being, micro and macro, personal and planetary. The context of the pandemic exposed modes of resistance in times of crisis, inviting us to rethink conditions and structures driving deterministic scenarios towards the future. This context generated a space for thinking through artistic practice and philosophy as a space to critique the extractivist logic of the Capitalocene. Throughout the thesis, I explore these issues in relation to the selected moving image installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl, which are approached as sites of resistance for thinking and feeling against the capitalist logic of projection, extraction, and abstraction. This site of resistance is configured through immersion, both in the present and in relation to the use of digital technologies in the installation space that distort the historical, linear conception of time.

The logic of projection, extraction, and abstraction – of reducing the world of existences to the circulation of fungible commodities – is part of a long history of colonial entanglements and global market processes. As mentioned earlier in my Introduction, the pandemic only emphasised the global dimension and complexity of the foundations of modernity, which are inseparable from the histories of colonial subjugation of racialised bodies entwined with the techno-capitalist logic of profitability. Importantly, this logic of profitability is also contributing to the increasingly disastrous effects of the climate crisis, officially defined by the term Anthropocene, which identifies a geological epoch shaped by coal and steam that started with industrialisation. The term refers to the anthropogenic activities on the planet Earth that are contributing to the irreversible collapse of the ecosystem; however, I will instead be using the term Capitalocene coined by Jason W. Moore in this thesis.\textsuperscript{76} The term Capitalocene takes

\textsuperscript{75} James, The Fragmentary Demand, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{76} The term Capitalocene is criticised for abstracting the human agency and responsibility, for example, see Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). However, my choice for using the term Capitalocene is based on the analysis of the artworks that engage in a critique of the logic of profitability that is enabling the capitalist shaping of the world into an extractable resource. The experiential critique of the Capitalocene is foregrounded in the analysis
into account large-scale activities that took place since the mid-fifteenth century, which allows us to approach the crises of the present in terms of ‘the historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital’.\textsuperscript{77} As Moore argues, this exposes the limitations of the concept of the Anthropocene, which reinstates the dualism between ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’ because of how it obscures the complexity of historical relations and processes. As Moore observes, the Anthropocene reduces human activity ‘to an abstract Humanity: a homogenous acting unit. Inequality, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy, racial formations, and much more, have been largely removed from consideration’.\textsuperscript{78} This is important to consider when thinking about the crises of the present that constitute the experiential textures of contemporaneity. Thus, throughout the thesis, I attempt to take into consideration the implication of my using the Capitalocene instead of the Anthropocene, to address the continuous process of shaping the world into a natural resource for extraction and appropriation. As Joanna Zylinska observes, the logic of the Anthropocene generates a soil for escapist narratives in the field of techno-science rather than a need to embrace the roots of the current trajectory. Instead, she argues, we need to explore modes of being and thinking shaped by an ethico-political perspective to approach the meaning and place of the ‘future’ as embedded in the present.\textsuperscript{79} By addressing the logic of projection, extraction, and abstraction in the analysis of the moving image installations, I explore the artworks’ potential to facilitate a space for the ethico-political perspective urgently needed to address the crises of the present, and the meaning and trajectory of the future.

The shaping of the world according to the needs of capital is entangled with the idea of projection into the future, the latter another frontier for investment and the accumulation of capital in the context of a rapidly evolving technological landscape. The notion of linear perspective, that is ‘to see through’ (in Latin, \textit{perspectiva}), can be addressed in relation to the example of an optical projection from the seventeenth century, and its links with the logic of colonial and imperial subjugation. I draw on Väliaho’s article on English polymath Robert Hooke’s design for a portable camera obscura, presented in 1694 to the members of The Royal

\textsuperscript{78} Moore, p. 170.
Society of London (see Figure 3). While it is unclear if the design for this device was realised and applied as intended by Hooke, its imaginary dimension nevertheless opens a narrative for optical projection to be considered outside the long history of projection as merely visual entertainment. Väliaho contends that the imaginary design of this apparatus overlaps with the economic developments in the Kingdom of England and its colonial conquests of the time:

Both the observer and the machine were [...] designed to be mobile, suggesting not only distant contemplation but the physical appropriation of territories. The gestures of screening, zooming, and drawing – and the very concept of optical projection – were here operationalized as part of the First Empire’s networks of possession, travel, and trade.80

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In the era of capital and information accumulation, machine-assisted drawing techniques have proliferated widely. In this context, Hooke’s portable camera obscura can be viewed as an attempt to introduce optical projection as a tool for producing knowledge through a means of outlining and tracing the edges of unknown territories, objects, and people.\footnote{Väliaho, 6–31 (p. 14).} It could be said that Hooke’s invention reifies the imperial desire of possession ‘through framing, looking, and drawing’,\footnote{Väliaho, 6–31 (p. 15).} insofar as these activities acquire epistemic value through the gathering of ‘data’ from across the globe. According to Väliaho, this example of a portable camera obscura exposes us to the ‘imaginary that linked optical projection with the pursuit of profit’.\footnote{Väliaho, 6–31 (p. 15).} Such reduction of phenomena into collectable ‘data’ thereby contributed to establishing a foundation for financial speculation through visualisation of what is worthy of investment, and is inextricably linked to the imperial desire to ‘tame the unknown’ and to convert it into profitable territory. This example of the design of portable camera obscura to assist in ‘data’ collection is inevitably linked with its effects on stabilising perception by flattening the outside world into an image. By its design and function, the camera obscura detaches the body from its surrounding environment, turning objects, people, and landscapes into an image projected on the internal screen, which establishes boundaries between the inside and the outside.

In the context of the twentieth century, this division between the inside and the outside also permeated the cinematic apparatus, which contributed to shaping the Earth into a global image. According to Tiago de Luca, cinema has actively participated in the construction of the idea of planetary and interconnected existence since its inception, fuelled by the nineteenth century’s colonial and imperial imaginaries. The idea of planetary cinema, which attempted to establish itself through this logic, inevitably contributed to the global figurations of the world, manifesting through the ‘“Apollonian vision” that sees expressly with the aim of surveying, demarcating and appropriating the world’.\footnote{Tiago de Luca, \textit{Planetary Cinema} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), p. 40.} The first image of the Earth taken from outer space in 1966 was celebrated for bringing a different perspective on the world, presenting the planet as a fragile and shared habitat. However, this perspective from the outside only contributed to further extension of Apollonian vision through an increasing number of satellites circulating the Earth, promising interconnectivity, instantaneity and establishing the protocols of global surveillance. As James Bridle observes, this interconnectivity would not be possible without
the networks that were first established by the same empires that ‘occupied, then exploited, the natural reserves of their possessions, and the networks they created live on in the digital infrastructures of the present day’. Thus, the idea of the planetary demands an awareness of the infrastructure and power relations that facilitate this interconnectivity and ‘globalness’.

As discussed in the *Introduction*, during the pandemic such exposure of interdependence through the movement of the virus made the planetary scale more tangible. For example, in Yuk Hui’s essay written during the pandemic ‘For a Planetary Thinking’ (2020), the writer invites a shift in philosophical perspective towards *planetarising*, which means taking into consideration that ‘we are in and will remain in a state of catastrophe’. As Hui argues, metaphysical thinking is still an active and desiring force directing the fate of human beings. Conquest of land, air, and sea driven by the ideals of progress and economic growth needs to be redirected towards exploring a possibility of technology not dictated by this logic. We need an approach to technology that can be radically opened to contribute to the creation of the world rather than its devastation. This essay presents an important aspect emerging in philosophical thought: the address of different applications of planetary technology, and consideration of how such approach could contribute to resisting ‘planetarisation’. This, however, is not exclusive to the context of the pandemic, and philosophers such as Claire Colebrook and Bruno Latour have already called for a need to rethink our relationship to the Earth in the context of climate crisis. According to Colebrook, the climate crisis has brought a new imaginary for political questions that comes in proximity to thinking about the Earth as not defined by territories but as a globe that requires collective and organised action to navigate the catastrophe. Colebrook suggests that, ‘it is the present sense of the planet as a whole, as a fragile bounded globe that might present us, finally, with the opportunity and imperative to think a genuine ethos’. In this context, a similar issue is raised by Latour in his observation of the changing political landscape that deals with the climate emergency and demands a shift in perspective, changing the ways we are inhabiting the Earth.

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Jennifer Gabrys approaches the context of climate crisis in relation to the notion of the planetary in her essay ‘Becoming Planetary’ (2018), which acknowledges that the notion of planetary is increasingly associated with computational technology. This distant and total sensing of the planet as an object of capture enables knowledge about the climate crisis, which is known in terms of the planetary scale only because of the global infrastructures that facilitate this vision. Inspired by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s and Sylvia Winter’s writings, Gabrys discusses a need to reconfigure the meaning of planetary and its associations with computable totality. Rather, she considers a becoming planetary as praxis, which:

[...] involves an attention to questions of colonial imaginations and control, of racial and economic exclusions, of environmental injustices, and of universal science and global abstractions that might be de-figured, superseded, and transformed in the search for more open and just ways of being human and planetary that are still to be re-imagined.  

Gabrys’s attempt to rethink the notion of the planetary supports my approach which considers the planetary in relation to the pandemic. This I perceive not just in terms of measurable and total vision of the globe, but as an event that has allowed for direct attention to the questions of racial and economic exclusions and injustices while re-imagining the ways of being human and planetary at the same time. This desire to reimagine the notion of planetary – or to address it in the moment of crisis such as the pandemic which is itself a product of globalisation – requires the dismantling of structures that facilitate mastery and control over the Earth as a site of conquest, exploitation, and economic growth, insofar as its mastery is achieved through its abstraction, reduction to measurable object and mapped territory. My approach thus moves towards thinking about the planetary while rethinking its meaning and dealing with the effects of the Capitalocene as it exists in the present. This resonates with Bridle’s invitation to think about the present as ‘poised between an oppressive history and an unknowable future’, calling for the identification of strategies for living, with a focus on ‘the here and now, and not the illusory promises of computational prediction, surveillance, ideology and representation’.  

These connections set the scene for further discussion on the meaning of experiential critique

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90 Bridle, p. 100.
in relation to the loss of mastery and total vision, which I explore throughout the thesis in relation to moving image installations.

Modes of Resistance

In this section of the chapter – having already discussed Nancy’s philosophical approach to globalisation, notions of the world, community, and technology – I would like to turn towards developing the idea of experiential critique, which will provide a framework for the analysis of the moving image installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl, and explore modes of resistance to extraction driven by the deterministic approaches to the future. As aforementioned, Nancy’s approach to touch allows us to configure experiential critique in terms of spacing and withdrawal. This approach encompasses thinking about the double sign of the ecotechnological landscape, which is composed of extractivist uses of technology, and thinking about technology as technē, which refers to creation. As Murray defined it following Nancy’s critique of technology, ‘techno-logie is framed by the perspectival and proscenium traditions of the screen through which the viewing subject is always positioned at a distance from the goal of vision’. It also orders trajectory and distance from the past towards the future that supports traditions of colonialism and sovereignty. These relations between the screen and projection are explored in the analysis of the artists’ installations in terms of their approaches to reconfiguring the screen and projection technologies, in order to interrogate the deterministic projection of a future modelled around the processes of extraction, appropriation, and abstraction. I will approach this subject while dealing with multiple aspects of the concept of immersion itself, which encompasses both the discourse on sensory experience and its ecotechnological dimension. This approach will be explored in relation to the emergence of the ‘oceanic turn’ (the field of Blue Humanities), which allows for the reconsideration of the concept of immersion in relation to the crises of the present. Given that immersion is inextricably linked with the ecotechnological landscape, which entangles beings, technologies, and environments on a planetary scale, the aim of this section is to define experiential critique as a mode of critical thinking in relation to the concept of immersion, as an invitation to rethink our positions within the world and how we relate to it.

91 Murray, p. 158.
92 Murray, p. 51.
Current processes of ‘un-world’ demand a radical shift in perspective – an invitation to move towards a non-terrestrial, immersive point of view to reconfigure relations. However, notions of fluidity, interconnectivity, nonlinearity, and immersivity are also inextricably linked with the flows of capital and digitality, which facilitate circulation of commodities, materials, images, and bodies, defining them in terms of the units of value. As discussed earlier in relation to Nancy, the global digital network also exposes the self as networked, technological, and environmental. Following the duality of globalisation and ecotechnics, the following discussion on immersion and critical proximity will attempt to define a framework for thinking about experiential critique thereby allowing us to explore immersive installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry and Hito Steyerl as sites of resisting the logic of Capitalocene. Critical proximity, a term coined by Kate Mondloch, reflects the critical and aesthetic awareness of a networked and relational existence whilst being embedded in an immersive environment of a museum or a gallery-based installation. In this instance, Mondloch’s approach acts as a starting point for developing thought on immersion further, extending it towards the idea of becoming planetary. I develop it further to not only reflect on the more-than-human entanglements and openness towards the world, but also to address the technological and environmental networks enabling co-existence that are enveloped in the flows of capital.

**On Immersion**

A conventional understanding of the term ‘immersion’ or an immersive environment in the field of visual culture tends to be described in terms of a diegetic absorption, embodied response to a sensory stimulus or as a mode of entering an illusionistic, virtual space. Although in the twenty-first century the concept of immersion itself has become associated with a myriad of possibilities of immersive entertainment offered by the digital media industry, the desire for immersive experiences existed before new media discourse. For example, Oliver Grau traces the history of immersive images from illusion spaces to virtual reality. Alison Griffiths discusses the history of immersive viewing by focusing on panoramas, museums, and

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cathedrals as spaces that engage with spectators’ mobility to facilitate immersive experiences.\textsuperscript{95} Angela Ndalianis develops a cross-historical analysis of media aesthetics by tracing trans-historical manifestations of the baroque in the entertainment industry.\textsuperscript{96} Such spaces created to seduce the senses and astonish a viewer have a significant place in the history of visual culture and are associated with making the framing apparatus invisible, with the aim of disseminating the power of, for example, the Catholic Church.

Considering the historical context of immersion, it is also important to recognise how this concept has been mutating with respect to digital media and neoliberal capitalism. As Christopher Pavsek puts it, the concept of immersion ‘is already a conventional and tired experience and idea’, which is ‘a central feature and ambition of the most current of media forms, those of digital media, which offer an endless array of immersive entertainment experiences’.\textsuperscript{97} Pavsek’s argument develops a critique of immersion in relation to the sensory ethnography film \textit{Leviathan} (dir. Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Vérona Paravel, 2012) and a contemporary media discourse which is inevitably linked to neoliberal capitalism. In this context, he considers an induced embodied experience as a constraint on the spectator, which limits a critical distance from an immersive environment.\textsuperscript{98} Another critique of immersion is presented by Mary Ann Doane who, to some extent, concurs with Pavsek’s argument. For her, the discourse of immersion does not ‘rescue the body from its nullification by both Renaissance perspective and the Kantian sublime, making us once again present to ourselves’.\textsuperscript{99} Actually, by appealing to the body as sensory experience, the category of immersion ‘does not revive an access to spatiotemporal presence or localization. Instead, it radically de-localizes the subject once again, grasping for more to see, more to hear, more to feel in an ever-expanding elsewhere’.\textsuperscript{100} Although the critique of immersion discussed here recognises how this category has been applied and exploited by the neoliberal visual economy in the context of digital technology, it is also necessary to consider other approaches to thinking about immersion or immersive viewing conditions.

\textsuperscript{97} Pavsek, 4–11 (p. 6).
\textsuperscript{98} Pavsek, 4–11 (p. 7).
\textsuperscript{100} Doane, p. 253.
Pavsek’s critique of the concept of immersion as a contemporary cliché was developed in relation to the logophobic discourse in which the film *Leviathan* operates. His approach is based on the argument that immersion, without framing and attentiveness to historical and geographical specificity – to the singular – instead becomes an experience of an ‘eternal present’, which produces a loss of critical distance.\(^{101}\) This argument follows the assumption that immersion is a passivity-inducing state, which brings us back to the prevalent pessimism in the history of cinema about the passive spectator absorbed by the cinematic viewing conditions. Contrary to Pavsek’s critique of immersive cinematic viewing conditions, Daniel Strutt proposes a more positive account of immersion in the context of science fiction films. He considers digital ontology as an embodiment of a metaphysical flux that argues for the importance of corporeal consciousness under the digital visual regime. To conceptualise digital ontology, Strutt applies Catherine Malabou’s notion of plasticity to break down ‘the division between neural activity, the activity of the body, and the activity of particles and forces in the world’.\(^{102}\) By shifting from cine-thinking to digi-thinking, Strutt conceptualises the latter ‘as a mode of metaphysical consciousness that is affectively synthesised through the automatisms of digital visual technologies, and which permeates thought, perception, and activity’.\(^{103}\) Various digital technologies progressively seek to increase immersive affectivity, which is inseparable from the biopolitical landscape of the neoliberal regime. However, according to Strutt, the haptic closeness to, and the loss of, cognitive distance from the image content is what generates an encounter with the infinite possibilities of variation that push beyond subjectivity towards an experimental and experiential mode of being:

the digital image, with the loss of the cut, the frame, and even the camera, not only breaks free from space but also cinematic time, towards a pure experience of metaphysics in flux. Furthermore, this is an embodied experience of metaphysics and, through an increasingly affective surface (in digital 3D, HFR, HD, or digital IMAX), we can feel this otherwise abstract ontology. Indeed, this is perhaps the only way to experience such a transportation moment of flux without being within the very corporeal conditions of drug intoxication, meditation, psychosis or near-death.\(^{104}\)

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\(^{101}\) Pavsek, 4–11 (p. 10).


\(^{103}\) Strutt, p. 224.

\(^{104}\) Strutt, p. 83.
Strutt argues that digital technology can facilitate space for ‘ethical aesthetic experimentation with modes of existence and observations of reality that reflects and foments a true ontological plasticity where thought becomes more active, creative and experimental’. This approach allows Strutt to see the potential in the new visual regime as a space of technical evolution of corporeal consciousness, which encourages visual experimentations with the notions of matter, body, and sensation that can reconfigure our relation to the world. In contrast to Pavsek’s argument, Strutt’s account of the digital visual regime opens up consideration of affective encounters as generative, rather than lacking critical distance.

Given this positive outlook on the digital visual regimes, explored through sci-fi films that offer an embodied experience of abstract ontology, we might question whether this approach can also be applied to thinking about proximity with the image in moving image installations as a mode to generate an onto-ethical understanding of the world. Undoubtedly, the concept of immersion is associated with the overstimulating effects of contemporary mediascapes and screen-reliant existence; however, it is essential to observe how the context of immersion differs from cinematic viewing conditions when thinking about moving image installations in the context of immersive experience. In contrast to the accounts on immersion already discussed, Fabienne Liptay and Burcu Dogramaci consider the immersive quality of the artwork as a space to reflect on positions and relations:

As surfers, divers, and swimmers, we may not – or rather no longer – maintain a proper distance from works of art and media, but we are still free to position ourselves in relation to them, to act within them, to actively participate in them, or to simply step out of them.106

The authors propose a consideration of immersion beyond its association with the direct sensory stimuli, which in turn allows them to reject ‘the prevalent idea of a loss of critical distance in the confrontation with pictures that physically and emotionally involve the viewer’. Instead, they acknowledge the ‘framing’ aspect of aesthetic experience rather than assuming that it is separate from the framing apparatus. The authors argue that immersive

105 Strutt, p. 223.
107 Liptay and Dogramaci, p. 9.
‘works of art are still “framed” by the context of their reception, which positions viewers within a network of architectural and technological, institutional and economical, cultural and social determinants’. Therefore, I propose to assess the immersive quality of moving image installation art beyond ideas of spectacle that reduce a body to sensory experience, but as a dynamic that activates modes of relations and positions from an embedded and embodied position. A brief overview of differing approaches to immersion demonstrates a need to carefully navigate the question of critical distance, which perpetuates the entrenched ideas of reason and vision enabled through observation from a distance.

Undoubtedly, immersion as a concept lacks analytical precision; it also cannot escape the capitalist frameworks and regimes of production and consumption. Nevertheless, this conceptual ambiguity can be considered as a productive feature that allows us to navigate the networked environment that defines the contemporary technological condition. In this networked environment, the screen acts as connective tissue between the body and the global digital infrastructure, which opens up space for considering various modes of experiential critique, from the environmental to the aesthetic.

**Critical Proximity**

A discussion around the idea of immersion demonstrates that, while considering experiential critique of the moving image art installations, it is important to assess immersion as both inseparable from neoliberal capitalist and biopolitical discourses, but also as a potential site for unfolding onto-ethical thought. Can such immersive installations be perceived beyond the spectacle, but as interfaces that can potentialise experiential critique of the dominant regimes of sensing and thinking? With this question in mind, I would like to advance a discussion on the idea of proximity and embeddedness that offers further perspectives on experiential critique.

Firstly, I propose a consideration of immersion in relation to Nancy’s philosophy, which offers a non-optical dynamic. In his book *Listening* (2007), Nancy asks what it is to be formed by listening or how to listen with all one’s being. He explores the idea of resonance of being and

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108 Liptay and Dogramaci, p. 9.
opening oneself to being-as-resonance, which overturns Cartesian perspectivalism and the intentionality of cogito. Rather, for Nancy, a listening subject is a sonorous body that resonates with the world, opening towards it through the sharing of inside and outside: ‘to be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside’. For Nancy, a turn to listening, as well as the touching discussed earlier, is an attempt to open philosophy beyond the ocularcentrism inherent in the notion of theōría, which merges vision and thought as a condition for observing and analysing a phenomenon. By bringing the notions of touch and listening as modes of thinking about existence, Nancy emphasises the importance of sensory perceptions abandoned by the Western philosophical tradition. Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s critique of ocularcentrism, Nancy’s work takes this direction further to question philosophy itself, and what it can or should do. He suggests considering being in terms of becoming a resonant subject, which opens philosophical thought to other points of references that diverge from being-as-appearance:

It is a question, then, of going back from the phenomenological subject, an intentional line of sight, to a resonant subject, an intensive spacing of a rebound that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to that same self.

Following Nancy’s thought on resonance offers another way to inflect the idea of immersion beyond its associations with the cinematic space. Nancy’s persistence in rethinking ontology as corporeal, and existence as an openness situated in terms of exteriority and exposure, destabilises a self-identical subject. It demands reintegrating the sensual perception excluded by the conceptual abstraction associated with Western ocularcentrism. This observation also resonates with Stefan Helmreich’s approach to rethinking philosophical reflection, not in relation to ‘mirror’ but to ‘resonance’, which ‘suggests a participation in the world, a moving in sympathy, an empirically attuned embodiment’. This openness of thought as always ‘dancing’ in relation to the senses is also part of my own embodied response to philosophy as a mode of ‘listening’ attentively, rather than ‘observing’ from a distance. It is important to note

111 Nancy, Listening, p. 21.
here that listening refers to sonorous omnipresence: ‘the sound that penetrates through the ear propagates throughout the entire body something of its effects, which could not be said to occur in the same way with the visual signal’. This approach is also a part of the idea of experiential critique that I have developed in relation to the event of pandemic, which suddenly overturned a dominance over the self and the world based on objectifying and perspectival vision. This moment in time made it possible for the multiple resonances of the world to emerge, inviting a thinking with the imperceptible and the untouchable that had material effects on a world shaped according to the laws of global neoliberal capitalism. This unprecedented time forced us to turn towards the world as emergence, which demands attunement to the new perspectives that opened in the moment of stillness, which disrupted the calculating ‘machine’ that extracts resources for economic growth and technological progress.

In light of this, and while still working within Nancy’s philosophical framework to think through senses such as listening and touching in order to attune to the emergence of the world presenting itself, I approach immersion through a dimension of liquid. As Adrienne Janus observes, Nancy’s idea of a sonorous body is full of air-space and the absence of noise, which indicates that it is lacking the medium of water:

[...] while Nancy claims an empirical point of departure in the sensation of his own bodily experience, his body does not seem to compose its resonance in a medium that is, after all, at least 70% water, where the ear itself is a resonance chamber filled with water, and the womb/belly-mouth matrix of resonance is a liquid medium. It is this relative absence of liquids, paradoxically enough, that seems to underlie the relative absence of noise in Nancy’s embodied resonance.

Drawing on this critique – in place of only addressing the body’s relation to frequency, vibrations and sonorous omnipresence – I also extend Janus’ idea to the realm of oceanic that enhances other modes of attentive listening. I seek to enter this non-terrestrial space as a mode of navigating a shift in perspective that demands radical reorientation, comprehending other ways of breathing, listening, touching, and thinking in times of crisis. This navigation insists

on immersion: ‘hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave’. 116 The pandemic has contributed to a visible manifestation of the birth of an unknown world – a ‘coming’ world – that emerges as ontological plurality, evading prediction, measurement, and control. As such, and in relation to the moving image installations, I explore approaches in order to learn how to navigate this space through attentive listening to the resonances of resistance.

In her book An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea (2018), Erika Balsom appropriates Romain Rolland’s notion of ‘oceanic feeling’, which is defined ‘as the sensation of an unbreakable bond between oneself and the outside world’. 117 This feeling, also taken up by Sigmund Freud, compromises the boundaries of the self, which emerges from an absorption in ‘a sense of limitlessness, unboundedness, and interconnectedness’. 118 In the context of cinema and neoliberal ideology, Balsom appropriates the metaphor of ‘oceanic feeling’ and considers it in relation to Hester Blum’s invitation to approach the oceanic as the new epistemology and dimension for thinking about the planetary relations and its extra-terrestrial resources, thus leaving the theological dimension of the metaphor behind: ‘to leave terra firma and delve into the liquid flux of oceanic feeling [which] is to undertake a radical reorientation of perspective’. 119 I consider this invitation to leave terra firma as a reconfiguration of space and time beyond linear perspectives, in order to embrace challenges of the present time, opening up the future as here-and-now, dissolving, crumbling, and relational. This approach offers a potential for considering the world and existence outside constructionist paradigms. This discussion therefore calls for a space to consider a shift in perspective, a radical reorientation that can potentially interrupt dominant structures of thinking and sensing defined by the logic of extraction and self-sufficiency.

This shift in perspective is facilitated by thinking about immersion in relation to the spaces that the selected artworks refer to. They touch on zones of the oceanic, the digital Atlantic, outer space and the idea of the future, all of which are invariably entangled within the landscape of Capitalocene. I argue that these moving image installations invite us to resist or defy the effects of a logic based on the accumulation of profit. This is approached by working within the context

116 Nancy, Listening, p. 21.
118 Balsom, p. 9.
119 Balsom, p. 10.
of the field of Blue Humanities which helps to situate the notion of immersion not only within the cinematic discourse, but also connect it to the notion of oceanic interconnectivity, an awareness of interdependence. The scholarship of Blue Humanities attempts to historicise the ocean in relation to the ecological catastrophe which is invisible to the human eye. This work is important in addressing violence the oceanic realm undergoes and its slow but invisible death through acidification, pollution, nuclear waste, overfishing, and so on.\textsuperscript{120} As Ian Buchanan and Celina Jeffery suggest, Blue Humanities not only critically engages with the space of the ocean, but also proposes approaching humanity as \textit{blue humanity}.\textsuperscript{121} This oceanic interconnectedness of blue humanity only becomes visible in the moment of ecological collapse driven by the effects of Capitalocene. Here, the notion of the oceanic is vital to considering visual and metaphorical links to aquatic environments present in the artworks that draw attention to the global crises reverberating on a planetary scale. In the analysis of these artworks, I reframe the notion of immersion in relation to the political and ethical resonances of contemporaneity.

A discussion of interconnectivity in relation to the oceanic and digital environment leads us to the notion of critical proximity and its ability to offer alternative ways of being \textit{towards} the world, here explored in the context of museum and gallery-based moving image installations. In \textit{A Capsule Aesthetic: Feminist Materialisms in New Media Art} (2018), Mondloch provides an overview of ‘performative human-technology interfaces’ and their ethical, aesthetic, and political implications in relation to post-1990 media art installations.\textsuperscript{122} Mondloch approaches immersive installations in relation to feminist materialisms, which allows her to explore the potential productivity of such settings as opportunities to ‘experience and evaluate the myriad interactions among viewing bodies, digital media, and other forms of materiality that tend to go unnoticed outside of an art exhibition context’.\textsuperscript{123} Opening up the idea of museum-based new media art installations as more than passive immersion, populist spectacle, and voyeuristic pleasure, Mondloch argues for their value in creatively enacting a range of human-nonhuman

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{122} Mondloch, \textit{A Capsule Aesthetic}, p. 16.
\bibitem{123} Mondloch, \textit{A Capsule Aesthetic}, p. 18.
\end{thebibliography}
relations. To support her argument, she explores installations by Pipilotti Rist, Patricia Piccinini, and Mariko Mori, exposing human experience as always interactive and instantiating ‘how subjects and objects emerge through their encounters with each other’. Mondloch’s discussion, which extends across the three different works of art, argues for the necessity of multi-sensory encounters with bodies, technologies, and other forms of matter, which ‘invite us to experience not only our embodied absorption within but also our ethical-political responsibility toward the rest of the material world’. In the chapter ‘Critical Proximity: Pipilotti Rist’s Exhibited Interfaces and the Contemporary Art Museum’, the author introduces the concept of critical proximity as a method to articulate immersive museum-based video installations as being more than only sites of entertainment. For Mondloch, Rist’s site-specific installation Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters) (2008), exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, acts as an example which ‘establishes a novel model of critical aesthetics’. According to her, Rist’s experimentation with the museum’s space approaches it as ‘a site to critically frame and engage the (typically overlooked) material and experiential interfaces between viewing bodies and digital technologies that characterise our twenty-first-century technoculture’. Critical proximity therefore stands as a model for ‘simultaneously reflexively critical and inexorably immersive’ experience. Mondloch’s approach to immersive experience as having the potential to frame and expose subjectivity as networked matter brings a dimension of onto-ethics to the concept of immersion.

Mondloch’s invitation to think the onto-ethical dimension of immersive installations resonates with Elizabeth Grosz’s concept of onto-ethics – an invention of new modes of thought and life that focuses on forces of difference and its ability to generate and undo subjectivities. The concept offers the possibility to consider how the digital visual regime in moving image installations could contribute to the creation of space for experimental modes of being towards an onto-ethical existence. In her book The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism (2017), Grosz explores the philosophical thought of a non-reductive material-ideal relation as a new new materialism, one necessary to thinking of the world as ontogenesis, as a world of becoming. In the book, Grosz delineates a genealogy of material-ideal relations explored by ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophers who dealt with an idea of the

124 Mondloch, A Capsule Aesthetic, p. 6.
125 Mondloch, A Capsule Aesthetic, p. 114.
126 Mondloch, A Capsule Aesthetic, p. 46.
127 Mondloch, A Capsule Aesthetic, p. 54.
128 Mondloch, A Capsule Aesthetic, p. 63.
incorporeal, indicating ‘a way to conceptualize materiality without reducing its ideal dimension, a way to think thought, through and in its material arrangements’.\textsuperscript{129} Such an exploration of non-reductive reconciliation between ideality and materiality – focused on the incorporeals such as time, space, void, sense (sayable) as immanent conditions or orientations for matter to take forms – opens up the ethical dimension of our condition and place of existence in a changing world. For Grosz, such an understanding of the world as material-ideal, as incorporeal openness, may provide a way to conceptualise ethics and politics as well as arts and technologies as more-than-human (but less-than-otherworldly), as ways of living in a vast world without mastering or properly understanding it.\textsuperscript{130} It could be said that both Grosz and Mondloch consider mediation not as a process taking place between the distinct objects and subjects, but as Sean Cubitt puts it, mediation ‘precedes the separation of the human and the environmental’.\textsuperscript{131} This thought resonates with Richard Grusin’s approach to mediation, which is considered as a process that is no longer ‘confined to communication and related forms of media but needs to be extended to all human and nonhuman activity’.\textsuperscript{132} It is in this way that Grusin introduces his concept of radical mediation, inviting us to rethink the notion of mediation in the twenty-first century as a nonhuman process:

although media and media technologies have operated and continue to operate epistemologically as modes of knowledge production, they also function technically, bodily, and materially to generate and modulate individual and collective affective moods or structures of feeling among assemblages of humans and nonhumans.\textsuperscript{133}

In the context of Mondloch’s concept of critical proximity and Grosz’s understanding of onto-ethics, Cubitt’s and Grusin’s ideas on mediation here are useful for approaching human and nonhuman assemblages in contemporary moving image installations as sites for encounters that can direct thought and body, towards the processes that condition our being-in-the-world.

Drawing on Nancy’s philosophical framework of corporeal ontology and considering it in relation to radical mediation, critical proximity, and onto-ethical thought, I turn to exploring

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Grosz, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Sean Cubitt, \textit{Finite Media} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Grusin, p. 125.
\end{itemize}
the possibilities of rethinking self in terms of environment, technology, and relations through the analysis of moving image installations. In the context of digital media, Nancy’s thoughts on touch as a conceptual and sensual configuration allows us to engage with the idea of self in terms of exteriority, while considering the screen as a site of exposure and existence as being-with. Thus, while navigating both the technical and conceptual dimensions of the artworks, I also attend to an experiential critique of the catastrophe of the present caught up in the logic of reduction of existence to value. Working within the framework of Nancy’s philosophy – which encourages rethinking sense and sensation, and creates a space to navigate the time of the pandemic – this thesis explores a different mode of relating to the world and its potentialities, which is here also explored in relation to the artists’ installations and their capacity of experiential critique of the Capitalocene. This is achieved because of a place of immersion in the present, and in the elsewhere of the digital realm, thus demanding a reconceptualisation of the notion of immersion itself as inextricably linked to the experiential textures of contemporaneity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated on philosophical concepts by Nancy such as touch, listening, being-with, ecotechnics, and struction, which will be applied in the discussion of the moving image installations by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry and Hito Steyerl that follows. These concepts are helpful in revisiting the notion of immersion insofar as they offer an experiential critique of the Capitalocene. Drawing on Nancy’s philosophical framework, I defined the methods I have applied in thinking about the digital technology and the role of the screen, one opening onto relations and existence as being exposed to the limit of sense. Here, the notion of touch is a significant point of departure for considering interruption of sense as offering resistance to the processes of extraction, appropriation, and abstraction that define the Capitalocene. In this instance, sensation, when thought in relation to Nancy’s conceptualisation of it, can be configured as a point of resistance to the processes of turning existence into units of value. In the following chapters, this premise is explored in relation to rethinking immersion as an experiential critique of the logic of profitability and self-sufficiency while approaching the oceanic as a reference for interconnectedness – an invitation to leave terra firma to consider
material relations from an immersive view on the present, resonant with one’s relation and position and with respect to the global crises that define contemporaneity.
Chapter 2: Rachel Rose. Feeling the Surface of Contemporaneity

Introduction. Towards the Earth

_The way that we manage to get outside our bodies is always through our bodies._

Rachel Rose is an American artist (b. 1986) known for her sensorially overwhelming, conceptually and technically complex moving image installations. They act as containers where themes around death, ecological instability, pervasiveness of technology and anxieties of contemporary life are explored as condensed experiential textures. Rose’s practice takes the form of an active questioning of our existential _surface_ of contemporaneity, which she explores on a video editing timeline. Video editing allows her to process and redraw the edges of the self through various encounters facilitated by imperceptible technical and ecological events. As Rose notes, ‘I guess I’m always asking myself what counts as inside of me and what counts as outside of me. What counts as an edge? If everything is permeable to everything else, what does an edge mean?’ Driven by this active questioning of the boundaries of the self and ‘a transition zone between different systems’ she treats video as a temporal fabric. This sensorially enveloping fabric incorporates Rose’s ‘thinking about the catastrophe of capitalism and how we land in the future by looking at sites in the past that led us there’. This questioning of the ‘catastrophe of capitalism’ is clearly visible in more recent moving image installations, such as _Wil-o-Wisp_ (2018) and _Enclosure_ (2019). In these works, the artist traces back to the origins of the privatisation of space and interrogates a new formation of landscapes and their effects on a subject’s relation to oneself and the environment. Rose’s earlier video works, such as _Sitting Feeding Sleeping_ (2013) and _A Minute Ago_ (2014), reflect on the present

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138 Stephanie Bailey, ‘Rachel Rose on the Alchemy of Power’, _Ocula_, 2021 <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/rachel-rose-on-the-alchemy-of-power/?fbclid=IwAR3eaUjA3tUGii0n8IvOcP9rEcnw9Nz0Wwbx72DEZVcCs0v4kc0UHewLY6Q> [accessed 26 April 2021].
time, ecological instability, and the effects of containment on the quality of human and nonhuman life.

The first part of this chapter ‘Compositing Ruptures’ explores Rose’s early video works and introduces her meticulous approach to the video editing process, which is based on navigating the meaning of an edge within the frame. In these works, the compositing technique allows Rose to combine visual elements from separate sources into a single frame or sequence, which experientially and conceptually takes the form of a critique of binaries such as inside and outside or life and death. As she notes, ‘I see the edit itself as a surface through which I can become more conscious of the content. Seeing it for what it is: as a shape, a texture, and a rhythm in relation to all the other cuts’. Rose sees the edit as the surface itself, which she cuts, rejoins, and layers as a temporal fabric to actively dissect contemporaneity. After dissecting it, she restitches its experiential textures into new sensations that unfold in complex moving image installations. In Rose’s practice, flatness, whether considered in relation to sound, image, or screen surface, plays a significant role in the making and installation of video works. The artist considers flatness ‘as a mechanism for actually allowing the viewer to go somewhere’ while engaging with the straightforwardness of the apparatus. For example, in her immersive installations stereo sound is often chosen over 5.1 sound to avoid an illustrative presentation of a dimensional space. Therefore, a quality of flatness, which is similar to painting, provides Rose with a structure for layering sound and images into dense textures that extend a process of weaving matter and mind together into an installation environment. Throughout this chapter, thus, the quality of flatness permeating the image, the screen surface and sound are interrogated as elements for reimagining immersion as an experiential critique, exposing the dissolving of thresholds between different systems. Rose’s practice which consists of dense layering of textures and temporalities uncovers the fault lines of the surface of contemporaneity.

In the section ‘Compositing Ruptures’, I argue that perceptual cuts performed in the videos that emerge from Rose’s creative impulse to cut through chaos itself, transforming and reorganising matter in a form of a moving image, expose perception as active and world-making. As Zylinska notes, perception is a site where cutting and stitching takes place: ‘our visual

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140 Rachel Rose, interviewed by Geistė Marija Kinčinaitytė, 24 February 2021.
apparatus introduces edges and cuts into the imagistic flow: it cuts up the environment so that we can see it, and then helps us stitch it back together again’.\textsuperscript{141} By recognising the role of the insertion of edges into a nonconscious flow of vision, Zylinska proposes considering a cut in creative practice more than a technique but as ‘an ethical imperative’ to ‘recut the world anew, to a different size and measure’.\textsuperscript{142} Drawing on Zylinska’s thought and Rose’s approach to video editing, guided by the meaning of an edge, I argue that the artist’s concerns regarding ecology and mortality are examined via cuts on an editing timeline with which she redraws the edges of the self. By bringing separate visual elements together into bursts of intensity, she exposes the process of cutting as an active perception, which gives a temporal form to matter and self. According to Sarah Kember and Zylinska:

The process of cutting is one of the most fundamental and originary processes through which we emerge as “selves” as we engage with matter and attempt to give it (and ourselves) form. Cutting reality into small pieces – with our eyes, our bodily and cognitive apparatus, our language, our memory, and our technologies – we enact separation and relationality as the two dominant aspects of material locatedness in time.\textsuperscript{143}

If we consider an ethical imperative of a cut as a process that allows us to restitch relations anew, it could be said that Rose’s video works embody it by overlapping timelines of different historical, personal, and nonhuman scales to cut through the experiential textures of contemporaneity. However, her practice also extends the notion of the cut in relation to the edge, which invites us to consider shifting boundaries between life and death, and technology and ecology. On the surface of a video timeline, this questioning becomes a philosophical and multi-layered fabric made of intensities.

To investigate the material and philosophical layers which constitute Rose’s moving image works, I will firstly discuss her earlier videos briefly mentioned above. This will help to situate Rose’s approach to moving image as a form of critique exposing conditions of life under regimes that facilitate self-abstraction from the material world. This introductory discussion

\textsuperscript{142} Zylinska, \textit{Nonhuman Photography}, p. 44.
will set the background for the analysis of the *Everything and More* (2015) installation. The latter artwork will be the focus of my analysis, for which I will be drawing on Nancy’s corporeal ontology and his notion of resonance. In the second part ‘Ontology as Critique: Gravity and Resonance’, I will map out how this installation critiques the prevailing binaries of inside and outside that continue to support the logic of self-sufficiency. The *Everything and More* installation, titled after David Foster Wallace’s book on the notion of infinity, aims to challenge a viewer by opening a body to new frequencies while simulating encounters with the limits of sensory perception in the outer space.\(^{144}\) In the analysis of this installation, I will explore how Rose rethinks the concept of immersion in relation to flatness, which reconfigures immersion in terms of being on the threshold rather than transcending into an illusory space. In this context, Nancy’s reconceptualisation of corporeality, where sense and sensation are thought beyond the notion of absolute interiority, allows us to access ontological plurality of being in terms of touch, exteriority, and resonance. Exteriority refers to the assemblage of exposed surfaces and fragments, and a notion of touch signifies an ontology of being-with, a co-existence that is defined through an ungraspable relation to finitude. In my analysis of this installation and its sound effects, I pay attention to ‘the weight of a localized body’, which Nancy states ‘is the true purely sensible a priori condition of the activity of reason: a transcendental aesthetics of gravity [*pesanteur*]’.\(^{145}\) This link between the weight of a body and thought is developed by Nancy in relation to the need to reflect on the failures of progress that led to the crises of the present and the end of History: ‘[w]e have exhausted the schemas of progress and of the progressive unveiling of truth’.\(^{146}\) What follows is that humanity’s movement to the ‘infinite universe’ requires a thought and praxis that engages with countermovement which critiques exponential expansion and economic growth. According to Nancy:

> We need figures that weigh upon the bottom rather than extracting themselves from it. That stave it in and expose it. We need a thought that would be like a mass out of true, the fall and the creation of a world.\(^{147}\)


\(^{146}\) Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 83.

\(^{147}\) Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 84.
In relation to Nancy’s philosophical thought and Rose’s interest in navigating the meaning of an edge, I will also reflect on the context of the pandemic, during which this chapter was developed, and which resonated with the installation’s concept and its effects – a space journey towards mortality. In relation to the installation’s content, which addresses astronaut’s experience of being in outer space and his return to Earth, I will also consider the actual events that were unfolding during the pandemic, such as Black Lives Matter protests and Elon Musk’s SpaceX contribution to expanding space commercialisation. These tangible tensions between the pandemic, the installation, which explores an experience of returning to Earth, and Nancy’s philosophical concepts will support my argument that Rose’s practice is a significant contribution for the consideration of the affective moving image installation environment as a site for evoking an onto-ethical understanding of the world. In this chapter, I contend that the *Everything and More* installation is an example of such sites, where a process of reweaving edges of the self in the face of contemporary crises takes place, moving one’s heavy body towards the Earth rather than extracting it from its material and interconnected surroundings.

I discuss this installation in relation to its capacity to evoke experiential critique of the Capitalocene. In this example, I approach experiential critique in terms of directing one’s body towards the notion of finitude and the planet Earth, which is undergoing significant ecological and political shifts. In *Down to Earth* (2018), Bruno Latour discusses the New Climatic Regime following the United States’ official withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement (2015) announced by the 45th President, Donald J. Trump, in 2017.¹⁴⁸ Latour argues that the climate crisis unites different types of migrants (situated inside and outside the borders of a sovereign state) under a feeling of ‘finding oneself deprived of land’.¹⁴⁹ Since the project of globalisation lost its viability in the face of the intensifying climate crisis, growing inequality, anti-migration movements, and loss of inhabitable land, Latour reflects on ‘the new universality [which] consists in feeling that the ground is in the process of giving way’.¹⁵⁰ He calls for a turn towards the Terrestrial as a way to come down to Earth, united under the urgency of orienting ourselves and mapping globally shifting positions imposed by the mutating landscape. The landscape is mutating because ‘the soil of globalization’s dreams is beginning to slip away’.¹⁵¹ It might be

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¹⁴⁸ The U.S. rejoined the Paris Agreement in 2021, under the 46th President, Joe Biden.
¹⁵⁰ Latour, p. 9.
¹⁵¹ Latour, pp. 2-4.
only a mere coincidence that Rose conceived *Everything and More* at the time when the Paris Climate Agreement was initiated, marking a move towards a globally coordinated action to revert the impending effects of the climate crisis. Nevertheless, in this chapter, the analysis of the *Everything and More* installation is approached with Latour’s questions resonating in the background:

how can we reweave edges, envelopes, protections; how can we find new footing while simultaneously taking into account the end of globalization, the scope of migration, and the limits placed on the sovereignty of nation-states that are henceforth confronted by climate change?152

Therefore, in the face of crises and urgent questions that seek to challenge global capitalism according to which the world-system is mapped, wired, and directed towards growth, a task of ‘rewaving edges’ needs to be embraced. Throughout this chapter, I argue that Rose’s practice is directed towards a process of ‘rewaving edges’ to open a common space, a dwelling to land on while acknowledging that the landscape is mutating. Simultaneously, it also attempts to orient a thought towards the gravity of planetary crises and to raise questions about the structures that facilitate this global instability. Thus, in this chapter, I explore the capacity of Rose’s editing technique and the specifics of the *Everything and More* installation to aesthetically and conceptually ‘rewave edges’ that are more than exteriors enveloping the self. These edges are interiors of the self that are always exposed to and operating in relation to exteriority, gesturing towards subjectivity and being as always relational. In times of migratory, economic, and climate crises, when illusions of immunity, borders, and escapism are intensifying, it is essential to find ways to reweave the edges of the self, to participate in an experiential critique of the logic of self-sufficiency.

152 Latour, p. 11.
Compositing Ruptures

_Sitting Feeding Sleeping_ (2013)

Rose transferred her research-driven artistic sensitivity to moving image practice after encountering creative limitations as a painter. Her interest in the idea of an edge, therefore, emerges from a previous relationship with painting, which is always about ‘dealing with things in relationship to gravity’. In this section, I will discuss the artist’s meticulous style of editing in _Sitting Feeding Sleeping_ (2013) and _A Minute Ago_ (2014), which demonstrate how she explores video editing as a tool to investigate various scales of mortality and map the edges of the self. This section will set the background for considering Rose’s editing technique and its onto-ethical implications in relation to the _Everything and More_ installation, which I will discuss in the following part ‘Ontology as Critique: Gravity and Resonance’.

Rose’s entire oeuvre is dedicated to negotiating the states between living and non-living, which is also central to her first video work, marking a shift in her practice from the medium of painting to a moving image. For _Sitting Feeding Sleeping_, the artist approached video as a tool to literally ‘edit’ together experiences of ‘deathfullness’. The latter term is described as a quality of life full of its own vacant abstraction evoking a certain numbness, exhaustion, and fatigue that are also prevalent effects of our contemporary condition. Throughout the video, various clips from the cryogenics laboratory, the zoo, and the robotics perception laboratory are edited together to expand a conceptual framework around mortality, which extends beyond a subjective anxiety about one’s own death (see Figures 4, 5, 6). Rose’s first video is an invitation to consider a condition of ‘feeling dead while being alive’ spanning across different life forms. It explores the shifting boundaries between life and death in the context of technologically manipulated death and ecological crisis. The video appears to be an invitation to reflect on other life forms that are co-dependent and affected by various anthropogenic activities.

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Figure 4. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.

Figure 5. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.
This blurring between life and death is explored through a feeling of numbness across different examples and an emerging sense of entropy that makes up this abstracted video collage. Entropic disintegration is the main sonic and visual texture in the video, underlying the narrative, which demonstrates various attempts to preserve, prolong, or sustain life. Throughout the video, a fragile voiceover threads various excerpts from different footage together, evoking a sense of disintegration while trying to extract meaning from a variety of sources. It is unclear if the video is situated in the aftermath of a catastrophic event or if its material entropy is referring to an acceleration and a felt proximity to such an event. However, a repetition of a sentence ‘try to stop death’ reminds us about the human drive to manipulate materiality to overcome nature, contributing to the logic of extraction and abstraction. It is relevant that Nancy’s essay ‘L’Intrus’ (2002), reflecting on his survival of a heart transplant, entered Rose’s reading list while she was generating ideas for Sitting Feeding Sleeping.  

Although this text was not a central element in conceiving the video, a philosophical questioning of medical and technological interventions in deferring death corresponds with a feeling of ‘deathfullness’ explored in the video. As Nancy puts it:

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What religions used to represent, modern humanity has exposed to the power [puissances] of a technology that postpones the end in all the senses of the word. In prolonging the end, technology displays an absence of ends: which life should be prolonged, and to what end? To defer death is thus also to exhibit and underscore it.\footnote{Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, trans. by Susan Hanson, CR: The New Centennial Review, 2.3 (2002), 1–14 <https://doi.org/doi:10.1353/ncr.2002.0052>, p. 6.}

A question of the deferral of death, or its extension, seems to permeate Rose’s practice on many different levels, including her interest in working with the materiality of the video. In this specific work, questions around corporeal vulnerability in relation to ecology are explored through the malleable quality of the digital image itself.

The malleability and materiality of the digital are prominent elements in Sitting Feeding Sleeping, manifesting in a form of disintegrating error messages (see Figures 7, 9). Usually, such ‘media offline’ errors appear when footage in the editing timeline cannot be located to its original source. These red blocks of information are followed by perceptually violent scenes appearing as bursts of almost imperceptible images. The least visible elements are reproductions of paintings depicting scenes of deluge by Romantic painters such as John Martin, Joshua Shaw and Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (see Figures 8, 10, 12). These dramatic paintings are presented in a rapid flicker intermixed with the clips filmed at the zoo aquariums. This visual effect evokes a sense of an impending catastrophe of raising sea levels – announcing marine life’s dependency on the fluctuating water temperatures and acidification outside the administered and controlled zoo environment (see Figure 11).

These rhythmic bursts of images intercut together with the other clips of animals in their artificial environments, return us to a question about the quality of life in captivity, which is described by Rose as ‘deathfullness’. Here, a polar bear extracted from its natural habitat, which is also being affected by global warming, is given a pivotal role in the piece, blurring the lines between what could be comprehended as an animal in agony or as complete exhaustion from boredom. This sense of numbness is configured in relation to a viewer who is incorporated in the process of observing the animal’s slow life/death. This act of observation resonates with a black and white aerial photograph of a dead elephant briefly introduced earlier in the video. While the camera is panning across the room filled with the tropical plants for zoo
animals, the narrator contextualises the photograph by describing a process of violent death inflicted on the elephant called Topsy, which was staged and documented by the Edison Manufacturing Company in an actuality film called *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903). Although the only visual evidence of this footage referred to in the video is given by the appearance of a still image, the voice describing the act of electrocution forces us to imagine the smoke coming from the elephant’s feet and Topsy’s quivering body on the ground. As Nicole Shukin observes:

> The “violent immediacy” of Edison’s electrical and cinematic execution of Topsy, […] makes visible the often overlooked fact that animal sacrifice constituted something of a founding symbolic and material gesture of early electrical and cinematic culture. At the same time, it served to normativize the spectacle of animal death as a means of monstrating the powers of the new technological media. 157

More than a century later, in *Sitting Feeding Sleeping* Rose reflects on this monstration in the context of YouTube video archives by associating the act of watching with an act of replaying death, which she also extends to urgent environmental questions. In the sequence dedicated to a polar bear, a common symbol of climate crisis alluding to the rapidly changing conditions of an animal’s natural habitat, we hear a clicking sound made by a computer mouse (see Figures 13, 14). This sound element links to the materiality of image processing, which requires manual intervention to view the video on a streaming site. In this instance, the click not only refers to video streaming on a YouTube platform which often monetises the content, but it also extends the act of watching to the processing of data stored in Google Modular Data Centres each time a video is played. Thus, along its reference to ecological instabilities, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping* is also a self-reflexive investigation of its own materiality in the context of digital systems, which exposes the fact that viewing conditions are always material. 158 This links back

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158 In addition, the planetary scale of the digital systems became increasingly visible when disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exposed its global infrastructure. A withdrawal from a direct physical contact across the globe has in turn increased a surge of Internet traffic beyond its usual levels, which has brought more awareness on the physicality of ‘browsing’. Data centres responsible for a smooth running of the Internet had to facilitate a sudden increase in data transmission activity. This moment made digital devices visible as portals extending beyond their mere opaque surface of the screen and connecting to the data centres every time an online activity is executed. For example, I accessed the video from my personal computer for research purposes. This video is stored on a Vimeo platform (a competitor of YouTube) open to the public for online video streaming. Vimeo states that its servers, databases, computer systems are located in the U.S. and other countries, which reinforces the importance of physical location on data processing.
to the photographic appearance of Topsy, which pierces through the surface of the screen for a deep-time exploration of relations between mortality and technologically reproduced images. According to Shukin, ‘it was onto the translucent animal gelatin of film stock that the electrocuted image of Topsy was seared, trebling the film’s convoluted relationship to animal rendering’.159 Thus, this photographic layer exposes a double animal sacrifice embedded in the materiality of the moving image culture, which also extends to the effects of energy consumption by digital systems and devices on a global scale.

The analysis of Rose’s early video reveals how a sense of ecological catastrophe is merged with a current state of photographic production often ‘characterized in the apocalyptic terms of a deluge or avalanche, an explosion or eruption, a tsunami or storm’.160 It is referred to in apocalyptic terms because of the scale of data that is produced every second, which surpasses human capacity to manage and comprehend the mass image. Rose’s first video, Sitting Feeding Sleeping, is an anamorphic and experiential reflection exposing the material quality of the digital image to remind us that ‘the image itself has a body, both expressed by its construction and material composition, and that this body may be inanimate and material’.161 Therefore, various references edited together into a temporal surface, such as a photograph of Topsy, paintings of apocalyptic deluge, freezing of the body in the cryogenics laboratory, a clip from the robotics perception laboratory, or a cursor reanimating a polar bear in captivity on the screen, point to relations between the imperceptible technical and ecological events that contribute to the blurring of boundaries between the meaning of death and life. This work exemplifies Rose’s approach to video editing as a critical tool to explore experiential textures of contemporaneity.

159 Shukin, p. 152.
Figure 7. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.

Figure 8. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.
Figure 9. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.

Figure 10. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.
Figure 11. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.

Figure 12. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.
Figure 13. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.

Figure 14. Still from Rachel Rose, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping*, 2013, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 9 min 49 sec.
A Minute Ago (2014)

Rose created the second video work, A Minute Ago (2014), after an encounter with Hurricane Sandy in New York City in 2012. This work attempts to question illusions of stability promised by modern architecture. The artist noted that ‘in part what was so traumatic about Hurricane Sandy is that we felt [that] the grid, glass and steel are all permeable and that we’re not stable against external forces’ (see Figure 15). Rose worked on A Minute Ago structure while thinking about a catastrophic event as a collage – a cut and rupture in space and time. This feeling is translated through juxtapositions between a containing, enveloping structure, and an exposure of a vulnerable body to the elements. To explore this kind of rupture in the timeline, the artist utilises the effects of compositing that allow her to move through architectural barriers, collapsing what are considered inside or outside spaces.

A Minute Ago starts with found footage from YouTube of a hailstorm hitting a beach in Siberia in 2014, which documents a sudden shift from a sunny day to a catastrophic event with a sudden temperature drop, evoking a scene from an apocalyptic scenario (see Figure 16). Sunbathers, frantically looking for a place to hide from falling large ice balls, are submerged in the sounds of Echoes by Pink Floyd who performed live in the absence of an audience in Pompeii in 1972. After a chaotic scene filled with screams of fear and wonder of an unexpected force disrupting a perfect day – ‘If we die - know that I love you’ – the view of an emptied beach cross-fades to the Glass House, followed by a rhythmic composition by Steve Reich. In the video, the Glass House, a symbol of Modernist architecture designed by Philip Johnson in 1948, is the main location where a sense of catastrophe unfolds through the violent effects of the compression of space and time. These effects are achieved by pasting and copying different elements in the same frame, for example, the skies from a different source or Johnson’s body from a VHS recording (see Figure 17). Throughout the video, Johnson’s figure appears as a flickering spectre guiding the viewer through the Glass House interior space and its surroundings. Rose used the archival footage of the architect himself, giving a walk-through of the house in 1997, and rotoscoped his body into her own recorded high-definition video replicating the original house tour shot for shot. Johnson’s ghostly and undefined presence corresponds with the footage of a flickering hailstorm, which is rapidly intercut with the interior of the house to

emphasise an uncertain state of reality and vulnerability of the body. Thus, a traumatic collage-like effect when an unexpected event takes place resonates with the first notes of *Echoes* performed in Pompeii – a preservation site of a disastrous event.

The Glass House is also considered to be a form of a spatial and temporal collage itself because of its transparent quality. In this architectural example, reversibility of glass creates confusion between the container and the contained: ‘in the large windows, the world outside becomes a backdrop; nature becomes part of the decor’.\(^{164}\) The house simultaneously flattens distance and blurs distinctions between the inside and the outside. Here, a process of separating space through the glass barrier and turning nature into a decorative surface corresponds with Nicolas Poussin’s painting *The Burial of Phocion* (ca. 1648-49) displayed in the living room of the Glass House (see Figure 18). According to Rose, a central element in the painting – Phocion’s dead body – seems to have been excluded by Johnson in his appreciation of the work as merely a detailed representation of landscape. Poussin’s painting, which was also used as a model for landscaping around the house, plays a significant conceptual part in the unfolding narrative of the video. For Rose, the painting manifests as an expression of a feeling of being inside the house – a sense of decaying put on hold: ‘the house is notoriously cumbersome to ventilate, as there are no operable windows and one must open the door to allow air to circulate’.\(^{165}\) The glass barrier is transparent but an impenetrable element which preserves the painting from external forces. However, because of the lack of ventilation, the house creates a space where preservation is also experienced as suffocation. This leads to a visible connection between Phocion’s body and the house itself. The body is folded in the fabric and suspended from the act of burial: ‘he is wrapped in the cloth, a temporary containment, an enclosing cover before the final resting place, the lightless grave. But the shroud is also canvas’.\(^{166}\) This scene corresponds with the Glass House, which acts as a frame itself, holding the bodies inside, enveloping and suspending them in the illusion of transparency. Thus, Rose’s focus on the folded body in a temporary containment, whether it is the Glass House, a shroud, a video frame where a rotoscoped body flickers, or a skin enveloping a body touched by the hailstones and suddenly exposed to the temperature drop, underlines the artist’s interest in exploring the


\(^{166}\) Trummer, pp. 12-19 (p. 18).
meaning of surface. She is interested in investigating how it both conditions and destabilises established boundaries between the inside and the outside, interiority and exteriority.

This uncertain state of reality evoking a sense of compressed collage characterised by chaos is directly illustrated by the disassembling effect of the video itself. It directs our focus to the image surface as inherently malleable and constructed. *A Minute Ago* ends with its own disintegration; it begins with the Glass House and then extends into the surrounding landscape, which leads to the shattering of the image itself into a fragmented abstraction. As Kevin McGarry observes, this effect evokes a sense that ‘everything dissolves together, apart, and the space in which we are left is a disorienting tangle of order and chaos’.\(^{167}\) Rose has confirmed that breaking the image apart allowed the fact that pixels themselves are a form of collage to come through. This effect also exposes the use of the compositing technique in the video: ‘everything we are experiencing about this film is collage’ (see Figures 19, 20).\(^{168}\) Therefore, compositing allows the artist to materialise experiential textures of contemporaneity and impending catastrophe, compressing a feeling of fading materiality into a tangible timeline.

Both video works, *Sitting Feeding Sleeping* and *A Minute Ago*, draw attention to the malleable surface of a digital image, which opens a space for the artist to compose ruptures. Through these ruptures, Rose attempts to challenge a prevailing logic of progress by distilling a sense of anxiety that underlies and envelops invisible structures of contemporaneity. As Balsom notes, the artist’s video works expose us to the affective intensity within which ‘one senses a delicate uncertainty concerning the continuing viability of the modern project and its belief in a logic of progress driven by the twin engines of industry and technology’.\(^{169}\) Rose materialises these ruptures through her meticulous edits around the edges of spatial, material, historical and temporal layers with a focus on the surface, which is a condition for this palpable tension to emerge, connecting the inside and the outside. In the following section, I will continue discussing Rose’s approach to video editing in terms of temporal surface, which, I argue, she approaches as a space for restitching relations to evoke an experiential critique of the Capitalocene.

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167 McGarry, 302–05 (p. 305).
Figure 15. Still from Rachel Rose, *A Minute Ago*, 2014, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 8 min 43 sec.

Figure 16. Still from Rachel Rose, *A Minute Ago*, 2014, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 8 min 43 sec.
Figure 17. Still from Rachel Rose, *A Minute Ago*, 2014, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 8 min 43 sec.

Figure 18. Still from Rachel Rose, *A Minute Ago*, 2014, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 8 min 43 sec.
Figure 19. Still from Rachel Rose, *A Minute Ago*, 2014, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 8 min 43 sec.

Figure 20. Still from Rachel Rose, *A Minute Ago*, 2014, HD video, colour, stereo sound, 8 min 43 sec.
Scientific research and media coverage disseminating announcements of the world balancing on a tipping point of an ecological crisis and witnessing extreme climate events such as wildfires, flooding and hurricanes suddenly leaving people without homes in recent years became an infinite source of anxiety enveloping the present and near future. For contemporary artists such as Rose, apocalyptic scenarios employed in popular entertainment culture and eschatological thinking, which turned the impending sense of catastrophe into a mundane discourse, have inevitably become the main source of enquiry. According to Jenny Stümer and Felicitas Loest, ‘living and thinking with apocalypses changes the horizon of how we orient the present and deal with the environmental and human consequences of Western chronopolitics’. As previously discussed, Rose focuses on a shared feeling of unease or anxiety enveloping contemporaneity, which allows her to explore an intuition of quickly shattering reality or slowly unfolding entropy. This openness to the complexities of the contemporary condition empowers her to remain critical of the eschatological narrative framing the concept of the Anthropocene. For example, Rose achieves this by directing attention to the historical emergence of enclosures that gave the impulse for reshaping relations according to the logic of capitalism explored in her recent moving image installation Enclosure (2019) mentioned in the introduction. As discussed in relation to her earlier works, Rose also investigates the emergence of conceptual and physical barriers that have been increasingly dissociating a subject from planetary entanglements. Therefore, it could be said that Rose’s practice focuses on disclosing structures that make up the temporal envelope of contemporaneity as constantly unfolding crises.

For example, as observed in her first video work, Sitting Feeding Sleeping, increasing distance between life and death has culminated in a celebration of technological transcendence – here cryogenics takes place as the main example of an attempt to technologically ‘fix’ death. Zylinska’s proposal for a feminist counterapocalypse invites us to question a desire to delay or escape an impending crisis with the help of the latest technological innovations driven by masculinist technocentric narratives of escapism surrounding the concept of the Anthropocene. In her analysis of this ‘trend’, Zylinska raises the following question: ‘if unbridled progress is
no longer an option, what kinds of coexistences and collaborations do we want to create in its aftermath?’. 171 Following the lead of posthuman feminists such as Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, Zylinska introduces relationality as a model of subjectivity. The latter ‘acknowledges the prior existence of relations between clusters of matter and energy that temporarily stabilize for us humans into entities – on a molecular, cellular, and social level’. 172 This microvision directs attention to countering the apocalyptic scenario embedded in the anthropocentric vision, and ‘takes seriously the geopolitical unfoldings on our planet while also rethinking our relations to and with it precisely as relations’. 173 This leads to a consideration of Rose’s video editing of her earlier works as exploring an act of creative reorganisation of relations, which move the viewers towards an openness to the world – a constantly unfolding temporal fabric, which should be approached onto-ethically.

Therefore, I contend that while exploring apocalyptic narratives, such as we see in Sitting Feeding Sleeping, Rose creates temporal collages that seek to open space to imagine relational modes of being and contest eschatological thinking that fuels the idea of the Anthropocene itself. This is achieved by Rose through editing together various organic and nonorganic, human, and nonhuman, material, and virtual elements meeting on the surface. The latter is configured as a coextensive space where complex temporal, material, perceptual and spatial relations are unfolding in various directions. It is an attempt to configure relationality as a site of experiential critique of a process of abstraction from the material world. Thus, while dissecting capitalism, Rose also distils its effects into woven experiential collages that become physical, extending into spatial arrangements. This aspect will be explored in more depth in the following section dedicated to the installation Everything and More (2015). I approach this installation as a site for an experiential critique of the Capitalocene to enable a movement towards a more embedded and embodied relational mode of becoming and being-with the world.

171 Zylinska, The End of Man, p. 59.
172 Zylinska, The End of Man, p. 53.
173 Zylinska, The End of Man, p. 53.
Ontology as Critique: Gravity and Resonance

In the discussion of Rose’s earlier video works, I have focused on the artist’s treatment of each video collage ‘as a container to develop a different attitude towards death’.174 This approach is also visible in the Everything and More (2015) installation, which I consider in this section in the context of the global health crisis that unfolded since 2020. I visited this installation in 2016 as part of the off-site exhibition The Infinite Mix curated by Ralph Rugoff, organised by Hayward Gallery together with The Vinyl Factory at the 180 Studios in London. Everything and More resurfaced in my memory when the world was suddenly exposed as a fragile network organised around the surface of the screen. During the time of suspended access to the physical exhibition space, I decided to focus on the Everything and More installation because its formal and conceptual execution resonated with a pulling existential gravity towards the ground contrasted with ‘weightlessness’ caused by a detachment from ordinary ways of being. As Rose observes, the events that took place in 2020 made us:

[…] inundated with death and that has been paired with a pause in consumption culture, a breakdown of capitalism. […] There is this strong link between how we consume and how we sublimate death, and when one comes forward the other one has to retreat.175

This weight of gravity, which exposes corporeal vulnerability as shared, is also explored in the Everything and More installation, which resonates deeply with the events that unfolded during the pandemic, thus adding another layer to its analysis. Such an unprecedented context enables me to incorporate Nancy’s thoughts about the shared corporeal vulnerability as a potential point of departure towards a relational mode of being in the twenty-first century, which is marked by global crises.

The pandemic disrupted modes of efficiency, production, and global circulation, which exposed already existing inequalities and further accelerated growing precarity. During this time, on 12 November 2020, Nancy delivered a lecture online, which challenged the notion of equality and democracy in the face of growing techno-socio-economic inequalities in the

175 Rittenbach, 116–33 (pp. 126-27).
The lecture concluded with a thought that the foundation of inequality is the incalculable quality of the value of each human existence. In other words, there is no foundation of equality, and there is no system of measure that can calculate equality. Hence, we are dealing with something incalculable, beyond the algorithmic ability to measure, which is close to the original incalculability that has characteristics of death. Since the destruction and devastation of life (human and nonhuman) is part of a process of advancement of modern society, Nancy proposes to think about death beyond religious means, which should become our meditation. This raises a question about the value of death, which in terms of production value is zero. For Nancy, however, the time of death is the time of recognition and dignity recognising the value of the person departing. In this lecture, Nancy raises questions that require moving beyond death which serves religious means. As mentioned in Chapter 1, he sees exposure to finitude as an opening of a shared space of a groundless community that exceeds modes of calculability, production, and efficiency (see page 42). In the time of the pandemic, these categories of managing life through efficiency were suspended, thus making the value of departure come through. Therefore, drawing on Nancy’s philosophy and reflecting on the time of the pandemic, I argue for this installation’s capacity to generate an experiential critique of the Capitalocene, which reduces existence to units of value.

*Everything and More (2015)*

Although the *Everything and More* installation has had different variations since its first presentation, in this section, the focus of analysis is on its initial version presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City in 2015, at the 180 Studios in London in 2016, and as part of the São Paulo Biennial in 2016. My personal memory of this work contains sensations of sharing space in a darkened room with visitors’ bodies lying on the carpeted floor, mesmerised by the soundscape which evokes a movement through a liquid environment, and the flickering effect created by projecting an image on the semi-transparent screen, which was installed against a large and isolated window. This architectural arrangement, which is meticulously thought through with technical assistance, involves working with the natural

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parameters of a room to create an installation employing frequencies of sound and daylight. In this installation, Rose seeks to create a feeling of dissociation and weightlessness while also directing a viewer’s attention to the conditions that enable sensory experience, such as gravity. Before turning to the architectural specifics of this installation, I will discuss the narrative unfolding in the video, which also plays an integral part in creating an oscillating movement between the imaginary and the physical spaces that make up the *Everything and More* installation.

The video itself consists of material-based ‘special’ effects, footage of people dancing at an electronic dance music festival and Rose’s own recordings from the University of Maryland’s Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory. The image surface is treated as a liquid substance where everyday materials such as milk, olive oil, food dye and water mix, creating a texture resembling interstellar gas and dust (see Figure 21). In contrast to her earlier video works, while
Figure 22. Still from Rachel Rose, *Everything and More*, 2015, HD video, colour, sound, 11 min 33 sec.

Figure 23. Still from Rachel Rose, *Everything and More*, 2015, HD video, colour, sound, 11 min 33 sec.
creating *Everything and More*, the artist attempted to use the compositing technique to suture violent cuts in time and space. For example, *A Minute Ago* (2014) is structured around a feeling of catastrophe, which is explored through the effects of traumatic rupture in time and space, whereas in *Everything and More*, the edit is structured around light and sound frequencies with as few cuts as possible. The material-based approach simulating outer space through a liquifying effect was influenced by an experimental filmmaker Jordan Belson known for his abstract cinematic meditations and Douglas Trumbull, who worked with basic materials to create ‘special’ effects for Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In this video, the liquifying effect sutures separate elements into a continuous and flowing visual substance. This approach acts as a compression of micro and macro environments into a fluid space, where bursts of light and sound shape a moving image into a pool of surface tensions (see Figure 22).

The main visual structure of the video is based around the footage filmed at the University of Maryland’s Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory. Here, an empty astronaut’s suit and the training pool are approached as sites where gravity is defied. They are also sites where a movement through space-time made of kitchen ‘stuff’ takes place. Shifting from the visor onto which material-based interstellar dusts are ‘displayed’, the camera moves towards the training pool, where ‘robots simulate training exercises that allow astronauts to navigate their bodies through zero gravity environments’. This oscillating movement between the two signifying elements, the astronaut’s suit and the fluid environment of the pool, repeats throughout the video, creating a point of view that shifts between immersion and emersion. Each time the camera re-emerges from the pool, the image surface becomes increasingly deconstructed, ‘unsettling both perspectival and volumetric space, and the seamless flatness of the sutured image’ (see Figure 23). This visual effect allows Rose to mix different elements together by displacing the camera’s movement: ‘here is a very basic shot of water, an astronaut suit in Maryland, but actually all of the air and light in between can feel like it is infused with what is happening in the kitchen’. By mixing all the elements together, the artist attempts to flatten the filmic space into a liquid surface. This gesture reminds the effect used to create the disintegrating image surface in *A Minute Ago* to expose malleability of the digital image. However, in this

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178 Valinsky, 10–11 (p. 10).
179 Valinsky, 10–11 (p. 10).
instance, the use of a liquid surface creates a different effect on one’s perception – a continuous movement through a visual and sonic substance instead of a violent rupture in time and space.

Reweaving Edges

In the video, slowly mixing liquids and colours, a camera moving above and below the water surface, and a disintegrating filmic space accompany a single memory of being in outer space: the opening of a body to ‘the feeling of being finite in a limitless space’.181 This experience is narrated by an American astronaut David Wolf who is recounting his return to Earth after 128 days spent in the International Space Station. Throughout the eleven-minute video, Wolf’s voice is woven together with American singer-song writer and civil rights activist Aretha Franklin’s recomposed church performance of *Amazing Grace*, recorded in 1972. Rose’s interest in exploring a feeling of being outside of everyday conditions was first provoked by her cinematic experience of science fiction blockbusters such as Alfonso Cuarón’s *Gravity* (2013) and Christopher Nolan’s *Interstellar* (2014) watched in the 4DX cinema theatre. After leaving the theatre, she describes her experience as:

[…] feeling a looseness, a detachment from my everyday understanding of the world and how things fit together. I wanted to do something that addressed that powerful feeling, but not through spectacle. How can we get to that place, but through what is grounded here on Earth?182

Rose’s determination to address a feeling of looseness through material elements in relation to the Earth’s gravity rather than a spectacle promoting ideology of technological escapism becomes apparent when discussing the content of these films.

Mostly made up of computer-generated visual effects to create a convincing narrative unfolding in outer space, where vertical and horizontal axes disappear, Cuarón’s *Gravity* explores existential questions of life and death faced by the protagonists Matt Kowalski

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(George Clooney) and Dr Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock). The plot is put into motion by the space debris causing destruction of satellites and damaging the protagonists’ space shuttle Explorer. This collision was caused by a Russian missile released to shoot down a defunct spy satellite, which created a chain reaction of dangerous and rapidly moving space debris. After the collision with space debris, astronauts are left stranded and afloat in space. While facing the ultimate limit of human experience, death and nothingness in outer space, the protagonists make a last attempt to go back to Earth before the space debris returns. Eventually, Dr Ryan remains the sole survivor after the collision, who finds a way to make it to Earth. Gravitational forces make the shuttle burn and break apart, but she successfully lands in the sea. Finally, the film ends with the woman crawling out of water because gravity makes the weight of her body unbearable. After struggling to stand up, she eventually gets out of the water and raises herself from the ground. This dramatic return to Earth signifies a sense of belonging, presenting the Earth as the only hospitable place for a human body conditioned by gravity and the planet’s atmosphere. This scene paints a contrast between outer space as a hostile environment – void, nothingness, death – while the Earth is represented as a hospitable cradle. The ending of the film which depicts a return to the land, both from outer space and the water, evokes notions of salvation and rebirth, which here are also conflated with the role of technology as a mediator between life and death making it possible to transcend the limits of physicality conditioned by gravity.

In contrast to Gravity, Nolan’s Interstellar tells a story driven by technological escapism from the planetary catastrophe, which presents the outer space as the ultimate destination to save humanity. The Earth has become a hostile place to maintain life since a global war began. The latter led to the shutdown of space exploration missions to focus all resources on fighting the bacterial blight that reduced the oxygen in the atmosphere and destroyed crops. In the film, this is portrayed as a dystopian near future, but it also refers to the past – the Great Depression (1929–1939). However, under the surface of the depleted Earth, NASA is devoted to its mission to pave the future path for humanity. Scientists are working on a secret project Lazarus, which explores other habitable worlds beyond our galaxy. This opportunity is opened by gravitational

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183 Although Gravity was released in 2013, an event endangering a long-term sustainability of the outer space took place in November 2021, when Russia shot a ballistic missile blasting its Soviet-era satellite. This calculated explosion added more dangerous pieces to the space debris, thus creating dangerous situations for the satellites, the International Space Station, and future explorations of the outer space. This event raised concerns that initiated a need for an anti-missile policy in outer space before it becomes a territory for warfare. See Khari Johnson, ‘Russian Missiles and Space Debris Could Threaten Satellites’, WIRED, 2022 <https://www.wired.com/story/space-debris-russia-satellites/> [accessed 14 April 2023].
anomalies such as a wormhole near Saturn, which opens the possibility of reaching another galaxy. Eventually, the mission team is sent to explore other possible worlds suitable for human colonies. They also carry frozen embryos that would ensure the continuation of human life beyond the Solar System. In the meantime, NASA scientists on Earth are trying to figure out a way to launch spaceships-colonies, which would end suffocation and starvation on Earth. Here, the project title *Lazarus* carries a biblical reference to Jesus helping to raise Lazarus, a brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead. The name also carries a meaning of God as the saviour (in Hebrew, ‘God has helped’). The title of this project thus adds a religious motif to the plot, in which technology and outer space are rendered the ultimate salvation from precarious life on Earth. The film ends with giant space colonies floating in the void with the task to save the future of humanity.

Interestingly, to make this science-fiction story convincing enough, the screenplay was developed together with a theoretical physicist, Kip Thorne. He contributed to the film plot’s scientific grounding, as well as with scientifically accurate visualisations based on equations of the black hole that were converted into computer code to generate IMAX images. In relation to Thorne’s scientific contribution to the making of *Interstellar*, it is relevant to mention Dan Strutt’s consideration of the new image regime of the digital, under which ‘art and science are ontologically conflated, and what emerges is a specifically digital understanding of the fundamental metaphysical state of the universe – a digital ontology’.

184 Expanding on Catherine Malabou’s concept of plasticity, Strutt introduces digital ontology to think about the potential of such immersive environments as being able to generate encounters that attempt to reconfigure our relation to the world. According to Strutt, when science is conflated with spectacle, it produces a space that allows experimentation with the notions of matter, body, and sensation since reality is considered a system that is receiving and giving form. Thus, by weaving ‘real science into the film’s fabric,’ the plot relies on established theories as well as speculations based on actual calculations.

185 The ending of the film is also based on the speculation that it is possible to lift these spaceships if gravitational anomalies could be controlled. Thorne speculates that perhaps the scientists in the film ‘figured out how to reduce Newton’s gravitational constant *G* inside the Earth’. This would make it possible for rocket...
engines to lift these enormous ships. However, the scientist also adds that by reducing the Earth’s gravity:

the Earth’s core – no longer compressed by the enormous weight of the planet above – must have sprung outward, pushing the Earth’s surface upward. Gigantic earthquakes and tsunamis must have followed, wreaking havoc on Earth as the colonies soared into space, a terrible price for the Earth to pay on top of its blight-driven catastrophe.  

Thorne’s scientific explanation adds another dimension to the film’s plot development, which symbolises an ultimate destruction of the planet emanating from its core, thus justifying the task of saving humanity because there is no home to return to. Therefore, beyond Rose’s statement about these films’ impact on her perception and their influence in making *Everything and More*, this intertextual discussion helps to map out a contemporary discursive terrain about space, technology, and the human, which as we shall see is also part of the context of this chapter.

Both films, *Gravity* and *Interstellar*, raised questions for Rose, which inspired her to create a space where a different perspective could be generated through material relations grounded on Earth instead of being delivered through a cinematic spectacle. This was achieved by bringing back the movement of the camera, directing attention to the surface of the image and using material-based effects to simulate similar experiences created by science fiction blockbusters. It could be said that this approach, manifested in the making of the *Everything and More* installation, embodies a critique of expansionist logic and ideology of the future, structuring the plot of such films as *Interstellar*. For example, according to Marcia Klotz, constant search for temporal and spatial fixes in *Interstellar* that rely on physics embodies an economic mode of logic, which ‘today has become lodged in the heart of economic predictions about the financial future’. Klotz argues that in the world of this film, ‘just as excess capital, pursuing new avenues of investment, seeks new locations to wrest higher profit from fresh markets, the human species can only survive if it can transcend its planetary limitations to relocate somewhere else’. For Klotz, *Interstellar* is an example of how a neoliberal economic policy

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187 Thorne, p. 275.
189 Klotz, 277–97 (p. 283).
maintains this tendency towards globalisation and exhaustion of markets demanding a temporal fix. The latter is expressed in the temporal logic of the derivative, where the futures are traded, thus creating conditions for the future to be hedged. Following this argument, I argue that by resisting a logic embedded in the expansionist agenda of *Interstellar*, in the *Everything and More* installation Rose attempts to direct our attention towards the world and its material entanglements.

Before moving forward with the analysis of how various material elements in the exhibition space contribute to creating conditions for an experiential critique of the logic of abstraction and self-sufficiency, it is necessary to reiterate how *Everything and More* facilitates the reweaving of the edges of space-time by also making past and present events resonate. During the process of making *Everything and More* while weaving Aretha Franklin’s voice with Wolf’s words, Rose became aware of the connection between the Civil Rights Movement acting as a catalyst for NASA’s contribution to equal opportunity labour laws. In the video, this link is not immediately visible because, in the first instance, the combination of voices refers to different modes of encountering infinities on Earth and beyond. However, in the context of the intensifying space race towards the commercialisation of space travel and growing inequalities on the surface of Earth, I suggest approaching this intuitive weaving of voices as an embedded critique of NASA’s role in dealing with social inequality during its early stages of development and technological innovation.

In the video, a civil rights activist’s voice, which ‘was officially declared a “natural resource” in 1985 by Michigan state’s department of natural resources,’ alludes to the historical context of NASA’s attempts to counteract racial inequalities in the U.S. exposed by the Space Race during the Cold War. In the South, where the majority of NASA’s infrastructure was being developed, terraforming continued the logic of segregation disguised as class politics by displacing African American communities from their home to polluted areas that did not receive attention from federal institutions. In addition, there was active resistance from the

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190 Klotz, 277–97 (pp. 284-95).
Civil Rights Movement in joining NASA’s project towards building the future in outer space because of correlations with extending colonial powers beyond the planetary boundaries while many people were exposed to the struggles on the surface of Earth. Resistance was fuelled by the fact that exploited communities were not receiving any funding from federal institutions, while competition for dominance in the Space Race was perceived as a nation-building tool. Therefore, for civil rights activists, such space missions signified the continuation of poverty, inequality, and suffering, despite NASA’s eventual contribution to the equal opportunity labour laws.

Rose’s intuitive weaving of the voices of a civil rights activist and NASA astronaut, generates space for me to connect the past events evoked by the work to the present ones, which I experienced when writing about *Everything and More* during the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier, during the first months of the pandemic, important events began to unfold, such as the Black Lives Matter protests. These protests first erupted in the United States and were provoked by the death of George Floyd during his arrest by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They started on 30\textsuperscript{th} May 2020, the same day as the historic event initiated by Elon Musk’s SpaceX Crew Dragon Demo-2 project for low-cost sustainable space travel. NASA astronauts were launched into orbit on self-landing reusable rockets, marking another step towards future commercialisation of space travel. In the context of global mobilisation of bodies protesting on the streets against systemic injustice and police violence during the time of the pandemic, the SpaceX event further exposed inequality as one of the conditions facilitating ideals of a progressive future. This event illustrates a form of ‘technological escapism from the Anthropocene’ – a desire to exit increasingly unhospitable conditions on Earth resulting in ‘the interplanetary future of World 2.0’.\textsuperscript{194} Although the SpaceX Crew Dragon Demo-2 launch was celebrated for cutting costs for future space missions and a step towards space travel commercialisation, the Black Lives Matter protests starting on the same day resonate through the space-time of a continuous struggle for equality and social justice.

There is a stark contrast here. On the one hand, crowds on Earth are protesting racial and social injustice. On the other hand, the SpaceX Crew Dragon Demo-2 launch marks a desire to transcend socially, politically, and ecologically complex realities to move towards a future of a multiplanetary life driven by innovation: ‘to carry private passengers to Earth orbit, the ISS

\footnote{Zylinska, *The End of Man*, p. 31.}
The juxtaposition of these events exposed tensions between inequality, mortality and its denial as a tangible planetary structure that organises the world economy. While reflecting on these events, I argue that in the *Everything and More* installation, the experiential landing down to Earth and towards a shared sense of finitude can be approached as facilitating a critique of techno-capitalist escapism advocated by the current space race among the world’s richest businessmen. Elon Musk (Space X), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), and Richard Branson (Virgin Galactic) continue to drive narratives of humanity expanding outside planetary boundaries. Therefore, considering these complex questions, I approach Rose’s creative strategy to get ‘to a place in which we might not be in denial’ of mortality as a form of defying a desire to transcend finitude by fixing it technologically. Although the *Everything and More* installation was created in 2015, its resonance with the events unfolding during the pandemic reveals the artist’s interest in capturing and distilling underlying structures and events that resonate with the present. As Rose observes, ‘the only way to imagine any kind of better future in any possible way is to be open to the complexity of how we feel’. This complexity, running throughout her video works, invites us to openly engage with the past and future crises constituting the experiential textures of contemporaneity.

**On the Threshold**

In this section, I will shift attention to the material conditions of the installation room, where the elements of gravity and weightlessness formally corresponding with the use of sound and light elicit moments of dissociation and rupture from everyday conditions. I argue that this rupture exposes conceptual and material structures conditioning a dichotomy between the inside and the outside, while at the same time, it points towards embeddedness and relationality by configuring resonance as a conceptual and material approach. For Nancy listening, which entails resonance, is an approach to self as always being in relation to exteriority. The idea of resonance will be explored by attending to the sound-based narrative unfolding in *Everything and More* as told by Wolf, which corresponds to the installation’s spatial arrangement.

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196 Bailey, 2021.
197 Bailey, 2021.
A feeling of looseness and detachment from everyday conditions that Rose experienced after leaving a cinema theatre was triggered again during her encounter with David Wolf’s voice on the radio. This feeling of weightlessness experienced after she left the cinema came back after Rose heard the astronaut retelling a story of his return to Earth. Wolf’s story and his disembodied voice were the final missing elements that moved Rose to investigate this moment of a sudden separation ‘from the conditions of being human’. She carried out the interview with the astronaut on the phone, which contributed to the installation’s soundscape carrying an effect of undeterminable distance between her and Wolf’s voice, which was textured with noise. In a recorded interview conducted by Rose herself, Wolf shared his thoughts about the conditions for sense expansions that he experienced in outer space, which became an underlying theme and the structure of the *Everything and More* installation. In one of the interviews, Rose reflects:

> What was exciting to me about Wolf's experience of pure blackness in outer space, and then seeing the earth, and then returning from space, was his description of how his sensations opened up. I thought about how those of us who have never been to space and have no ability to extract our body from its evolutionary home could seek these sense expansions.

This story led Rose to consider gravity as a central element for exploring sensations of a body extracted from its evolutionary conditions on Earth. Rose’s attempt to reflect on the disorienting effects in which vertical and horizontal axes central for orientation are absent also resonates with Scott C. Richmond’s observation of films such as *Gravity*: they ‘take up as their aesthetic object not only my perception but something more intimate: my internal resonance, my self-sensitivity. Proprioceptive cinema works not only on my attunement to the world but on its correlate: my attunement to myself’. Richmond’s reflection on proprioceptive cinema’s effects on one’s body is useful to frame Rose’s impulse to investigate the disembodiment that astronauts feel in space, which was triggered by her own partial unbounding from her surroundings after leaving the cinema theatre. This feeling prompted her

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198 Pryor, 2016.
to question conditions such as gravity-defined orientation in the world, as well as the impact of sound and light frequencies through which we emerge as always in relation to exteriority.

Figure 2. Caravaggio, *The Death of the Virgin*, 1605–1606, oil on canvas, Louvre Museum, Paris.
For the *Everything and More* installation, Rose employs a force of gravity and frequencies received by the body as the main element guiding the structure and the narrative of the video. It is central to the realisation of the installation where embodied spatial encounters open senses to a process of refolding a sense of self in terms of exteriority. To discuss the philosophical layers embedded in the oscillation between the effects of gravity and weightlessness, Nancy’s thinking about the threshold allows us to approach a prevalent question in Rose’s practice, which concerns the inside and the outside in terms of corporeal ontology. In ‘On the Threshold’ (1996), an essay on Caravaggio’s painting *The Death of the Virgin* (1605–1606), Nancy explores his own encounter with the painting of Mary’s dead body isolated from a usual depiction of the assumption into Heaven (see Figure 24). Controversially, in this work, the spiritual is figured in relation to the physical surface while focusing on the lips, the folds, and the texture of the canvas itself beyond the questions of veiling or incarnation that would be evoked in such a biblical scene. Nancy reflects on a particular composition of the painting, which exposes the bodies in front of it as being on a threshold: ‘we are there, without leaving the threshold, on the threshold, neither inside nor outside – and perhaps we are, ourselves, the threshold, just as our eye conforms to the plane of the canvas and weaves itself into its fabric’. 201 Instead of merely representing death, the painting is thought of in terms of a painted threshold of existence as a surface itself, which gives ‘access to the fact that we do not accede – either to the inside or to the outside of ourselves’. 202 According to Nancy, the body is ‘the mortal spacing of the body, registering the fact that existence has no essence (not even “death”), but only ex-ists’. 203 Caravaggio’s painting, which meditates on the corporeal threshold of existence through a tension extending as the folds of body, drapery, and canvas into a dense surface where matter and mind continuously weave together, resonates with the material and conceptual aspects of the *Everything and More* installation. Although in this video there are no direct references to paintings, which Rose uses in other video works ‘as thresholds to join seemingly disparate dimensions and times,’ in this case the image surface acquires the quality of a threshold itself. 204 It is treated as a warp in space-time where real and imaginary spaces spill into each other, creating a *trompe l’oeil* effect. As a painting technique, this effect facilitates an optical illusion of a movement between the actual and imaginary perspectives,

204 Rose, 2015.
which opens a body for an immersive and decentring experience. It is a perceptual movement, which is palpably felt as a tension between the weaving folds of matter and mind, as Gilles Deleuze puts it in reference to the infinity of baroque fold: ‘I am forever unfolding between two folds, and if to perceive means to unfold, then I am forever perceiving within the folds’. Drawing on Rose’s approach to the painting surface in her earlier video works as a connective tissue extending across time and space, *Everything and More* could be considered as a layered drapery unfolding a body within affective intensity which, experientially in the installation, and conceptually in the video, exposes body as something always taking place at the limit. Following Nancy, corporeal existence is defined in terms of ‘the unity of the coming to self as a “self-sensing,” a “self-touching” that necessarily passes through the outside’. Therefore, self-sensing always takes place in relation to exteriority – the body as a folding and unfolding surface – a threshold of existence itself.

In the video, this moment of self-sensing as a threshold of existence is explored by weaving Wolf’s words describing his experience of the pull of gravity when returning to Earth together with Franklin’s recomposed performance of *Amazing Grace*. Rose erased by hand all the frequencies around the singer’s voice in a digital spectrograph to create an effect on her tone like a floating sound wave in an open space, wrapping around Wolf’s disembodied words that attempt to describe a feeling of ‘becoming space’ while floating outside the space station. However, as the astronaut recalls experiencing gravity on his return to Earth, the lightness of the singer’s tone is contrasted with a description of his unbearable weight. A weaving of voices that negotiates this physical tension also acts as an indicator of a movement through fluid space. Each time the camera plunges into the training pool for astronauts, it creates a sonic effect of drowning, which is achieved by ‘submerging’ Wolf’s and Franklin’s voices underwater. Muffled words resonate throughout the liquid, creating a sensation of being in constant motion. While the camera is submerged in the pool, bursts of flashing dance festival footage followed by rhythmic low-frequency sound from underwater open the surface of the images as a portal towards a deeply affecting motion (see Figures 25, 26). To achieve this motion taking place in a liquid substance, Rose uses light ‘flashes’ instead of a cut that places the viewer under the

206 Nancy, *Corpus*, pp. 133-34.
Figure 25. Still from Rachel Rose, *Everything and More*, 2015, HD video, colour, sound, 11 min 33 sec.

Figure 26. Still from Rachel Rose, *Everything and More*, 2015, HD video, colour, sound, 11 min 33 sec.
surface. These visual ruptures as light ‘flashes’ are created by compositing different image sources into one frame, which creates an illusion of traveling through many layers of time and space. This sense of disorientation created by the use of light ‘flashes’ and the underwater sound effects, resonates with Wolf’s experience, as John-Paul Pryor notices, which is ‘the displacement of self and the vastness of outer space’.\textsuperscript{208} In this instance, by distorting both sound and visual information, Rose attempts to affect a viewer’s orientation in relation to the screen by submerging a body through the motion of sound and images in a fluid environment, which collapses distinctions between the inside and the outside.

In contrast to the experience of weightlessness, Wolf’s memory of feeling overwhelmed on his return to Earth is recounted as disorientation, a sense of acceleration with each step, and an unbearable weight of gravity on his body, when senses which had been absent for many months were suddenly made painfully present. Wolf attempts to describe a ‘heavy’ return that makes readapting to Earth seem harder than adapting to space: ‘the weight of the body is overwhelming, even my ears felt heavy on my head’. This physically felt tension plays an important role in the video by emphasising different physical conditions of appearance or disappearance of the body itself. The soundscape of the installation attempts to translate this palpable tension by inviting the viewer to imagine and feel her body, as Nancy would put it, ‘being a certain tone, a certain tension’.\textsuperscript{209} In the installation, sound reverberates in the bodies, as well as rendering bodies as soundwaves in the video, referring to the structure of self. According to Nancy, this structure is based on resonance, which is a foundation of sense: ‘sense is first of all the rebound of sound, a rebound that is coextensive with the whole folding/unfolding [\textit{pli/dépli}] of presence and of the present that makes or opens the perceptible as such’.\textsuperscript{210} Thus, Rose approaches corporeal existence in terms of bursts of intensity by directing attention to resonance as being conditioned by frequencies of light, sound and gravity. Here, intensity is considered in the context of Nancy’s approach to the body as ‘the unity of a being outside itself’.\textsuperscript{211} For him, intensity is ‘extension in the sense of a tension of the outside as such’.\textsuperscript{212} Therefore, Wolf’s account of his encounter with the infinite and the force of gravity

\textsuperscript{208} Pryor, 2016.
\textsuperscript{209} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{211} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{212} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 134.
on his return to Earth, to some extent elaborates on Nancy’s thought on listening as an approach to self, a resonance referring to always being in relation to exteriority:

To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion.213

Rose’s choice to focus on Wolf’s return to Earth instead of ‘becoming space’ in the opening of the video configures an encounter with one’s bodily existence as a threshold. This encounter exposes the self in terms of a tension of the outside refolding one’s relation towards the Terrestrial existence, which here is configured in terms of fluidity, disrupting the logic of self-sufficiency.

This approach is further manifested in the making of the Everything and More installation, with a focus on material relations meeting on the translucent screen-fabric (see Figure 27). For example, when ‘assembling’ the installation, Rose considers projection, sound, semi-transparent screen, and daylight coming through an isolated window as elements integral to the making of the installation’s conceptual and aesthetic frame. To evoke an oscillation between weightlessness and gravity, Rose edited the footage according to the natural parameters of the space by merging projection and daylight on the semi-transparent scrim. According to Rose:

The idea was that when there is black in the image, it becomes transparent to the world, and you are placed inside the world. When there is colour, you are in the world of the film. I wanted it to feel like as a viewer, in a way, you are moving between 2D and 3D world, which felt related to David Wolf’s experience in outer space coming from the void back to Earth.214

The process of weaving different elements together creates awareness of one’s sensory perception, which resonates with Wolf’s account of his experience of weightlessness in outer

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space followed by his return to Earth. This movement is expressed as an overwhelming pull of gravity defining the edges of his corporeal surface, thus making conditions of sensory perception manifest as an opening of the senses. Configured as a central element in the video as well as in the installation, this movement materialises ‘navigation between the weightless, disembodied experience of viewership in the darkened black box, and the awareness of a certain gravitational pull within physical space’. This material interplay creates disorienting effects on perception, blurring the lines between the inner and the outer worlds. Such effects of translucency tend to collapse both ‘worlds’ through a flicker between virtual and material spaces, which aim to destabilise the projected image via an intervention of the outside view: the cityscapes of New York or London, or an old tree behind the window as part of the installation version for São Paulo Art Biennial (see Figure 28). In this instance, each time the image withdraws into daylight, the terms of exteriority and interiority are renegotiated, allowing the world – usually partitioned by a wall, a screen, or framed by a window – to present itself through the scrim. A flickering movement between the projected image and the outside view formally responds to Wolf’s experience of weightlessness while floating in ‘nothingness’

215 Valinsky, 10–11 (p. 10).
and his return to Earth as an overwhelming opening of the body to sensation again. It opens a gap, a rupture that makes a body aware of active conditions enabling sensory perception. This rupture takes a tangible form, balancing on the threshold between the inside and the outside, weaving inner and outer worlds together. In the installation, this oscillation opens the body to frequencies and light waves, simulating an astronaut’s experience of being in outer space while conflating the inside and the outside spaces.

In the Everything and More installation, a story narrated by the astronaut and Rose’s embodied impulse to address her cinematic encounters are explored through various surface tensions, such as bodily, audible, visual, and tactile. These tensions manifest spatially and sonically to simulate an ‘overview effect’ experienced by the astronauts, which is evoked in the story told by Wolf. The ‘overview effect’ phenomenon was first investigated by Frank White in The Overview Effect (1987) – a book based on his interviews with astronauts. Thore Bjørnvig describes White’s idea of the ‘overview effect’ as:

[…] the impact of the view of Earth seen from space on both astronauts and humankind at large. Ultimately, it triggers a new stage in human evolution. It can transform a
person’s reality and entails the realization that Earth is a star-orbiting spaceship traveling through the galaxy. It is connected to changed ways of perceiving space and time along with intense experiences of silence and weightlessness. Central to it is a globalized, pacific vision of Earth as a borderless, interdependent system, dreams of a united humanity, and a heightened ecological awareness. Alongside this vision, a technological overview system is under development in the form of, for example, satellite communication systems and computer networks.216

According to Bjørnvig, White’s dedication to establish the idea of the ‘overview effect’ as a transformative experience beneficial for the evolution of humankind is based on religious motifs and lacks scientific grounding in the analysis of the phenomenon itself.217 In addition, since it was coined, the term itself has been used uncritically in academic and scientific fields, without acknowledging its liberal discourse of globalism.218 However, I argue that Rose’s approach to this phenomenon seeks to exceed a common understanding of the ‘overview effect’ as a sublime and enlightening moment that has a history in the development of the pro-space movement. In contrast, in the Everything and More installation, an ‘overview effect’ is reconfigured in relation to a feeling of balancing on the threshold, which is generated by a flicker between the projection and daylight, presenting the world through the scrim rather than creating another imaginary space to ascend to. Even if for a limited duration of time, this oscillating movement between the inside and the outside and sensations of gravity and weightlessness opens up a different perspective, inviting us to orient towards the world, from the point of proximity rather than from the distancing overview perspective. Thus, although the idea of the ‘overview effect’ is inseparable from the ideas of globalisation and surveillance,219 Rose’s installation is an invitation to balance on the threshold of the self in order to reorient towards relational and Terrestrial modes of being which are configured in the video’s fluid environment. This is expressed particularly strongly in a moment at the end of the video when a white screen slowly fades out to black. In the installation setting, this effect makes the window view clearer, bringing it through the rays of natural light on the semi-transparent screen. This final moment summarises the Everything and More installation as an experiential

217 Bjørnvig, 4–24.
218 Bjørnvig, 4–24 (p. 6).
219 Bjørnvig, 4–24 (p. 9).
vehicle, which invites bodies to open towards the Earth, its material relations, and surface tensions that are the conditions of planetary entanglements.
Conclusion

In this chapter dedicated to a discussion of Rose’s practice I have explored the experiential critique of the logic of self-sufficiency by drawing on Nancy’s corporeal ontology and referencing the events that took place during the pandemic, such as the SpaceX launch and the Black Lives Matter protests. These events, which took place at the time of writing, opened space to explore vulnerability as a source of resistance against the measure of economic value and calculation, which are also interrogated by Rose in her practice, which enacts a dissection of the catastrophe of capitalism. While navigating through the meaning of the edge, crisis of the present, and the feeling of catastrophe, Rose’s video works explore creative processes of video editing as a mode of restitching relations and redrawing edges of the self in times of uncertainty.

In the second part of the chapter dedicated to a discussion on the *Everything and More* installation, I have explored the potential of resonance to enact the process of leaving *terra firma* and to ‘land’ in the oceanic to challenge established perspectives and points of view, thinking about the world, being, and self. Here, Nancy’s idea of resonance is explored as enabling a reworking of the notion of corporeality, which invites the viewer to turn away from the ocularcentric paradigm built around vision and mastery, thus bringing forth the senses that constitute and open up a different approach to relational existence, embodied and embedded. Situated within the liquid environment, this journey is bodily and relational rather than disembodied, which also attempts to contribute to a critique of the techno-utopian ideology of the future embedded in the science fiction films referenced above. Rose’s intuition to work through the liquid environment as a vehicle to land on Earth was explored in a discussion of how the formal elements in the video correspond to the architecture of the installation, where a semi-transparent projection screen facilitates an oscillating effect, placing a viewer on the threshold between the inside and the outside. This movement, I argue, creates a space for reconfiguring sensory experience in relation to resonance, tone, and intensity, as a tension of being that extends the notion of self as environmental, and always in relation to exteriority.
Chapter 3: Sondra Perry. Immersed in the Digital Atlantic

Introduction

Originally trained as a ceramicist who shapes matter with her hands, American artist Sondra Perry (b. 1986) develops critical and aesthetic tools in her practice to experientially map the consequences of the ongoing shaping of bodies and the environment according to the needs of capitalist visions. In her immersive mixed-media installations, Perry employs digital technology to question the vestiges of colonialism and ongoing racialisation of bodies. Through her practice, she interrogates the technological landscape as an environment where time, space, material relations and bodies continue to be flattened and folded into homogenous flows of data and transmitted in global circulation as commodities. As Hito Steyerl notes, ‘the all-out internet condition is not an interface but an environment. Older media as well as imaged people, imaged structures, and image objects are embedded into networked matter’. 220 However, for Perry, this technological landscape also allows her to explore blackness as technē of resistance. She dissects the conditions of a networked matter, an environment facilitated by digital infrastructures and interfaces, and then re-assembles it into a space where the agility of blackness is explored and enacted. The installation format provides her with a space to explore techniques of re-shaping her own body in order to critique the algorithmic vision embedded in digital representational technologies. When referring to blackness, I follow Simone Browne’s observation that ‘[b]lackness is identity and culture, history and present, signifier and signified, but never fixed’. 221

In this chapter, to further expand on the embodied forms of resistance present in Perry’s installation work, I focus on her two site-specific moving image installations: Flesh Wall (2016–2020), temporarily shown in Times Square, New York City in 2021, and Typhoon coming on (2018), conceived for an exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries in London in 2018. With these installations, the artist explores the radical and technological potentials of blackness to counteract entrenched racialised systems of visibility. Due to the circumstances in which this research has been conducted, namely the pandemic, I have chosen not to ground the analysis of Perry’s work solely on my subjective experience of these site-specific artworks, but

220 Steyerl, Duty Free Art, p. 147.
rather to focus on their visual documentation. I accessed both installations through the YouTube, Instagram and other channels of the gallery, the visitors, and the artist herself. They became the primary sources of discovery and access to these works, which in turn enabled self-reflexivity through the act of viewing facilitated by the digital screen. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research project began with thinking about touch as a mode of rupture and interruption which led me to approach the digital screen as a site for interrogating embeddedness in the globally networked environment. This approach shapes the structure of the chapter, which draws on the emerging tensions between different iterations of the Wall 2 (2017) installation presented at the Serpentine Galleries and Times Square. Reflecting on the circulation of images across different locations and platforms such as an enclosed gallery structure, an open public space, and a social media feed requires turning our attention to the material conditions of the global flows of data. This approach allows us to explore how the cross-platform circulation of Perry’s highly saturated skin that makes up the Wall 2 artwork, which reappears in Flesh Wall and Typhoon coming on, exposes and critiques digital technology infrastructures by shifting our attention to its materiality.

Drawing on the tensions which emerge from a cross-platform circulation, I argue that its migratory aspect opens up Perry’s practice for engagement with broader questions of fungibility in the context of digitality. In the digital context, fungibility refers to a numerical rendering that permits transmission and exchange of information, which also follows the logic of exchange value. However, the term, according to C. Riley Snorton, etymologically originates in the writings on British contract law by Henry Colebrook published in 1818. First mentioned in the aftermath of slavery’s abolition, the term is found in the documents that delineate the right for compensation for fungible articles while also mentioning the right for compensation for slaves and cattle even if by law they are not considered fungible.222 This highlights that even after the abolition of slavery, bodies racialised as black continued to be treated as commodities eligible for compensation. Snorton explores fungibility in relation to the category of fugitivity by drawing on Hortense J. Spiller’s reflections on ‘ungendering’ of racialised bodies in captivity.223 Building on Spiller’s observations, Snorton argues that ‘captive flesh figures a critical genealogy for modern transness, as chattel persons gave rise to

an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being’. Thus, exploring the context of fungibility in the aftermath of slavery, Snorton argues that ‘ungendered blackness provided the grounds for (trans) performances for freedom’. Here fungibility and fugitivity are thought of interdependently which also reflects the time of ‘the transition from slavery to freedom or from slaving economies to the free market’. Hence, while attending to Perry’s use of her own body as an image in global circulation, I attempt to map techniques which the artist employs to move beyond the racialised production of fungibility. Although the fugitive is in constant tension with the fungible, Perry embraces the transgressive aspects of fugitivity, which allow her to explore and perform the agility of blackness as a resistance to the algorithmic logic of visibility. The artist explores this notion of the agility of blackness in the context of post-production as a site to interrogate being otherwise, reclaiming and performing blackness as technē – as a creation and not a means to an End, thus also resisting the idea of techno-logie as such.

This spatially ‘expanded’ enquiry into Perry’s practice demands a consideration of the notions of surface, touch, circulation, and an imaginative capacity to move together with the images. While I am holding a shiny device and lightly tapping its surface to zoom in on Perry’s body of work and her highly saturated skin, which makes up her installation Flesh Wall in Times Square, the screen becomes a site of contemplation where consumption, body, liquid crystals, and images merge through the act of touch. Interactions with a touchscreen device animate the liquid crystal display via a touch of skin surface, which interrupts the electrical field running under the glass to produce digital images through ‘electrical charges that switch pixels, dots of liquid crystal, on and off’. In this instance, through touch, modes of consumption and corporeality merge with extracted materials and minerals, such as liquid crystals, to enable the appearance of the digital image. According to Esther Leslie, the liquid crystals now ‘have become the technical matter of a new faux-sublime, a commodity sublime, conveyed by the digital machine’. In this context, the act of touching is inseparable from considerations of the digital landscape and various technological processes that collapse the distance between a

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224 Snorton, p. 57.  
225 Snorton, p. 59.  
226 Snorton, p. 56. Although in this chapter I am not engaging with a discussion on (trans) performances, this thread could be picked up in another project.  
228 Leslie, p. 206.
supposedly self-enclosed subject and the planetary dimension of data appropriation, transmission and circulation.

Through the mapping of Perry’s installations’ affective and critical potential to attend to these questions, which touch on the flows of capital circulation, I draw on Nancy’s notions of ecotechnics and expeausition evoked through the idea of touch. In this case, applying Nancy’s ecotechnics in relation to Perry’s Flesh Wall helps to expose the paradox of globalisation (see page 43), which allows us to consider Perry’s work as enacting an experiential critique of the racialising logic of fungibility. Ecotechnics allows access to the notion of being beyond the logic of identity and visibility but as shared and fragmented, a singular plural being. However, ecotechnics also refers to embeddedness in the flows of capital circulation, requiring a consideration of this twofold aspect of planetary entanglements. As I explore in this chapter, this sense-based experience of digital mediation and contemplation on circulation has led me to question broader issues stretching across the planetary surface. My encounter with and analysis of Perry’s work started with the touch of the screen – ‘a membrane of contact’, which also puts the body in proximity with the technological environment. Considering Nancy’s notion of touch, which interrupts the instrumentalisation of touch in the digital systems (see page 39), I approach this physical proximity to consider the effects of the ecotechnological environment, stretching from the tips of the fingers to the mines. Seb Franklin summarises digitality as:

a cultural logic [which] both produces and is produced by users who experience their devices as media of frictionless connection. In the present, that experience both requires and invisibilizes a massive carbon footprint, vast amounts of waste, and myriad forms of disposable labor.

Thus, while drawing on Nancy’s notion of ecotechnics, expeausition and touch, I engage with the digital screen as a connecting tissue that enables navigation of questions relating to embodiment, racialised bodies and digital materiality. This is considered in relation to the act of ‘touching’ the screen itself, which invites us to acknowledge and reflect on our participation and embeddedness in the globally networked environment. While interrogating the digital

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Atlantic, Perry approaches blackness as an existential mode of resistance against the algorithmic logic entrenched in regimes of visibility. Throughout this chapter, I will focus on questions of corporeality and fungibility, which will be addressed in relation to Perry’s approach to immersion as an experiential critique of extraction, appropriation, and abstraction.
On Corporeal and Temporal Dispersals

Encounters: *Flesh Wall* (2016–2020)

Figure 29. Installation view, Sondra Perry, *Flesh Wall*, 2016–2020, Midnight Series: Times Square Arts, New York City, February 2021.

Perry’s commission *Flesh Wall* (2016–2020) for *Midnight Series: Times Square Arts* in New York City was shown on seventy LED displays across the district, lasting for three minutes before midnight throughout February 2021 (see Figure 29). The installation took place during the time of the pandemic, when suspended tourism and closure of entertainment venues exposed Times Square, ‘the heart of the world’, as an empty space filled with attention-grabbing advertisements. In this space, the artist, using extreme close-up, ‘presents her skin as a diffusive figure, a dispersed scattering that is also a fusing, like lava flow, rock become throbbing, heaving liquid at over 1300 degrees Fahrenheit’. In the video documentation of Perry’s monumental installation, commercials of new digital devices such as Samsung Galaxy, iPhone 12, and a revolutionary 5G connection alongside Perry’s highly saturated and digitally manipulated skin, extending across the screens into a commercial landscape, expose ever-present tensions between commodity, race, circulation, profitability, and disposability of

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life. In this context, the *Flesh Wall* installation renders Perry’s practice an existential mode of critique against algorithmic logic entrenched in regimes of visibility that compress bodies into fungible commodities. Presented in the absence of crowds during the lockdown, a movement of Perry’s *flesh* disrupted the rhythm of advertisements populating Times Square. It exposed their aimless repetition, creating a distancing effect allowing for these tensions between commodity and race to emerge as tangible. This tension is rendered through a slow movement of *Flesh Wall* and glistening objects of desire, between the *liquid flesh* and technological devices, which amplify the promises of the digital: instant connectivity and transmission of data.

Exhibited in Times Square, the *Flesh Wall* installation embodies the circulatory and modifying effects of the digital Atlantic. The latter term refers to Franklin’s observation that ‘the promises of digital culture remain relationally bound to Atlantic slavery and its afterlives’. Tensions that emerge between the advertisements and the *Flesh Wall* installation help to visualise historical processes that take new forms in the digital landscape, which continues to render a data subject as a corporeal channel enabling the circulation of data collection as a commodity. As Sean Cubitt put it, the data subject ‘has itself become a medium defined by its action as membrane organising passage between corporeal and informatic realms’. Thinking through these relations between transfer of data, commodity and connectivity, Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias argue that data colonialism is a new distinctive form of colonialism in the twenty-first century, which requires a platform (for example, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and so on). They argue that the platform ‘produces the social for capital, that is, a form of “social” that is ready for appropriation and exploitation for value as data, when combined with other data similarly appropriated’. This argument introduces us to a prevalent mode of thinking about emerging data relations as a given resource to be appropriated and extracted. However, I argue that Perry’s practice exposes how the colonial extractive practices that marked and traded bodies as units of value continue to permeate the digital landscape where racialised bodies and lives are rendered as disposable based on the entrenched logic of

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233 Franklin, p. 2.
algorithmic visibility. It unsettles the idea of data colonialism, which disperses the agency of the oppressor across the digital infrastructure, thus requiring us to attend to the complexities where data, labouring and racialised bodies, the logic of visibility and colonialism are inextricably entangled. Therefore, while Perry’s *Flesh Wall* embodies, exposes, and reflects on the inevitability of participating in this circulation, her work, I contend, performs an ontological critique of the digital and political structures in which everyday life is embedded. This tension raises questions about continuity between historical and contemporary systems of profitability based on appropriation of territory, natural resources, labouring and racialised bodies, commodities, and data relations. Throughout the chapter, I will continue addressing these questions in relation to the *Typhoon coming on* (2018) exhibition, which critically responds to J. M. W. Turner’s painting *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* (1840) (see Figure 30), and Perry’s first video installation, *Black Girl as a Landscape* (2010), to contextualise her critical approach to post-production and the use of Chroma Keys.

Figure 30. J. M. W. Turner, *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, 1840, oil on canvas.
A few months before the *Flesh Wall* installation was exhibited in New York City, during the first post-lockdown reopening of museums and galleries, on 3rd November 2020 I visited *Turner’s Modern World* at Tate Britain, London. In this exhibition, among many paintings depicting Turner’s fascination with industrialisation, societal changes, and transforming landscapes, on display, there was also the *Slave Ship* painting, which was first displayed at the Royal Academy of Arts coinciding with the abolitionist agenda of the time. The painting bears witness to a liberal subject failing to comprehend the dehumanising force of slavery after its abolition in most territories of the British Empire following the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. *Slave Ship* stood out in the exhibition because of its attempt to depict a scene and a subject matter that exceeds representation: the Zong massacre which took place in 1781. In the painting, the sea acquires an abyssal quality, swallowing enslaved bodies thrown overboard for insurance purposes:

The insurance policy taken out by the Liverpool-based Gregson slave-trading syndicate in advance of the Zong’s journey covered the value ascribed to “cargo” lost at sea, but not that of enslaved people who died onboard due to illness, dehydration, or malnutrition. Hence the decision by the captain to throw them overboard.²³⁶

In the context of migratory crisis and the Black Lives Matter protests that took momentum during the pandemic, a physical encounter with Turner’s painting spoke more to the present time as a continuation of the past than to the historical fact of the Abolition of slavery. According to Arabella Stanger, Turner’s painting depicts a ‘maritime catastrophe that reveals antiblackness and finance capital to be co-constitutive phenomena’, which exposes how profitability is based on the disposability of human life.²³⁷ Thus, witnessing the flow of images of the *Flesh Wall* installation in Times Square during the time of capitalist asphyxia after my encounter with Turner’s painting, this artwork was revealed as an exposure of the circulation of racialised bodies as a foundation of capitalist modernity.

This violence produced by financial capital has been addressed by such writers as M. NourbeSe Philip in ‘Zong! Poems’ (2008), who appropriated the case report of Gregson vs. Gilbert, and

²³⁶ Seb Franklin, *Digitally Disposed: Racial Capitalism and the Informatics of Value* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2021), p. 120.
transformed it into a poetic space of words that have lost their initial purpose. In these poems, each word and letter are dotted across the page, resisting the linear flow of sentences. The gaps emerging between the words become ruptures, turning the case report into an echo of screams, exposing the violence of profitability that led to the fragmentation of bodies, now floating as black letters ‘lost in the archives and in the sea’. Saidiya Hartman in ‘Venus in Two Acts’ (2008) also discusses the importance of reimagining lives of enslaved people beyond the archival records that replicate racialised violence and render their lives as properties, commodities and units of value registered in invoices, account books and dehumanising descriptions. Hartman proposes to create ‘a counter-history of the human’ as a practice of freedom produced through narration, which for her is ‘inseparable from writing a history of present’. In this essay, she focuses on the lives and death on board the slave ships, since narratives of captivity and enslavement in the archives are scarce. For Hartman, to recover the voice of justice requires creating a counter-history that considers this absence: ‘to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing’. Counter-history entails rethinking the past, ghostly absence by evoking it in the present through narration, which attempts to produce an alternative future for the people stripped of their humanness.

A similar approach towards considering the histories of racialised violence as constitutive of the present is also enacted in Christina Sharpe’s invitation to attend to these ruptures by absorbing the wake in all its meanings, which refers to the aftermath of slavery as the past rupturing the present. Thinking through the wake as work that needs to be done to attend to the present shaped by antiblack violence raises a question: ‘[h]ow do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?’ Sharpe discusses the continuous racialised violence that African migrants experience crossing the English Channel, the Mediterranean Sea in the holds of the ships, or being thrown overboard by smugglers, and if able to reach a ‘safe’ European country, being held in refugee camps, putting their lives on hold. She places these events in relation to the past that is constituting the present, in which the holds continue to multiply: ‘the Zong repeats; it repeats and repeats through the logics and the calculus of dehumanizing started long ago and still

241 Hartman, 1–14 (p. 4).
242 Sharpe, p. 20.
operative’. This act of resistance, to think the present as ruptured by the past or to recover the lives from the archives as a form of reparation, is also enacted by Perry in the *Typhoon coming on* installation, which resists Turner’s representation of the *Zong* catastrophe by creating a space for experiential critique of a reduction of life to a unit of value.

**Ocean as Modifier: *Typhoon coming on* (2018)**

In this section, I explore how Perry responds to Turner’s painting *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* (1840) in the exhibition *Typhoon coming on* (2018) at the Serpentine Galleries. It critiques the understanding of Abolition as historical fact by warping its timeline, which Perry explores through immersion in the digital Atlantic as a technique to address the ongoing violence of profitability. The Magazine, a type of building that was used to store gunpowder and where the gallery is now located, provides historical context for thinking about the complexity of Perry’s installation. According to Stanger, ‘the commodity, in other words, for whose protection The Magazine was designed, was once traded by British merchants for African people and so sustained the very histories of dehumanization to which Perry’s reading of Turner is attuned’. The installation consists of six-channel video projection, which creates an edge-blending wrap around the perimeter of the gallery walls that used to protect gunpowder. ADi Audiovisual worked together with the gallery team and the artist to manage the scale and complexity of this installation, for which a total of twelve Epson projectors with ultra-short throw lenses were used. This set-up permits gallery visitors to stand very close to the interior wall without making a shadow, which generates immersive and mesmerising effects of feeling engulfed by the constantly moving image projected on the wall surface. Perry stated that for this work she initially wanted to cover the space of the gallery with her skin—the *Wall 2* projection—to create a feeling of being contained in her body. However, instead of a projected skin surface, for the *Typhoon coming on* exhibition, gallery walls were transformed into an enveloping oceanic surface as an opening

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243 Sharpe, p. 73.
244 Stanger, 11–20 (p. 12).
up of the histories of colonial subjugation. As mentioned earlier, eventually, Perry’s desire to engulf a visitor with an expanded presence of her corporeal surface was realised a few years later, covering the exteriors of the buildings in the Times Square district in the *Flesh Wall* installation. Although the skin wall for the Serpentine exhibition was reduced to only one wall projection as part of the *TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence)* (2018) installation, it has not stopped moving across locations and screens (see Figure 31). This movement towards expansion and scale is extending Perry’s practice towards configurations that expose the oceanic and the digital Atlantic as interlinked sites of globalisation enabling profitability through processes that render racialised bodies as disposable.

The *Typhoon coming on* (2018) installation is made up of a digitally manipulated version of Turner’s *Slave Ship*, which is accompanied by a deep and heavy purple emerging from ‘underneath’ the painterly surface in a continuous on and off movement between the two seascapes (see Figures 32, 33). To simulate this oceanic movement, Perry used the same digital tool that was applied to animate the *Wall 2* artwork presented in most of her installations. These effects of liquidity were created using a 3D simulation tool called *Ocean Modifier* available in the open-source software Blender. Perry appropriated these modifying effects to investigate

the moving foundations of capitalist modernity. As the artist notes, ‘in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, the ocean is a literal modifier to culture, bodies, movement’. She treats the simulation tool as both an aesthetic and conceptual device, to reflect on the processes of capitalist modernity, based on trading and exploiting racialised bodies as units of value.

By applying the *Ocean Modifier* tool to create these visuals, Perry transforms the gallery into a space where visitors are immersed in the oceanic waves. Seeking to reconfigure the histories of colonial violence as unfolding and constituting the present, the artist edited corporeal elements out of Turner’s *Slave Ship* and animated its surface to submerge the gallery visitors in its abyssal space. By absorbing and enveloping their bodies, the projection stages visitors in the unfolding moment of the *Zong* catastrophe. According to Stanger, Perry’s refusal to reproduce Turner’s representation of the *Zong* massacre in which bodily wreckage is visualised acts as a gesture counteracting the painter’s historicisation of the events depicted. As mentioned earlier, Turner’s attempt to represent human life as corporeal debris ‘disappearing into the representational abyss beneath the frame’ raises questions about the foundation of liberal morality. By removing a recognisable human figure from the digitally manipulated version of Turner’s painting, Perry stages ‘a dispersal of historical time’, which here presents the Middle Passage ‘as a ground of global modernity’. The scene is dissolving into an ‘endless background where the absence of figural debris calls to the invisibilised state of social violence with which colonial modernity secures its economic futures’. Perry removed the indexical sign of wreckage, which refers to the destructive event, to reconfigure this historical event into a ‘durational field, not the before or after of abolition and emancipation but the ongoing condition of racial capitalism constituting the (after-)lives of slavery’. By submerging visitors’ bodies into the unfolding seascape projected on the gallery walls, the artist attempts to bring them out into a relational field and in proximity with history as a durational field. Here, a relational field refers to Édouard Glissant’s conceptualisation of community outside the political, ideological and essentialising operations as discussed in his *Poétique de la relation* (1990), which as Raphaël Lambert observes, is also evoked in Nancy’s work on

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248 Stanger, 11–20 (p. 15).
249 Stanger, 11–20 (p. 13).
250 Stanger, 11–20 (p. 11).
251 Stanger, 11–20 (p. 13).
252 Stanger, 11–20 (p. 13).
inooperative community (see page 42): ‘both Glissant and Nancy invoke this communal bond *ante omnia* against a conception of community in which the “I” surrenders to a wider, reassuring, and totalizing “We”’.

Therefore, Perry transforms the gallery into a space for an experiential critique of the reduction of life to a unit of value, creating a relational space for visitors to reflect on their own positions in the world shaped by capital relations. According to Stranger:

> It is through its dispersals of historical time into durational field and of individual autonomy into spatial (and ontological and socio-economic) relationality, that Perry’s work creates an Atlantic free from debris and so stages the Middle Passage as ongoing present in which all are invested: as a harbour for structural racism and for forms of Black agility, too.

While reworking past and present temporalities in the installation, the artist transforms the *Typhoon coming on* into an experiential site where a gravitational force of invisibilised and abstracted racialised bodies submerged in the ocean distort the linear trajectory of historical time.

In the remainder of this section, I argue that *Typhoon coming on* reconfigures the oceanic space as relational and so invites reflection on immersion as a mode of criticality towards abstraction and extraction, which are modelled according to perspectival position, imposing artificial subject/object relations. In the essay ‘In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’ (2012), Hito Steyerl discusses Turner’s *Slave Ship* as marking the historical shift in perspective. Steyerl argues that the painting depicts a transition from a linear perspective towards other visual paradigms emerging in the nineteenth century:

> In this painting, the horizon line, if distinguishable at all, is tilted, curved and troubled. The observer has lost his stable position. […] At the sight of the effects of colonialism and slavery, linear perspective – the central viewpoint, the position of mastery, control,
and subjecthood – is abandoned and starts tumbling and tilting, taking with it the idea of space and time as systemic constructions.255

Drawing on Steyerl’s interpretation of the painting that has influenced Perry’s work, I argue that the installation attempts to create experiential space where visitors are immersed in the oceanic, which exposes the historical event as unfolding and constituting the present.256 The resulting effect of disorientation is created by what Steyerl calls ‘the perspective of free fall’, which gestures towards an embrace of groundless contemporaneity:

the perspective of free fall teaches us to consider a social and political dreamscape of radicalized class war from above, one that throws jawdropping social inequalities into sharp focus. But falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place. Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backwards onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation.257

Steyerl’s thought experiment, embodied in this installation, is significant for an understanding of the experiential critique that Perry’s practice enacts. The projection of a painterly surface refers to Turner’s historical time, while the purple ocean indicates an error of missing information communicated by the 3D simulation program and signifies the fungibility of data in the context of the ‘smooth’ space of the digital network. By juxtaposing both oceans, Perry evokes a sense of continuation between the past and the present that does not resemble a linear timeline but a dimensional, durational, and resonant space, such as the oceanic environment. Here, the shift between the dark and bright tones of different oceans creates a rupture, which destabilises a visitor in relation to the projected image in the gallery space. In this environment, following Nancy’s and Glissant’s conceptualisations of community, a relational field is configured as a mode of resistance to the totalising idea of community. There is no horizontal line present that would allow a sense of anchoring or perspective. On the contrary, in this spatial

256 In the interview on the occasion of the exhibition opening Typhoon coming on at Luma Westbau in Zurich, Perry acknowledges the great influence that Steyerl’s ‘In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’, and Arthur Jaffa’s ‘My Black Death’ had on her practice, see ‘In Conversation: Sondra Perry & Hans Ulrich Obrist’, Luma Foundation, 2018 <https://vimeo.com/307269119> [accessed 2 November 2022].
257 Steyerl, The Wretched of the Screen, p. 28.
arrangement, visitors’ bodies become part of the unfolding image, immersed in the light, colour, sound, and movement flooding the corridors.

This juxtaposition between the oceanic and the scene in the painting exposes connections ‘between digitality, value and racialized violence’.258 As Franklin notes, to exist in the realm of the model generated in the software, ‘a concrete body or thing must be digitized and thus subject to exchange, transformation, and animation’.259 This logic of the compression of life into a unit of value permeates the digital technology context described by Couldry and Mejias as data colonialism (see page 120). Although this definition is helpful while thinking about the relations between life, (big) data, appropriation, extraction, and profitability, it is also important to acknowledge that this circulation is not determined by the technologies of the twenty-first century, but it is inseparable, as Perry’s work explores, from modernity’s liquid and watery, moving foundations onto which the digital infrastructure continues to be modelled through extractive practices. Therefore, by embedding visitors’ bodies in the gallery space, Perry reconfigures the oceanic as a relational and interconnected field, which creates the conditions for an experiential critique of the racialising logic of fungibility.

Figure 34. Slave ship diagram, nineteenth century. Diagram from ‘Bilderbuch fur Kinder’, 1805, by German publisher Friedrich Justin Bertuch (1747–1822). Credit: Paul D Stewart/Science Photo Library.

258 Franklin, pp. 120-22.
259 Franklin, pp. 120-22.
This permeating logic of fungibility is already visible in the earlier technologies such as slave ships called *Guineamen*, as well as bureaucratic and biometric mechanisms for managing the flow of bodies and commodities, which were used to extract value through literal compression of bodies into parts, parcels, and units to be carried across the oceans as cargo (see Figure 34). According to R. A. Judy, in *Liquid Modernity* (2012) Zygmunt Bauman identified the process of time and space distortion in relation to the liquefying effects of modernity, however, he omitted the technologies that were used in slavery such as the European slave ships.260 Judy appropriates Karl Marx’s quotation to emphasise that the liquefaction of modernity discussed by Bauman was impossible without the pivotal role of the enslaved bodies in circulation: ‘without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry’.261 In this context, Judy also reflects on the twenty-first century art market as liquidity’s iteration ‘where ownership of black expression provides collateral for raising capital’.262 As an example to illustrate this argument, among other artists he mentions Perry’s *Wall 2* discussed earlier. According to Judy, despite its intrinsic artistic value, in the art market ‘what is actually being evaluated is the viability of the credit financing system in which it functions as an asset’.263 However, in my discussion on Perry’s practice I depart from a reductionist approach to art as a financial asset. In the following sections, I continue a discussion on Perry’s critical engagement with fungibility while embracing a quality of fugitivity as a form of resistance and ontological critique.

262 Judy, 28–36 (p. 33).
263 Judy, 28–36 (p. 33).
Expeausition

On Reconfiguring Corporeality

The projects discussed so far were first explored and given their initial forms in an earlier exhibition by Perry, *Resident Evil* at the Kitchen in New York City in 2016. In this exhibition, Perry used the gallery space to unfold the layers of the foundations of modernity, configuring the space as an encounter with labouring machines and human bodies, overlapping histories of insurance and Atlantic slavery, and a critique of digital representational spaces and surveillance. Distinctive elements brought together in the exhibition space, such as the skin wall, a robotic vacuum cleaner, and workstations displaying Perry’s avatar and saturated skin, resemble a dismembered body, which exceeds the category of a human body. Perry’s commitment to searching for new ways of relating to her own body opens the notion of the human towards a spatial and experiential critique, which allows her to transgress universal and essentialising categories. In an interview with fellow artist M. Carmen Lane, conducted during the pandemic, Perry reflects on the meaning of interruption and consistent presence of her body in her recent installation discussed earlier:

*Flesh Wall* has been coming back into the work and back into my studio recently. It won’t go away because it’s my body. But it’s my body in a way that I haven’t been able to see myself, it’s an unruly being; *The Flesh Wall* is an unruly being and I think I want to be an unruly being.  

In this section, I will discuss how Perry approaches corporeality as a site of critique of fungibility. This critique is fuelled by the artist’s desire to allow her body to breathe as an unruly being that takes different forms, thus enacting an ontological resistance that attempts to counteract the hypervisibility of racialised bodies.

In the *Typhoon coming on* exhibition, the logic of fungibility is also challenged through notions of exposure and visibility in relation to violence. For example, in the *TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence)* installation, the *Wall 2* projection, which is also presented as a separate work *Flesh*

Wall in Times Square, is installed as a background for a video work on policing, surveillance, and the profitability of fear displayed on a television monitor (see Figure 31). Using a body camera Perry recorded:

mundane activities such as walking down the street and entering a house [which] are accompanied by a canned horror soundtrack. This footage is spliced together with real US news reports of enforced curfews, riot police raiding homes and advertisements for mass-surveillance technology.265

The footage is also filled with the rolling text ‘that narrates Perry’s terror when a SWAT team broke into her childhood home’.266 Perry created this video having in mind the exploitative nature of social media platforms that profit from violent footage going viral. As she recalls, ‘in 2015 videos of black people being killed by the police started appearing online […]. Suddenly I realised that Facebook was profiting from this; the more people watching them, the more money they made from advertising’.267 While addressing these issues of turning black death into a fungible unit, Perry also notes that simultaneously, social media offers a subversive type of communication, which is based on instantaneity, virality and fluidity: ‘blackness is about constant movement in order to survive. That’s what a meme does. It moves, accrues meaning, loses it’.268 The digital space, thus, is treated as the only location for the collective being of blackness.

Historically, as Aria Dean noted in one of Perry’s exhibition catalogues, collective being has been scattered and stretched across the continents and bodies of water. This circulatory mode of existence in the oceanic realm is approached by Dean as an historical process which continues to unfold in the present time in the context of digitality: ‘we have long been digital, “compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed” across time and space. For blackness, the meme could be a way of further figuring an existence that spills over the bounds of the body, a homecoming into our homelessness’.269 In the context of social media platforms, the digital as

267 Coatman, 2018.
268 Coatman, 2018.
269 Aria Dean, ‘Poor Meme Rich Meme (Aka Toward a Black Circulationism)’, in Nothing No Confidence No = Nothing No = 0000 (The Kitchen, 2016), pp. 6-15 (p. 15).
a location is considered a site for viral content to emerge, for example as memes or through aggressive circulation of videos that document death or violence against black people that can also be reclaimed by diasporic communities. Thus, by positioning TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence) against the projection of her own skin, Perry configures a tension emerging from the absence of actual bodies on screen, as in the Typhoon coming on installation. In this instance, a projection of slowly moving flesh in tension with the eeriness and violence emanating from the TV screen reveals the logic of visibility, which is often championed as the solution to end racism accompanied by an inability to recognise systemic violence that exposes bodies through racialised boundaries.

This link between light, visibility and violence is explored by Browne in her book Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness (2015). In the book, the author traces the early applications of biometrics during the transatlantic slave trade and discusses the emergence of biometric information technologies framing the body as a function of identification. Nowadays, biometric technologies are widely applied to identification and recognition technologies used for international border crossing and in personal devices, for example, Touch ID, Face ID, and Voice ID. In the book, Browne considers the essential role of biometrics ‘in the racial framing of blackness as property’. She argues that dehumanising practices such as ‘branding in the transatlantic slave trade was a biometric technology, as it was a measure of slavery’s making, marking, and marketing of the black subject as commodity’. Branding of enslaved people through scarring turned the marked epidermis into the site of trading, a recognisable commodity to be used, sold and consumed. Consumption of blackness, enabled by the transatlantic slave trade which alienated blackness from humanness, has contributed to the commodity racism extending beyond the practices of the slave trade. Browne indicates that commodity racism shares a similar logic to that of lynching, after which the participants would collect corporeal pieces, an act which legitimises and enables such practices by establishing a white supremacist community. What follows from Browne’s argument is that biometrics, identification technologies used to measure the living body, and recognition algorithms embedded in digital surveillance technologies are an accumulation of practices that are rooted in racialisation, relying on the measurement of the body for evidence and bureaucracy which establishes a measurement of deviation from White normativity. Therefore biometrics,

270 Browne, p. 91.
271 Browne, p. 91.
considered as a racialising practice, in the context of contemporary digital technologies is thought of as digital epidermalisation, rendering bodies as digital code. According to Browne:

> Digital epidermalization is the exercise of power cast by the disembodied gaze of certain surveillance technologies […] that can be employed to do the work of alienating the subject by producing a truth about the racial body and one’s identity (or identities) despite the subject’s claims.\(^\text{272}\)

For example, reports made by drivers formerly employed by Uber who were denied access to the company’s mobile application expose the presence of racial biases embedded in the digital verification software introduced by the company in April 2020.\(^\text{273}\) The software holds the power to permit or forbid a contractor from working for the company based on a decision made by the face-recognition algorithm, which compares submitted selfies in order to unlock access to the application. As Daniela Agostinho notes, since surveillance and recognition are inseparable from historical structural inequalities, ‘visibility does not affect subjects equally, and […] computational technologies extend this differential and racialized visibility’.\(^\text{274}\) Algorithmic systems of recognition challenge new modes of visibility that are undergoing reconfiguration. However, for Agostinho, ‘algorithmic visibility’ does not radically change notions of visibility:

> Visibility, as a racial formation, is already pervaded by an algorithmic logic, insofar as race enables certain actions and recognitions while barring others. […] The differential recognizability that structured the scene of recognition is now, with algorithmic processes, recast in new ways.\(^\text{275}\)

Perry’s practice exposes this complexity of identification in the realm of digital media, which is based on racialised parameters of visibility. As discussed earlier, the artist offers an encounter with the image of her own skin, practising different modes of existence within the

\(^{272}\) Browne, p. 110.


\(^{275}\) Agostinho, 131–55 (p. 141).
digital realm to challenge the very structure of visibility. With *Flesh Wall*, she evades schemes of recognition but remains visible in a way that challenges the racialised frame of identification.

Perry’s use of her own digitised epidermis for *Flesh Wall* acts in resistance to the practices of identification that historically turned the racialised body into an object of examination, reducing it to a collection of data – managed, controlled, traded. According to Agostinho:

> In this becoming-flesh as open source resides Perry’s potential for an alternative political ontology of the image, one that challenges the racialized parameters of visibility that structure visual events, and one that acknowledges the flesh as a source for rethinking the racist disposition of the visible.\(^{276}\)

The installation claims space for encounters with other modes of existence that evade the algorithmic logic of race and expose the consumption of blackness through practices of othering based on the logic of visibility. As Yoon described it, ‘Perry’s skin, that overdetermined site for the “fact” of blackness, becomes flesh, in all its fluidity, viscosity, and sensuality of being’.\(^ {277}\) Her skin, rendered into a digital moving image, acquires the form of a living entity, which escapes the boundaries of measurement. It seeps from the racialised frame, manifesting alternative modes of being, evading possibilities for the consumption of blackness.

Thus far, I have discussed shifting presentations of Perry’s *Flesh Wall* between 2016 and 2021 that sensorially activate and embody critical reflection on the embedding of pervasive capitalist logic into the ways that lives are administered, measured, observed, and exposed. Continuing to consider the artist’s powerful contribution to discussions about corporeality from the perspective of critical race theory, I would like to further explore how Perry’s mode of working with her own body complicates Nancy’s philosophical framework of thinking existence as exposure. Emerging tensions between Perry’s ‘unruly’ body and philosophical thought on corporeal ontology are approached in the form of a productive discussion between the artwork, the body, and the modes of thinking about the body in post-phenomenological ways.

\(^{276}\) Agostinho, 131–55 (p. 148).
\(^{277}\) Yoon, 30–37 (p. 37).
For Nancy, existence is thought through notions of touch, skin, and surface, which renders being in terms of its fragmented exposure. Nancy moves away from thinking the body in terms of substance and privileges corporeality in terms of exposition: ‘the body is a thing of exposition. A body is being exposed’.278 His approach to corporeality through the terms of exposure enables thinking beyond bodily integrity and coherent, absolute totality. Rather, ‘the body is figured as an assemblage of exposed surfaces and fragments’,279 which extends to a thought on ‘the world of bodies [which] consists only of surfaces, folded in various ways’.280 Interconnectivity between technologies and bodies also demands a fragmentation of being into bits and pieces as tradeable information, which takes place in the modes of circulation of meaning and commodities. Nancy’s investment in thinking being-in-the-world through the notion and gesture of touch and interconnection locates technologies and bodies as co-constitutive in disclosing a sense of the world. As McMahon notes, ‘for Nancy, technologies, in their plurality, are also techné, a mode of revealing, of disclosing being, of making manifest the sense of the world, prior to, and in excess of, acts of signification’.281 Skin, for Nancy is also a mode of disclosing this circulation and a sense of ‘the’ world which should be understood as a circulation of sense skin-to-skin because existence is a mode of sharing and sharing out [partage]. This mode of sharing, defined in terms of circulation that consists of singular plural beings, allows access to the world as ‘emergence’ rather than a collection of pre-existing items and meanings situated in a geometrical space. For Nancy, circularity ‘is the very condition of all touching, all contact, that is to say, of all composition of a world’.282 Perry’s all-enveloping and moving flesh gestures towards the act of ‘unhiding [expeausition]: signature along the surface of the hide, the hide of being’.283 In other words, it exposes the truth of the skin, which for Nancy is the site of existence and the sense of the world:

The skin is not the site of calculation and measurement: it is a place of passage, of transit and transport, of traffic and transaction. It is a place where rubbing and irritation, mingling and distinguishing, and colliding and stroking all take place.284

278 Nancy, Corpus, p. 124.
279 McMahon, p. 16.
281 McMahon, p. 23.
284 Nancy, The Fragile Skin of the World, p. 89.
Thus, Perry’s installation, presented in the Times Square district during the pandemic, exposes global interconnectedness as a shared existence. In other words, it exposes the skin of the world, which for Nancy consists of the sense of the world going from skin to skin but never enveloped by anything else. However, he argues, if this sense becomes:

[…] an entity enveloped in an autonomy that would have to rationalize itself, an enormous coagulation of functions and of organs, then it is lost, it implodes, it is asphyxiated like a skin whose pores are coated with a sealant of organic or technical self-sufficiency.285

Although Nancy’s philosophy is a significant contribution to thinking about the ontological plurality of existence, digital mediation, and the world as ‘emergence’, Perry’s saturated flesh enveloping the urban and commercial space also points to the problematics of thinking through the notion of skin as a site of transaction and connection. In the context of capitalist structures embedded with the logic of profitability rendering life into tradeable quantities, bodies have been commodified and exposed to this violence for centuries based on race. This aspect should not be ignored when discussing existence in terms of exposure or being exposed to violence, which is based on the notions of surface, skin, and boundaries. Thus, Perry’s animated flesh—a simulation of her ‘hide’—here refers to a performative aspect of this work and of a body being exposed, which explores connections between fungibility and fugitivity through her exposed skin—a place to hide.

In ‘L’Intrus’ and Corpus (2008), Nancy mentions racialised bodies in relation to capitalism and identity politics. However, these remarks are presented in passing to create a visual and affective contrast. This contrast exposes the logic of difference based on visibility, which reaffirms capital as ‘a system of over-signified bodies’.286 For example, in ‘L’Intrus’, a thought of possibly having Nancy’s own life prolonged with a transplanted black woman’s heart, which transgresses the limits of sex or ethnicity, exposes inherently problematic logic.287 The body of the other is reduced to a substitute. This reduction is presented as the ultimate difference from the white male’s body, rendering the donor’s body a black woman who becomes a renewed source of life. Here, the transplantation of a heart organ in the context of colonial parcelling of

286 Nancy, Corpus, p. 111.
bodies into units of value resembles Claire Denis’s film *L’Intrus* (2004), inspired by the same essay, which questions the dissolving boundaries between life and death and attempts to critique the logic of intrusion in relation to migration and national and bodily borders.

In *Corpus*, dedicated to rethinking corporeality beyond the logic of substance, Nancy continues to create a visual effect that marks and differentiates bodies in relation to capitalist structures:

> Capital means: a body marketed, transported, displaced, replaced, superseded, assigned to a post and a posture, to the point of ruin, unemployment, famine, a Bengali body bent over a car in Tokyo, a Turkish body in a Berlin trench, a black body loaded down with white packages in Suresnes or San Francisco.\(^{288}\)

The quoted remarks are significant in thinking about racialised bodies and a colonial history of marking and trading as commodities that continues in the present as a migratory crisis, which Nancy only addresses in passing here. Although Nancy’s reconceptualisation of corporeality is useful in terms of avoiding essentialisation or turning the body into an object of study, Perry’s approach extends this thought while thinking about the limits of representation in relation to blackness. Nancy grasps corporeal existence that is in-between definitions and meanings, an incommensurable being. It allows him to access a body as a limit, or multiple limits, a site of intersections. However, Perry pushes these boundaries further, approaching the body in a way that encompasses the notion of blackness, agility, and liquidity to critique modes of representation.

Perry’s critical engagement with configuring spaces for resistance to systemic violence is also explored through the workstations in the *Typhoon coming on* exhibition. The oceanic installation space connecting all the elements together is contrasted with the heavy presence of workstations that make the struggle against the systemic pressures even more prominent and embodied. These machines came to Perry’s attention as Google and Amazon advertisements suggesting to improve one’s health while working. Perry adjusted these cycling and rowing workstations to invite a visitor to physically explore what it feels like to be a body that does not fit in the frame of the Caucasian body template, health and other normative standards and categories. With these interactive and sculptural pieces Perry comments on the culture of

positivity and wellbeing, and questions the meaning of a productive, efficient, and healthy body in the capitalist system.

In one of the workstations, which consists of a rowing machine and three displays, *Wet and Wavy Looks – Typhoon coming on for a Three Monitor Workstation* (2016), the video captures attention with meditation sounds and distorted voices (see Figure 35). They are reverberating throughout the seascape, which is made up of the digitally manipulated painting and the purple ocean. The *Wet and Wavy Looks* video is also applied in the large-scale *Typhoon coming on* installation projection with slight alterations. On this workstation, a simulation of rowing through the ocean, which refers to the Middle Passage and the digital Atlantic, is accompanied by a harrowing soundscape. It enacts a space of resonance where the unfolding history of systemic violence is brought in relation to the contemporary pressures of capitalism on black embodiment. Another exhibited workstation is *Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation* (2016), an exercise bike designed to enable the user to work on a desktop while moving their legs. In this interactive sculpture, exercise and work are brought together to comment on
extreme capitalist methods of making the body constantly efficient. According to the capitalist standards, a lean and defined body represents efficiency, productivity – the ultimate product of an achievement society. For Perry, it is an important point of reference for thinking about the bodies that fall out of this desirable template, such as disabled or racialised bodies. To comment on this issue, Perry increased the resistance setting on both workstations, physically representing a way of functioning less efficiently but just enough to sustain oneself in an environment that demands productivity and success. These machines are designed to imagine and experience the resistance of bodies that are wrapped in the system which excludes them.

This critique is further elaborated in the video played on the screens installed on the bike workstation, where we encounter Perry’s avatar fading in from the blue chroma colour background (see Figure 36). Accompanied by an ambient soundtrack, the avatar asks: ‘Do you like our audio? We looked up music for relaxation on YouTube and found this.’ The avatar continues to mention the purpose of this sound, called Deep Sleep, as being for relaxation and yoga. Then, the background changes to the rendered skin image, which is the same element used in the video projection in the gallery space and the Flesh Wall public installation. The avatar introduces herself and the skin as two versions of Perry, adopting the collective pronoun ‘we’. Unfortunately, the two versions do not fully represent her image, and the avatar explains
why: ‘We were rendered to Sondra’s fullest ability, but she could not replicate her fatness in this software that was used to make us. Sondra’s body type was not an accessible pre-existing template.’ This sentence indicates one of the many biases embedded in a software that is designed according to a standardised assumption of the universal body which is based on the measurements of Caucasian body features. This automatically excludes the body that does not fall into this frame of measurement, forcing it to fit into a biased code and hence making Perry’s features and body type distorted. The avatar regrets not being able to approximate Perry’s look. However, both versions of her – the saturated skin and the avatar – refer to the absence of Perry’s body that is excluded from the representational system or compressed into a mould, template, and frame that renders it visible. As Perry notes in relation to this workstation, an obese body does not meet the set requirements of a labouring body.

The avatar then goes on to explain all the technical elements consisting of this workstation and installation: ‘This cycling workstation was an exercise machine office workers used to get physical activity during their workday. We were designed to help users incorporate leg movement into their work routine. But now our function is no longer clear. What is still familiar is our incredible exhaustion. Looping, running daily…’ Fade to black, silence. A small-scale image of documentary footage appears in the middle of the screen, which shows scenes of deliverance from spirits. While hearing a voice recording from one of these rituals, the blue background fades in from black, replacing the documentary footage with a CGI model. The sound increases in volume and intensity. Centred on the blue background, a planet-like ball is spinning and floating above the grid ‘floor’ (see Figure 37). The presence of the soundscape increases with spoken words either by one of the séance participants or from a different source: ‘I am a woman… I don’t have a mother. I don’t have a father. I am nobody.’ After these words, the image transforms into a dark purple oceanic surface, which resembles the sea at night. The words and the image of dark purple water here evoke the loss of kinship that fuelled the mechanism of slavery. According to Spillers, ‘under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not “belong” to the Mother, nor is s/he “related” to the “owner,” though the latter “possesses” it’, which marks the female body to become ‘the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange’.289 The scene of a spinning and twisting zygote, resembling a planet

289 Spillers, 64–81 (p. 74).
290 Spillers, 64–81 (p. 76).
made entirely of skin, is accompanied by the intensifying sound. The electronic music rhythm becomes more profound, echoing voices from the spiritual séance get louder – all elements make up the visceral texture of the eerie soundscape while a gallery visitor is struggling to work out on the bike workstation with increased resistance.

Eventually, the shouting stops with a sense of relief: ‘We will not be punished’. In this moment, the avatar re-emerges from the blue background, shifting the mood of the video entirely: ‘Hey, did you know that according to the *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, attributing success to personal characteristics instead of biased structural systems may negatively impact black folks’ heeeeeeaaaaaalth?’ The avatar glitches on the word health, and the relaxation sounds return, accompanying a discussion of justice in the world and how it relates to health issues in black communities: ‘The psychologists found that those of us who both strongly believed that the world was a just place and reported experiencing high levels of discrimination, more and more are likely to suffer from chronic illnesses and increased blood pressure.’ This statement is followed by the next sentence: ‘We are a problem to be fixed, and if we resist being that problem, we would be made a problem to be fixed.’ Suddenly, the avatar directly addresses the viewer-cyclist: ‘What time is it? Sondra only asks because you are in the gallery, and it is the
middle of the day. She doesn’t want to presume she knows what you are doing here, or that either of you are complicit in the imperialist fever inherent in the West’s cultural colonialism. How many jobs do you have? Do you work here? How’s your body? How does your body feel inside of us?’ After interrogating the gallery visitors, demanding awareness of one’s position and the socio-economic conditions that allow or prevent them attending the exhibition, a long pause of silence fills the space until the final message: ‘We are told we should live up to our potential, but productivity is painful, and we haven’t been feeling well. Just being who we are is extremely risky…’. The avatar fades and disappears in the blue background. By incorporating her own self-reflexive avatar in the space as a presence, which interrogates the person sitting on the bike workstation, Perry directs attention to the physicality of any labour, and exhaustion from resisting the systemic violence embedded in the structures that turn existence into an unbearable weight to push against. This is one of many important elements that Perry uses to create an immersive environment, which invites self-reflexivity, bringing forth an awareness encouraging a questioning of one’s own position within the economies of the digital Atlantic.

**Blue Chroma Key: Against Stratal Relations**

In her work, Perry acknowledges the role of post-production that fabricates but also extends one’s imagination in relation to the spatial and temporal coordinates of the future, as seen in the science fiction films already mentioned in the chapter on Rose’s practice (see pages 95, 96). Perry actively attempts to recreate or reclaim the space of post-production, which promises infinite possibilities of manipulation and malleability of reality. This further extends her practice as enacting temporal and spatial dispersals that aim to rupture conventional or controlled representational spaces based on algorithmic visibility. Perry’s approach to post-production sees it act as a site of critique, exposing racial issues present in digital technologies. For example, the blue wall opposite the *TK (Suspicious Glorious Absence)* installation, a reappearing visual element in Perry’s practice, signifies an attempt to reclaim the potential of the post-production space for a different kind of future where the background is not tinted with the algorithmic logic of visibility (see Figure 38). According to Perry:
The chroma key is the space of postproduction where everyone gathers to create a new world. It’s a space that needs direction. It’s a space that needs ushers. It’s a space of possibility, but you gotta watch it a little bit. You gotta watch it because it’s the possibility of anything. ²⁹¹

For Perry, Blue Chroma Key acts as a site of potential disruption of stratal relations based on the logic of algorithmic visibility. Historical and technological ‘erasure’ of blackness in imaging technologies from photography to cinema based on emulsion’s sensitivity to light continues to permeate the context of digital post-production. Both Blue and Green Chroma Keys are measured in terms of being the most distant colours from the human skin, so a human figure could be easily outlined and separated from the background in post-production. It permits manipulation of the background behind the figure, which can be extracted or embedded in a newly generated environment. These universal chroma keys, used in film post-production, continue to exclude skin colours that do not meet the universal ideal of what would be

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²⁹¹ Lane, Perry, and Sullivan, 211–26 (p. 223).
considered human skin. For example, Blue Chroma Key is designed to be used for low light scenes with low visibility. It simultaneously includes and excludes the figure in the image based on the logic of visibility in representational technologies, which is inseparable from a racial formation and continues to be embedded in digital structures and surveillance. As with the animated oceanic and saturated skin backgrounds, by painting gallery walls with the same colour as the Blue Chroma Key, Perry situates a visitor as part of the background, addressing its simultaneously inclusive and exclusive quality, and its potentiality to be transformed into a site of resistance.

Perry’s first video work entitled *Black Girl as a Landscape* (2010), performed by a fellow artist Dionne Lee, displays her early interest in experimenting with chroma keying and exploring its disruptive potential (see Figures 39, 40, 41). While making this video work, in post-production Perry inverted the chroma key, which turned the background into a white colour, rendering the body as a dark silhouette with shades of grey. Through the sharp contrast of black and white, rotated horizontally and presented in silence, the female body is explored by the camera through tensions between proximity and distance. This movement between close-ups of the body and textured surface of the patterned dress displays the process of the body being turned into landscape, which eventually is rendered as abstraction. This effect allows Perry to
Figure 40. Still from Sondra Perry, *Black Girl as a Landscape*, 2010, single channel video installation, colour, silent, 10 min 4 sec. Performed by Dionne Lee.

Figure 41. Still from Sondra Perry, *Black Girl as a Landscape*, 2010, single channel video installation, colour, silent, 10 min 4 sec. Performed by Dionne Lee.
articulate the possibility of using abstraction as a method to explore the extended dimensionality of connections between ‘individual bodies to larger visual and environmental ecologies’.\textsuperscript{292} Black Girl as a Landscape has instilled this interest in Perry’s practice, which to date continues to be explored in different dimensions, such as the Flesh Wall installation, the most recent iteration of her own abstracted body. In this instance, the body acquires a colour instead of grey and black tones, which resembles a heated magma or liquid blackness that resists capture but at the same time refers to and critiques the moving foundations of modernity.

Perry’s elegant approach to abstraction as a form of resistance while appropriating post-production techniques such as chroma keying extends to a multidimensional critique of the notion of ‘human’. According to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, ‘blackness has been central to, rather than excluded from, liberal humanism: the black body is an essential index for the calculation of degree of humanity and the measure of human progress’.\textsuperscript{293} Perry’s investment in challenging the bodily form through its abstraction also comments on the demands put on the enslaved bodies to be extended in all dimensions ‘as infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, at once sub/super/human’.\textsuperscript{294} This leads to thinking about stratal relations shared by black labour and the landscape in the long history of geology. Following Kathryn Yusoff’s analysis of the inextricable links between geology, slavery, and the Anthropocene in A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None (2018), it is important to acknowledge that geology as a category of knowledge allowed transactions between bodies and materials. It is a process during which ‘the inhuman categorization and the inhuman earth’ were pressed into intimacy that served ‘as a node of extraction of properties and personhood’.\textsuperscript{295} This resulted in blackness as not merely ‘a negative relation but as a plastic fleshly being that stabilizes and gives form to human and animal as categories’.\textsuperscript{296} I contend that Perry’s movement between the body and the landscape, human and inhuman categories allows her to expose these categorisations as still prevalent and embedded in the technological environments that demand a human body to fall into measurements and definitions based on racial biases, as seen in the representational and recognition technologies. While portraying the female body as a landscape, navigating

\textsuperscript{294} Jackson, pp. 47-48.
\textsuperscript{295} Kathryn Yusoff, A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. xii.
\textsuperscript{296} Jackson, pp. 47-48.
historically conditioned categories of human and inhuman, Perry also raises questions around disposability, waste and labour that are connected to the environmental aspects visible in this video work. Planned obsolescence, a profit-driven logic that relies on the excavation of minerals and metals to produce electronic media with a calculated expiration time, inevitably leads to questions concerning digital materiality and its environmental impact on a global scale. As Jussi Parikka observed, digital materiality is entangled with geological processes and neocolonial contexts: ‘the environmentally disastrous consequences of planned obsolescence of electronic media, the energy costs of digital culture, and, for instance, the neocolonial arrangements of material and energy extraction across the globe’. In his book *Anthrobscene*, which explores intricate relations between media obsolescence and the Anthropocene, Parikka proposes ‘to consider the depths of mines as essential places for the emergence of technical media culture – from the entertainment sector to the military’. This observation raises questions about the geological aspects of media, its materiality and environmental effects.

As a starting point, approaching digital culture from the mines, the depths of earth, introduces a geology of media where relations between minerals, metals, the environment, and digital technologies are thought about together, which complicates the myth of the digital realm as immaterial. The discourse of electronic waste and toxicity of digital technologies industry elaborated in *Digital Rubbish* (2011) by Gabrys, follows the idea that ‘electronics are not only “matter,” unfolding through minerals, chemicals, bodies, soil, water, environments, and temporalities. They also provide traces of the economic, cultural, and political contexts in which they circulate’. Gabrys focuses on the material effects to interrogate a wider cultural context in which these electronic fossils circulate, thus allowing us to comprehend the flows of extracted matter and their effects on the environment on a global scale. Working through Parikka’s approach to digital cultures as emerging from mines, which leads to an understanding of media as geological, and drawing on Gabrys’s approach to consider media fossils to map the contexts of circulation, leads us to another question raised by Yusoff in relation to geology and race. While thinking about media as always geological and environmental, which dissolves the binaries between nature, technology, and culture, it is also important to acknowledge geology as a foundational category for establishing stratal relations. Yussof traces extractive and stratal effects of geology – a category of knowledge on the properties of metals and

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298 Parikka, p. 6.
minerals – as inseparable from the histories of slavery and construction of the notions of human/inhuman:

Slavery was a geologic axiom of the inhuman in which nonbeing was made, reproduced, and circulated as flesh. This unmaking of subjects constitutes a warp of dispossession in the progressive narrative of collective accumulation or geologic commons in which “we” all share.300

Yusoff’s illuminating observation on the role of geology in establishing stratal relations, which conditioned racialised attitudes towards enslaved bodies as matter with extractable properties that can be used as valuable material for profit, leads to a consideration of the mines not just as a source for the emergence of media cultures. The mines act as points of convergence where the interconnections between geology, bodies, media, and the circulation of waste are conditioned by the uneven distribution of wealth and power relations. In other words, it is important to acknowledge that extractive geological practices used to mine metals and minerals condition media cultures and contribute, along with planned obsolescence, to environmental pollution. This further exposes processes that are pressing racialised bodies into a different kind of intimacy with the earthly metals emerging from the electronic waste. Perry’s early video, Black Girl as a Landscape, epitomises these relations between racialised bodies and landscapes as natural resources of extraction, which she renders through close proximity with the body, abstracting it into the textures of indistinguishable geological formation. This leads us to another example of how these processes of extraction, appropriation, and abstraction operate in relation to racialised bodies and electronic waste.

Drawing on different approaches to geology and its capacity to deterritorialise earthly components and personhood, the contemporary scrap metal industries are obvious examples of how this process takes place. As Parikka observed, ‘media history conflates with earth history; the geological material of metals and chemicals get deterritorialized from their strata and reterritorialized in machines that define our technical media culture’.301 Louis Henderson’s short, experimental documentary All That is Solid (2014) shows the process of burning and melting toxic waste to ‘mine’ valuable materials from the processors found in electronic waste.

300 Yusoff, p. 5.
301 Parikka, p. 16.
devices, which also comments on how media history is entangled with the earth’s history. It also documents the illegal artisanal gold mining that local communities rely on to sustain their livelihoods. The documented process of burning waste takes place in a scrapyard in Agbogbloshie in Accra, Ghana (the former British Crown Colony known as the Gold Coast), which at the time was the biggest recycling site for electronic devices. Overall, the film attempts to critique the capitalist myth of immaterial digital culture and turns our attention to colonial history when enslaved bodies were traded for gold, while the gold itself was extracted by the enslaved communities. This is narrated through the overlapping ‘window’ layers appearing on the desktop, which integrates search engine results on the history of the Gold Coast and its colonial entanglements. However, in 2021, the scrapyard visible in All That is Solid was demolished by the local government, leaving about 8000 workers displaced and without income. This act represents a failure to recognise the scrapyard as a recycling industry that also contributed to the local economy.302 Similarly, the locals engaged in the mining of gold are having to find other means of income because of increasing international investments (for example, China) in metal mining pressuring the government to forbid the illegal mining business. In All That is Solid we can see how historical processes of extraction and investment

transform, forming new landscapes such as the scrapyard where the workers are extracting value from the electronic waste illegally exported from Western countries.

This ongoing circulation of waste, media, materials, minerals, and bodies brings us back to a discussion of Perry’s installation *Flesh Wall* (2016–2020) (see Figure 42). This work, presented in the context of media commodities, does not only refer to the circulation of images conditioned by digital networks. It also links to a geology of media, which exposes us to the extraction of metals and recycling of e-waste in former colonies, such as Ghana. It refers to the ongoing process of ‘rendering subjects as inhuman matter,’ which ‘facilitated and incorporated the historical fact of extraction of personhood as a quality of geology at its inception’. Therefore, I argue, the *Flesh Wall* public installation facilitates an immersion in the ongoing violence of circulation, which relies on pressing human bodies, earthly metals, and digital devices into units of value and sources of profit based on extractive capitalist short-term profit gains, with devastating effects on the local communities and the environment. Thus, in the context of Perry’s work, Nancy’s approach to thinking about the ecotechnological condition of the world through existence as being-with, which rejects a totalising ‘we’ of community driven by the logic of self-sufficiency, also demands a recognition of the foundations enabling this global circulation.

This leads to an argument that Perry’s practice allows us to rethink immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene, which has rendered existence into units of value. I refer here to the term Capitalocene to emphasise the logic of profitability that has led to, as Yusoff calls it, the many Anthropocenes that already took place in the past, which is a demand for acknowledging the ongoing violence to which communities have been and continue to be exposed. According to Yusoff:

> If the Anthropocene proclaims a sudden concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities, it does so in the wake of histories in which these harms have been knowingly exported to black and brown communities under the rubric of civilization, progress, modernization, and capitalism.³⁰⁴

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³⁰³ Yusoff, p. 6.
³⁰⁴ Yusoff, p. xiii.
The Capitalocene exposes the profit driven logic that enabled planetary violence through practices that are embedded in the formation of geology as a category of knowledge based on surveying, investment, and extraction. This requires rethinking the official term Anthropocene in relation to colonial entanglements in order to take responsibility and action for embracing the contemporary crises as an accumulation of multiple Anthropocenes that have been unfolding throughout the centuries. Thus, following Yusoff’s argument, I contend that Perry’s practice, especially the *Flesh Wall* installation, pierces through space-time to unearth the past and disrupt imposed stratal relations that constitute the notion of *humanity* or *human* shaped by capital relations and the logic of self-sufficiency. As observed in this chapter, Perry’s practice evokes an experiential critique of the Capitalocene by reconfiguring corporeality into a source of resistance, a fluid and agile network which resembles a flow of heated magma through abstraction escaping solidification into an extractable unit of value.
Conclusion

The liquid crystals that condition the appearance of the digital image on touchscreen devices act as a reference to the concealing and facilitating of inequality. When it comes to the context of the Middle Passage and insurance procedures as a mode of making profit while concealing violence (as observed by Perry in relation to Turner’s painting), the ocean acquires depths where the bodies thrown overboard disappear as waste, disposable lives. The liquid surface conceals acts of violence and invisibilises the bodies. In a similar way, digitality, with the promise of smooth operation and interconnectivity, hides inequalities embedded in the mineral and material extraction practices – bodies dispersed across the scrapyards, in the landscape marked by the historical modes of extraction of lives: disposed in the ocean or sold as commodities. Perry’s approach to creating affective environments where these links between the past and the present become tangible invites urban dwellers in Times Square or gallery visitors elsewhere to ‘immerse’ themselves in the depths of the digital Atlantic and under the layers of her skin. This immersion facilitates encounters with the unfolding violence that began with the colonial and imperial project based on the algorithmic logic of visibility, which continues to unfold and mutate in the context of digitality. As Parikka noted, the earth and media are tied in a dynamic feedback loop: ‘electronic waste is an example of how media feeds back to earth history and future fossil times’. This loop exposes geology as a category, which links digital culture, the global economy, and the categorisation of human/inhuman in its modes of circulation and extraction.

In this chapter, I focused on Perry’s two site-specific moving image installations: Flesh Wall (2016–2020), shown in Times Square in New York City during the pandemic in 2021, and Typhoon coming on (2018), conceived for an exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries in London. Drawing on both installations allowed me to approach Perry’s practice in terms of emerging tensions that expose circulation as a foundation of capitalist modernity. Skin, epidermis, and flesh in Perry’s practice are treated as visual elements re-emerging in different installations with an attempt to critique racial capitalism and the algorithmic logic of visibility. Nancy’s idea of the sense of the world that is not enveloped but circulating outside the logic of self-sufficiency becomes more complicated when approached through Perry’s critique of Western notions of human/inhuman and fungibility of bodies as commodities, both in colonial history.

305 Parikka, p. 29.
and contemporary digital technology context (as images of economic value or bodies extracting value from e-waste). As became clear throughout this chapter, the artist pushes the boundaries of her own flesh to create assemblages which allow her to critique representational digital spaces as well as the global economy based on unequal power relations. By creating abstract spaces that allude to the agility of liquid blackness as a critique of fungibility, Perry also recognises the long history of racialised bodies being embedded in the flows of capital as source material. Therefore, in the context of Nancy’s notion of ecotechnics, I explored Perry’s work as an ontological critique of fungibility, while focusing on the abstract space of post-production where such issues can be addressed in relation to the image surface as a site of resistance, reimagination, and potentialities.
Chapter 4: Hito Steyerl. In Search of a Future Garden

Introduction

In this chapter, dedicated to the analysis of mixed-media installation *This is the Future/Power Plants* (2019) by German artist and scholar Hito Steyerl (b. 1966), I continue to address the question of immersion as experiential critique of the Capitalocene. The analysis weaves in the atmospheres of the event that brought another global concern alongside the COVID-19 pandemic and the global post-fascist tendencies. Since the beginning of 2022, uncertainty of the post-pandemic future was replaced by uncertainty of international foreign policy with the escalation of the war in Ukraine, which generated another wave of migratory crisis displacing millions of people. While infrastructures and ecosystems are collapsing, war crimes are being committed daily. This chapter finds itself caught between the two extremities: the natural, uncontained force of the virus that disrupted the world-system, and the large-scale Russian invasion of a sovereign country in Europe for the first time since the Second World War. These events reiterate the importance of developing an experiential critique of self-sufficiency and absolute interiority in order to resist political ‘immunisation’. Although Steyerl’s artwork does not directly address these issues, it nevertheless engages in a critique of the idea of the future based on economic growth that contributes to global instability. Throughout the analysis of *This is the Future/Power Plants*, I will consider the growing reliance on predictive algorithms that deliver results based on past data, and its implications on the present. The unfolding narrative in the installation, which conflates the human and machine learning predictions of the near future, eventually distorts and ruptures the totalising image of the future, based on the logic of profitability and technological progress. Throughout the chapter, I will address how in this installation the rupturing and glitching of future prediction – in its attempts to distort temporal axes – contributes to developing an approach to immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene.

Some elements of *This is the Future/Power Plants* were initially developed for the *Power Plants* exhibition, which was first co-commissioned by the Serpentine Galleries and The Store X in 2019. The initial *Power Plants* exhibition consists of three intertwined parts: ‘Actual Reality’, ‘Power Walks’ and ‘Power Plants’, that explored the reality of societal inequalities existing around the Serpentine Galleries located in Hyde Park in London. The *Power Plants* exhibition attempted to reveal this hidden reality by questioning the intricate relationship...
between power and technology. According to the description of the exhibition, this relationship is particularly visible ‘in the decision-making power imbued within technologies like artificial intelligence and predictive modelling now used to ascertain access to services like insurance, housing and social benefits’.

This aspect is clearly communicated in the ‘Actual Reality’ part, which presents collected data in the physical space through the use of an augmented reality application. In addition, the relationship between power and technology is also exposed in the third part of the exhibition, which shares the same title as the exhibition – ‘Power Plants’ (see Figure 43). The latter part makes up the *This is the Future/Power Plants* installation, which consists of three sculptural constructions made of LED panels and LED text panels attached to the stainless steel scaffolding structures. A twelve-channel video of growing plants runs looped on the LED panels, and is accompanied by the soundtracks *Photo Sin Thesis* composed by Kojey Radical, and *This is the Future* by Hito Steyerl and Susumu Yakota.


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The installation *This is the Future/Power Plants* extends the initial sculptural structure of ‘Power Plants’ presented at the Serpentine Galleries. In this later version, the installation also includes the main video work *This is the Future* (2019), projected on novel screen technology – a Smart Glass panel programmed to shift between modes of transparency and opacity, which is usually used to create privacy partitions in the office environment (see Figure 44). The use of this screen technology introduces the screen not only as a carrier of the video projection, but also as a ‘window’, which at the end of the video reveals a sculptural part of the installation extending beyond the screen (see Figure 45). I will discuss this in more detail in the final section ‘Recon/struction’ in relation to Nancy’s thought on struction and general equivalence.

This later version of *This is the Future/Power Plants* installation presented in Venice Biennale in 2019 consists of raised passageways and scaffolding structures with attached screens dispersed across a darkened exhibition space. The exhibition design addresses the rising sea water levels and the future reality of a sinking city of Venice. In a more recent iteration of this installation, displayed as part of the *LUX: New Wave of Contemporary Art* exhibition at the 180 Studios in London in 2021, the passageways were replaced with small pebbles covering the floor (see Figure 46). The pebbles – small grey pieces of a mineral called olivine and the primary component of the earth’s upper mantle – were chosen by Steyerl because of its ability to trap carbon dioxide. As in the installation for Venice Biennale, a haunting atmosphere of the future catastrophe is referenced in the use of elements such as olivine, which are currently being studied for mitigating the effects of carbon dioxide on the environment. Although *This is the Future/Power Plants* is adapted to specific locations there are some elements that remain consistent throughout, such as a sculptural construction of a digital ‘garden’ – *Power Plants* (2019) – and the 16-minute-long video projection *This is the Future* (2019), which I will focus on throughout the chapter.

The main narrative unfolding in the 16-minute-long video projection on the Smart Glass panel is made up of five parts: *Hêja’s Garden, The Future: A History, Bambusa Futuris, Power Plants* and *Hêja’s Prediction*. They are narrated by the protagonist – a neural network which predicts and manifests images generated by Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). This ‘prediction’ produces the images that escape representation and are situated in-between

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308 The exhibition was curated by Jiyoon Leen with *Fact* and sponsored by LG. It attempts to explore dissolving boundaries between the virtual and physical worlds in moving image installations that interrogate creative potentialities of innovative technologies.

Figure 45. Installation view, Hito Steyerl, *This is the Future/Power Plants*, 2019, Venice Biennale, 2019. Image
The previous and the following frames. In this constantly ‘evolving’ landscape, the other protagonist Hêja looks for a future garden from which she seeks to retrieve the hidden plants that have the powers to heal the present. Although the reference to the garden immediately evokes biblical associations of the Garden of Eden and salvation narratives, it rather represents the idea of nature as a source of growth and power – an idea also referenced in the ‘Power Plants’ part of a sculptural ‘digital’ garden – contrasting the technological and economic ideas of ‘growth’ and ‘power’ based on extraction. I explore this installation as an example of how the spatial arrangement of the screens and projection technology, and the use of machine learning to create the images, are gestures directed at producing ruptures. Instead of using digital technology to immerse a visitor in glistening virtual worlds, I argue that Steyerl, in this installation, exposes technical systems of imperceptible power structures that contribute to the extractive economy that have an impact on a planetary scale.

With the *This is the Future/Power Plants* installation and her later works, such as *SocialSim* (2020) and *Animal Spirits* (2022), Steyerl entered a wider pool of contemporary artists who interrogate the creative and critical potentialities of converging realms of machine learning and
Although this emerging field is attracting experimentations that explore intersubjectivity and open-endedness, many works concerned with machine learning aesthetics appear more often as a shimmering surface of visual effects. As Zylinska noted, this tends to conceal significant and imperceptible processes implicit in machine learning developments and its wider applications across industries. In this chapter, I seek to explore Steyerl’s installation as an attempt to create something more intriguing than playing with the aesthetics offered by machine learning applications. While considering the context of the artificial intelligence (AI) industry, I argue that the installation This is the Future/Power Plants, created using GANs, exceeds the visual spectacle associated with the aesthetics of computer-generated imaging (see Figure 47). In this work, Steyerl raises questions concerning the impact of artificial intelligence on art and society, while creating space for optimistic future scenarios in which nature has a power to heal the present, thereby acting as a critique of the techno-capitalist paradigm. Drawing on both the spatial arrangement of the installation and the narrative unfolding in the main video projection, this analysis of This is the Future/Power Plants considers tensions between the two elements as a space for experiential critique of deterministic projections of the future embedded in the logic of prediction algorithms.

Throughout the chapter, I explore how this installation enables us to raise questions concerning the artificial intelligence industry that is invested in growing a dominant vision of the world, one based on the imperial and colonial gaze.\textsuperscript{311} I continue exploring a lineage between the earlier predictive analytics used in insurance companies since the seventeenth century that allowed the racialising logic of fungibility to proliferate (see page 121), and the political and ethical ramifications of predictive algorithms visible today. To achieve this, I discuss the biases embedded in the structures of databases, such as ImageNet. Exposing these structural biases allows us to explore the role of the artificial intelligence industry in creating a totalising and exclusionary vision of the present and the future. While focusing on the technical aspects of the \textit{This is the Future/Power Plants} installation, I argue that this work invites us to contemplate how the present-future relationship is modelled around finality, which opens space to critique and defy the logic of profitability based on the future predictions. This interrogation of temporality questions the role of predictive algorithms that rely on past data to calculate risks and shape the future and present realities. This installation, therefore, is approached as a space for encountering and questioning algorithmic processes that shape reality through calculation, classification, and prediction based on past data.

Later in the chapter, I draw on Nancy’s concept of struction to explore \textit{This is the Future/Power Plants} installation as a critical reimagining of the future in the context of techno-utopianism and global crises. As a result, I develop the concept of recon/struction which, in relation to Steyerl’s practice, emerges as a conceptual tool for navigating the catastrophic logic of general equivalence. For Nancy, ‘the regime of general equivalence henceforth virtually absorbs, well beyond the monetary or financial sphere but thanks to it and with regard to it, all the spheres of existence of humans, and along with them all things that exist’.\textsuperscript{312} This logic also absorbs wars and natural disasters, exposing the interdependence between capitalism, technological development, and ecology. For example, according to Nancy, the economic warfare ‘agitates the system of general equivalence from within. In brief, it is this equivalence that is catastrophic.’\textsuperscript{313} To bring this conceptual framing in relation to the current context, before engaging with the analysis of the installation itself, in the following section ‘Context: Global Instability and Duty Free Art’, I will proceed with a discussion on a wider set of questions that are driving Steyerl’s

\textsuperscript{312} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{313} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 6.
critical thinking and practice. The purpose of the following section is to set a background for the overall analysis of the installation in the context of global instability, such as climate breakdown and Russia’s full-scale offensive on Ukraine. This context is important for situating the questions addressed in *This is the Future/Power Plants* and its formal and conceptual execution.
Future Prediction

Context: Global Instability and Duty Free Art

Steyerl’s work predominantly focuses on the materiality of the digital image and the movement of capital across space and time. She is interested in the digital image ‘as lodged in a circulatory system of desire and exchange’ and the way in which, it ‘relies on a very specific economic regime’. The contemporary art world and its economic regime is also of concern for the artist. In her recent book *Duty Free Art* (2019), Steyerl argues that the contemporary art scene functions as a screen, which relies on and veils the structures supporting economic and political violence. In other words, she interrogates the contemporary art scene’s implicit role in the machinery of neoliberal violence. I would like to turn to one such example that questions this relationship and connects it to the current context of global instability.

In the opening essay ‘A Tank on a Pedestal’, which appears in the aforementioned book, Steyerl refers to an event in 2014 where the pro-Russian separatists collected some Second World War relics, such as a Soviet battle tank and some artillery from a museum to use them in the fight in Eastern Ukraine. For Steyerl, this example demonstrates how history continuously leaks into the present. In this case, the museum becomes a storage site for weaponry that can be utilised for a battle, which she sees as history morphing into a loop. In the context of the current full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military that began on 24th February 2022, this statement is even more poignant. This invasion is an escalation of the war that first began in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. At the time of writing this chapter, the fight is taking place for the future of Ukraine’s sovereignty, which extends beyond the importance of territorial and national defence; it is also a battle for the European geopolitical future and global spheres of influence. A byproduct of this war inevitably reverberates globally – as energy, ecological and migratory crises, and a significant reduction of food supplies that will lead to a further growth of inequality worldwide.

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314 Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, p. 5.
Steyerl’s questioning of the duty of art in the face of immense destruction of lives, ecosystems, infrastructures, and cities, as well as a continuous resistance against oppression, demands from the contemporary art scene a moment of critical self-reflection. For example, since the beginning of the war, newly imposed international sanctions on selected Russian oligarchs entailed the suspension of their financial transactions and access to assets located outside Russia. During this time, Roman Abramovich, who in 2018 was included in the U.S. list of Russian oligarchs gained media attention regarding the status of his assets. Before the war, he was ‘the largest shareholder of the London-based multinational steel and mining company Evraz’.\textsuperscript{317} In 2021, Abramovich was also listed to be among the top art collectors.\textsuperscript{318} This case serves as one of the many examples of inextricable links between the contemporary art industry and environmental and economic violence. In the same essay, Steyerl poses an important question: ‘How can one think of art institutions in an age that is defined by planetary civil war, growing inequality, and proprietary digital technology?’\textsuperscript{319} Such questioning enables us to perceive these realms as interconnected, especially in relation to the computational propaganda that is accompanying the territorial war in Ukraine. In her artworks, she navigates this interdependence in order to expose links between the art industry and military, technological, political, environmental and economic realms.

A discussion on the current events that are taking place provides context for Steyerl’s practice, which engages in institutional critique, as well as a critique of the capitalist logic of profitability framing the trajectory of the future. Having this context in mind, in the analysis of the installation \textit{This is the Future/Power Plants}, which discusses the societal implications of predictive algorithms, the technical systems that enable algorithmic predictions are also considered as part of a wider extractive economy. According to Kate Crawford:

\begin{quote}
There has been a general failure to address the ways in which the instruments of knowledge in AI reflect and serve the incentives of a wider extractive economy. What remains is a persistent asymmetry of power, where technical systems maintain and extend structural inequality, regardless of the intention of the designers.\textsuperscript{320}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{318} ‘Roman Abramovich – ARTnews Top 200 Collector’, 2022. \\
\textsuperscript{319} Steyerl, \textit{Duty Free Art}, p. 1. \\
\textsuperscript{320} Crawford, p. 135.
\end{flushright}
While attending to these questions of extractive economy, throughout the analysis of the installation *This is the Future/Power Plants*, I seek to explore the role of algorithmic predictions that inevitably contribute to the shaping of the present and future realities. This is a pivotal discussion in relation to the installation, which attempts to reverse temporal axes in order to open up space for engagement with the political and ethical aspects of the present-future relations. This installation also acts as a space for reimagining the future after the catastrophe of a present caught up in the logic of general equivalence.

**Image Database: Towards a Total Vision**

In this section, ‘Image Database: Towards a Total Vision’, I will discuss the technical aspects of the video element in the installation *This is the Future/Power Plants*, which introduces the wider context of the ImageNet database and its classification system. While considering implications of image databases on the production of total vision, as well as its shaping of reality according to biases embedded in its classification systems, I will explore how this artwork challenges the AI production of the worldview based on extractive practices. Zylinska observes that, ‘art that draws on deep learning and big data sets [...] often ends up offering a mere psychedelic sea of squiggles, giggles and not very much in-between’. However, I argue that while employing such aesthetics of a psychedelic spectacle, the artwork in discussion also highlights paradoxes embedded within the algorithmic prediction systems. While addressing these paradoxes through the analysis of the video, this section also focuses on the underlying problems in the classificatory systems used for training predictive algorithms. Thus, drawing on Crawford’s critique of the AI industry, I explore how biased classification systems contribute to a production of a worldview, which has political, societal, ethical, and material implications. This context is helpful for establishing the background for the discussion that unfolds in the following section, ‘Algorithmic Magic/Knowledge’, which further explores how the video addresses the societal and political implications of treating statistical data and algorithmic predictions as objective truth.

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321 Zylinska, *AI Art*, p. 76.
The opening subtitles state that the video is made of ‘documentary images of the future’, which refers to the past data used to predict the future images. Here, the concept of documentary images moves away from a discussion on indexicality in film studies and evokes a paradox in the video, which manifests in the neural network’s attempt to document a future that is yet to become actual. Nevertheless, the neural network manages to record the future by manifesting its own predictions on screen, which renders the arrival of the future as dependent on past data. After the introduction of Hêja, the main protagonist in the video who engages in a dialogue with the neural network, a prediction of the future begins with a colourful imagery of aquatic life accompanied by the rhythmic electronic music (see Figure 48). None of the ‘images of the future’ reveal defined objects or scenes; we can only see the abstract shapes continuously shifting as if they were submerged underwater, pixels dissolving, evolving, and flickering between the video frames.

This loop between past data and future prediction output exposes the workings of interframe predictive algorithms that are generated by the class of machine-learning systems. Generative
Adversarial Networks (GANs) are made up of two neural networks: the generator and the discriminator. The generator is responsible for producing plausible data, which the discriminator attempts to distinguish from the real data in the training dataset, in this way forcing the generator to produce better results. The visuals in the video were generated from images classed under categories of ‘sea’, ‘fish’, ‘flower’ and so on, contained in the ImageNet database. According to Antonio Somaini, in this way ‘a perfect feedback loop is created, each output image becomes the input for the next step in the calculation’. This process produces visual effects that resemble a psychedelic journey of abstracted and rapidly changing colourful shapes that allude to deep learning processes. As Sabine Himmelsbach noted, the hallucinatory effect as a spectacle appears as such because of our incapacity (unless one is involved in the supervision of these processes) to ‘penetrate the learning processes in machine learning itself to all layers; the depth of the process remains opaque to us, although it is simply based on the evaluation of a multitude of data’. In the first instance, the video in question appears as nothing more than this psychedelic journey into the realm of deep learning. However, it is also structured around the critical space emerging from in-between the video frames, and explores biases embedded in the algorithmic models that are designed to calculate predictions based on past data. For example, following the introductory part in the video, the voiceover (neural network) communicates how the images are made, with reference to the logic of a feedback loop (see Figure 49):

This is the immediate future. I am a neural network. This is what I see. I can see one fraction of a second into the future. My predictions are based on extreme probability. In a second, something like a fish will wobble around the screen. See, I told you it would happen.

After a prediction of ‘something like a fish’ appearing on the screen – which refers to the structure of the neural network as based on the training of datasets on how to emulate the real

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322 To create these visuals, Steyerl collaborated with Damien Henry, formerly a Technical Program Manager at Google. Henry was a technical advisor for the project and a creator of the initial algorithm. The algorithm was rewritten by another engineer-artist, Jules LaPlace, who also built the AI tool to create images for the video.
data – the neural network rapidly shifts to a prediction of the future reality, stating that ‘there is water all over’. It is followed then by a sequence of images of a distorted cityscape of Venice. While trying to grasp the edges of shimmering canals and buildings that are crumbling into a mass of data, we are told by the neural network that this is the immediate future where Hêja is looking for her garden. Before returning to a discussion on this unfolding narrative, it is pivotal to address the database cultures and a changing status of the image in order to understand the complexity of Steyerl’s work that interrogates algorithmic processes and their predictive modelling of the future.

To create most of the abstracted content in this video, Steyerl and her team used the ImageNet database to extract the images that are part of machine-learning training sets. This aspect introduces the complexity of database cultures that have radically changed the status of the image itself. According to Tomáš Dvořák and Parikka, ‘the horizon of blindness’ in database cultures, defined as machine-to-machine communication, presents a shifting role of the image: ‘to see an image is by necessity to consider it as part of an extensive dataset or database’. In other words, as the authors argue, contemporary photography and digital archives require constant filtering and ordering, they are ‘no longer merely visual objects so much as quantified

325 Dvořák and Parikka, pp. 1–21 (p. 4).
input for data visualisation and pattern recognition’. For example, in 2009, ImageNet was created to tackle the exponential growth of digital images distributed on the Internet platforms such as Flickr, YouTube, and Google Image Search. It exemplifies how quantification relies heavily on the promises of measure and order that aim to master the multitude of shared data.

Developers of ImageNet had a vision that it will serve as a training database for machine learning algorithms because it closely resembles certain orderings of knowledge of the world based on word classifications. The ImageNet database is structured around a semantic hierarchy – the backbone of WordNet. The WordNet was created in 1985 and conceived as a machine-readable dictionary made of a collection of words, including the Brown Corpus compiled in the 1960s that consists of words found in newspapers and a collection of books. The ImageNet database’s developers believed ‘that a large-scale ontology of images is a critical resource for developing advanced, large-scale content-based image search and image-understanding algorithms, as well as for providing critical training and benchmarking data for such algorithms’. Significantly, ImageNet played an important role in contributing to the fast-growing machine learning industry. Therefore, the video in discussion, which is made of the images taken from the ImageNet database, presents us with the shifting function of the image: from being considered merely a visual object to becoming a data source to train algorithms.

The changing status of the image and its function also directs attention to the fundamental organisational structure of any database that is used for training datasets to develop statistical models and predictive algorithms. The immense database of images structured around the semantic hierarchy, as discussed in relation to the ImageNet example, introduces another issue that contributes to the shaping of a worldview. Such databases facilitate the continuous exclusion of objects, people, and environments that make up the world outside the semantic hierarchy or those that cannot be reduced to existing dominant categories. According to Crawford, ‘to create a training set is to take an almost infinitely complex and varied world and fix it into taxonomies composed of discrete classifications of individual data points, a process

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326 Dvořák and Parikka, pp. 1-21 (p. 13).
328 Crawford, p. 136.
329 Deng and others, 248–55 (p. 1).
that requires inherently political, cultural, and social choices’. The logic of classification poses issues in terms of world-building and the shaping of a worldview, which is a political concern given many training datasets flatten complex relations into quantifiable entities. In the essay ‘The Autonomy of Images, Or We Always Knew Images Can Kill, But Now Their Fingers Are on the Triggers’ (2020), Steyerl and Trevor Paglen discuss the AI industry’s infrastructure in terms of its planetary scale. There are only a few companies in the world that have the power to control AI infrastructure on a planetary scale, for example, Amazon, Meta (formerly Facebook), and Google. This leads to the argument that an examination of the intricate architecture of a rapidly developing technology, such as artificial intelligence, and its participation in the process of world-building and shaping the idea of futurity becomes increasingly difficult. According to Crawford, ‘the classification schemes used in companies like Facebook are much harder to investigate and criticise: proprietary systems offer few ways for outsiders to probe or audit how images are ordered or interpreted’. This observation leads to recognising that certain algorithmic programmes dedicated for observation and classification are based on delineating desirable traits, a process that is grounded in hierarchical categorisation based on questionable value systems. It contributes to violence and oppression based on categorising and ordering, which also perpetuates the logic of a colonial project across the digital systems.

As observed by Crawford, this aspect remains an issue in technical systems that maintain inequality insofar as its architecture is based on assumptions ‘that race and gender can be automatically detectable in machine learning’. For example, ‘in ImageNet the category “human body” falls under the branch Natural Object → Body → Human Body’. Under the class of ‘adult body’, there are only two categories: female body and male body. As Crawford observes, this kind of classification of gender is a naturalising process that reduces gender to a biological binary construct, whereas ‘transgender or gender nonbinary people are either nonexistent or placed under categories of sexuality’. This continues as a process reducing

330 Crawford, pp. 135-36.
331 Crawford, p. 144.
333 Crawford, pp. 142-43.
334 Crawford, p. 144.
335 Crawford, p. 138.
336 Crawford, p. 138.
humans into objects and into binary gender categories that excludes those who are not identified according to the established logic of the classification system, thus rendering them ‘deviant’ or invisible.\textsuperscript{337} Having observed the intricate architecture of the ImageNet database which through categorisation flattens relations, objects, and people into quantifiable data, demands another question: how does a semantically structured and classified worldview affect the arrival of the future? In the next section, I am going to discuss in detail how Steyerl’s video narrative itself becomes a critique of algorithmic prediction, which models the idea of the future based on past data.

\textbf{Algorithmic Magic/Knowledge}

In her talk on the AI industries ‘Tech Colonialism: Too Much World’ in 2018, Steyerl speaks of a widespread trust in statistical data and algorithmic predictions.\textsuperscript{338} She raises the question of why \textit{human predictors} are ignored by the officials, and provides the example of the Grenfell Tower fire that took place in London in 2017. As Steyerl observes, this event could perhaps have been prevented if the residents’ warnings about the power surges leading to the blowing up of electronic devices, and other concerns, were addressed or taken seriously.\textsuperscript{339} Steyerl’s thoughts are that the tragedy was a 100\% accurate future prediction delivered by the residents of Grenfell Tower, and this is echoed by the statement appearing in the opening title of \textit{This is the Future}’s video: ‘A 100\% ACCURATE PREDICTION’. The artist’s curiosity to investigate why the black box neuro nets are trusted more in making decisions than people’s experiences acts as a driving force behind the video’s narrative, which attempts to expose biases, glitches and illogical predictions performed by the neural network. By applying predictive algorithms to create this work, Steyerl questions their role in contemporary sense-making processes. She creates a diametrical opposition between two understandings of ‘magic’ in relation to the algorithmic predictions. The first kind is that of the rupture of the real, and the future as something beyond any kind of past-data-based prediction. The second is the magic of the ‘magic trick’ of AI, which seems to have a kind of superhuman power of prediction, uncannily

\textsuperscript{337} Crawford, p. 138.
accurate in certain contexts as can be seen in user ‘preference’ predictions on streaming and retail websites.

According to Betti Marenko, because of the imperceptibility to humans, algorithms engage in shaping reality by dissolving epistemological barriers between the human and technological realms. They ‘produce a nonhuman universe of signification where cognitive operations keep on running in the background – unseen, unheard, unknown, and incommensurable to human scale’.³⁴⁰ In her view, the invisible labour of algorithms enables an understanding of its processes as ‘the hinge of new forms of sense-making that are rational, milieu-based, and postcognitive’.³⁴¹ Ed Finn develops a similar argument by considering algorithmic systems as culture machines because of their role in mapping and influencing human knowledge, which involves processes from ‘operating the global data cloud to modelling and predicting human behaviour’.³⁴² Marenko and Finn approach algorithmic processes as contributors to the shaping of reality and its perception, one that also allows for the emergence of networked subjectivities.

In this section, with a detailed description of first three parts of the video – Hêja’s Garden, The Future: A History and Bambusa Futuris – I explore how Steyerl interrogates the role of predictive algorithms in sense-making processes, which also highlights embedded biases in the architecture of computational ‘knowledge’ production.

The first part, Hêja’s Garden, refers to an individual experience of imprisonment and surveillance and contrasts it with the power of imagination, which opens space for alternative futures to unfold and traverse carceral boundaries. This part sets a different mood to the rhythmic and uplifting introduction discussed earlier. In contrast, the ambient sound evokes a futuristic atmosphere, which accompanies the time-lapse images of flowers produced by the neural network (see Figure 50). After the voiceover introduces us to the part of Hêja’s Garden, the focus shifts to the English subtitles that provide translation of a story told in Kurdish by the protagonist Hêja:

³⁴¹ Marenko, pp. 213-28 (p. 224).
When we were in jail, we grew plants by crumbling paper and chewing it. We caught flying seeds in the courtyard and got them to germinate on the paper. The flowers grew on love letters and indictment charges for centuries of detention. The guards would come and destroy the plants whenever they find them. So, we hid them in the future, where the network predicted we could retrieve them soon.

The voice of a fictional character Hēja belongs to Hēja Türk, a musician and artist who fled from Turkey after she was prosecuted for terrorism-related charges. First detained in 2016 for an accusation of sheltering a woman thought to be affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), she ‘served nine months in prison before being released on the grounds of insufficient evidence for continued detention’. During the months spent in prison, she learnt to play a guitar and started writing songs. Hēja’s Fulbright scholarship to study at Columbia University and to explore her potential as a literary scholar was revoked because of her detention and a conviction for five years. Eventually, Hēja escaped her conviction by fleeing to Germany where, since 2018, she has lived as a refugee and started a new career as a

343 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is a militant separatist group established in 1970s, driven by the ideas of revolutionary socialism and Kurdish nationalism to fight against the oppression of Turkish government.
musician, filmmaker, and actress. Steyerl developed the story in *This is the Future/Power Plants* based on Hêja’s time in prison where she tried to grow plants that were eventually taken away by the guards. The real-life story of Hêja in the video is hidden beneath a fictional arrangement of narratives unfolding in parallel between the neural network that predicts the future and Hêja’s search for a future garden. The work, which is developed in response to a future prediction of Hêja’s life, inhabits this waiting time and is an attempt to manifest a possible future outside the carceral walls. In this excerpt, a rather optimistic and utopian portrayal of nature that heals the present emerges as a desire for change, bringing into the horizon a potential for the future to arrive devoid of oppressive political systems.

This personal experience behind Hêja’s voice recalls Steyerl’s earlier experimentations with the documentary image. For example, Steyerl’s video *November* (2004) is structured around repurposed archival footage of Andrea Wolf, a friend from Steyerl’s youth who starred in her martial arts student film. *November* tells the story of how the image of Wolf drifts from a fictional fighter to a martyr who is fighting together with the PKK and is later executed as a terrorist by the Turkish security forces in 1998. As Pablo Lafuente argues, in *November*, the shift between fictional and documentary images and narratives is inevitably linked with the ‘complication’ of time itself:

[… in ‘the time of November’ – our time, marked by the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of Real Socialism – revolution is impossible, as struggles are local and impossible to communicate, never mind universalise. […] Within November, the idea of ‘October’ as a time past – when revolution was possible – is not an accurate and nostalgic portrayal of the past, but an image of a fictional time that serves as a counterpoint to a current situation and inhabits it.]

Alongside this complication of time, space also undergoes distortion: ‘the film recounts how, after the fall of the Wall, the GDR’s military equipment was sold to Turkey and is now being used by the Turkish army in its war against the Kurdish independentists’. These associations link Hêja’s and Andrea’s experiences in the timeline of ongoing history of oppression,

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347 Lafuente, pp. 81-92 (p. 85).
resistance, and state surveillance. However, in *This is the Future/Power Plants*, Steyerl continues to explore complication of time and distortion of space through an interrogation of objective, documentary truth that the neural network claims to be able to manifest.

The part *Hêja’s Garden* exposes both political and technological realms as interlinked, where the notion of truth becomes obsolete. Later in the video, the network confirms: ‘I predicted that Hêja would commit a crime, so she went to prison’. This sentence acts as a reminder about the deeply entangled panoptic gaze and the AI sector but also ridicules a blind trust in the algorithmic logic, which is often portrayed as a source of absolute knowledge that delivers objective truths. By integrating Hêja’s voice and her personal experience into the narrative of the video, Steyerl also critiques governmental and military surveillance structures supported by the AI applications, which have a growing influence in modelling political and social realities, and an effect on personal narratives, as can be seen in Hêja’s case.

Further into the *Hêja’s Garden* sequence, a critique of algorithmic prediction is extended through a visual and sonic rupture, which brings us back to a political present marked by global post-fascist tendencies. In this sequence, the images of flowers that possess healing powers are interrupted by a sudden change in sound. We hear a cheerful ‘Dream, dream, dream’, the first lines of the pop song *All I Have to Do is Dream* (1958) by The Everly Brothers. This refrain is immediately followed by Hêja saying: ‘But as the future was predicted, the present became unpredictable.’ The colourful set of images processed by the neural network is suddenly intercepted by a documentary footage of far-right anti-immigration marches in Chemnitz, Germany in 2019 (see Figure 51). *Hêja’s Garden* sequence abruptly ends with chanting by the protesters: ‘Out, out, foreigners out!’ That the images created by the algorithmic predictions of the future are interrupted with a documentation of a protest reminds us about global instability and its political realities in the present. As Marcella Lista notes, these images ‘bring into focus the ghosts, some of the most egregious in history, that are fatally awakened by the absence of any space for reflection, engagement, and public debate on how the future might look in post-democratic societies’.348 This moment refers to the feedback loop between the past data and

future prediction algorithms referenced throughout the video as producing the logic of political ‘immunisation’ which contributes to global instability. Hêja’s ability to dream for a better future that moves her across the geographic, carceral, political, social, and cultural barriers is thus contrasted with a turbulent reality, where political and populist movements dedicated to building violent borders, both mental and physical, are becoming increasingly persistent. This part of the video acts as a commentary on the global instability and resurgence of global post-fascist tendencies and nationalist attitudes, which are also ironically portrayed as products of algorithmic calculation attempting to predict the future based on past data.

The following section of the video, The Future: A History, discusses human prediction and algorithmic prediction as intertwined processes that expose cultural beliefs and narratives around a reliance on the total vision of AI – the source of objective knowledge. The sequence opens with the images of Stonehenge, alluding to ancient practices of future prediction that preceded computational technologies. In this part, the neural network demonstrates the use of AI applications to answer various questions:

*Future prediction is an old problem. People have tried to predict the future for thousands of years. Stonehenge may have been a tool to predict the seasons. But humans ask other urgent questions: When will I die? Will it rain tomorrow? Why didn’t...*
anyone predict Brexit? Will fascism return? Do they really love me? How about the Messiah by the way?

In this mix of questions – that imitate a list of questions appearing on Google Search – there appears the event of Brexit (the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union) and a worrisome thought of a return of fascism, which is also referenced in the Chemnitz footage (see Figure 52). These questions remark upon a changing political reality that creates space for emerging populist and xenophobic movements, all of which are exploiting and contributing to global instability. The ‘immunising’ response to global instability reinforces borders, segregation, fragmentation, polarisation, and conflict. Here, an emerging contrast between ancient tools for season prediction, and questions that attempt to understand societal, political, and personal behaviours, resonates with the political present of global instability.

After posing questions that indicate the arrival of the future and its anticipation through predictions, the neural network repeats a sentence twice, which Hêja identifies as a malfunction: ‘It thinks it can predict the future using past data.’ Hêja continues: ‘I once asked: When does science breed magic? The answer was: “The science will breed magic in 15 kilometres.”’ Here, an attempt to measure and quantify the unmeasurable and the unquantifiable – such as magic or the arrival of the future – exposes the neural network’s
inability to provide answers based on past data. This example reminds us that the real is inaccessible and cannot be rendered by information technology systems. It remains outside the process of calculation as an unpredictable rupture of excess.

In the following section *Bambusa Futuris*, accompanied by a rhythmic sound, the screen is filled with images of a rapidly growing bamboo forest. This part exposes a contradiction between biological life and prediction algorithms, and highlights a shift from production to prediction in technological systems (see Figure 53). The opening sequence is followed by the introduction: ‘This is a neural network. I trained it to predict the growth of a simple bamboo shoot. But then it didn’t stop.’ Such growth ad infinitum as predicted and depicted by the neural network, fills the screen with a rapidly evolving bamboo forest, signifying the flaws of a predictive algorithm. Bamboo only grows rapidly for a certain amount of time, which could take up to 90 days; after the time of intense growth, a bamboo shoot stops and never grows again. This example, of the algorithm’s inability to calculate something that is biological and escapes the logic of computation, is also used to explain how the same algorithm has been applied to the social realm: ‘Soon someone realised one could use it to predict traffic, rebellion and suicides.’ In this moment, a popular prediction algorithm gets introduced, with the voiceover explaining how this algorithm functions: ‘In this forest science comes to die and is reborn as alchemy. Prediction takes the place of production.’ This sentence refers to a
classification algorithm named Random Forest, which classifies large volumes of data. Unlike the bamboo forest, the Random Forest algorithm ‘is a combination of decision trees’, and ‘each ‘tree’ is grown to the largest extent possible’. One of the features of the Random Forest algorithm is that it can maintain ‘accuracy when a large proportion of the data is missing’. However, the voiceover further reiterates that calculation of the future is based on existing data, which is appropriated from past events: ‘Your future has been written in the past and it will always catch up with you.’ In this instance, as exemplified by the infinitely growing bamboo forest, algorithmic prediction is viewed as a process that produces new realities while relying on the past information. This logic inevitably leads to technological, political, and societal glitches because the contingency of the present and the future exceeds the parameters of calculation.

Further in this sequence, the neural network continues to calculate the incalculable, which exposes how life is captured by the logic of profitability and how it also resists these parameters of calculation. In this instance, the bamboo forest is replaced by a visualisation of the neural network’s first prediction, in which a small drawn human figure moves hectically, slowly breaking apart. It is perceived as a stick figure, which resembles an animated neurone or a molecule with a potential to reassemble and grow. This image is followed by the neural network telling a story about its own development: ‘Very soon I was predicting your credit rate, and life span.’ It is followed by a sudden change in sound, and a visualisation of this prediction model is transformed into an image source for a prediction of the next frame, which leads to further fragmentation of the image. This fragmentation is interrupted by an announcement: ‘Warning, danger, the future poses a 100% risk for human health’, which is followed by Steyerl’s appearance on the screen replacing the animated figure (see Figure 54). However, in this moment, her body reveals the neural network’s inability to predict her dance moves, which eventually leads to a distortion of her body. A malleable and flexible appearance trapped in the neural network’s predictive imagination is immediately followed by another announcement: ‘Statistically, in the future, all humans will die. Entering the future is a massive health hazard. Your body might stretch or fall apart. I told Hêja this was going to happen. Why is she even

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getting predictions if she doesn’t listen?’ This warning message, coming from the neural network itself, informs us that Hêja is entering the future, which reiterates the idea of the incalculable excess of life and finitude that escapes the logic of prediction based on the extraction of value. In this sequence, as a result, Steyerl’s body becomes distorted in its attempt to enter the future and represents a playful mode of resistance, which challenges neural network’s prediction. This scene, as well as the images of aquatic environment in the opening sequence and the bamboo forest discussed above, open space for the contingency of life to disrupt the desire to calculate, classify, order, and predict. Here, critical gestures such as glitches, ruptures, and irrational predictions amplify inconsistencies of algorithmic predictions and knowledge production. As noted earlier with reference to Himmelsbach’s observation, the imperceptibility of the processes in algorithmic calculations and machine learning – which are based on the evaluation and approximation of data – is often seen as a ‘magic trick’ because of the inaccessible black box of neuro nets. This approximation to hallucination, magic, or alchemy of calculation also limits our understanding of the power relations embedded in such structures. As a result, these invisible technical processes produce calculated results that are perceived as objective knowledge, ‘truth’ or an accurate prediction of the future.

Drawing on these examples of the neural network’s predictions, which are approached in terms of producing an approximation of totality, it is relevant to consider that in these instances of
rupture between the calculable and the contingency of life excess is not only approximated to the real that is unexpected. As Nancy observes, that the meaning of excess also refers to responsibility that arises when something is measured. In his ‘Human Excess’ (2000) essay, Nancy argues that the former ways of ordering truth – for example, in almanacs, record books that contain facts – do not attempt to control excess but rather measure ‘the engagement with certain evaluations within a market, the engagements with a certain number of risks and tasks in a world (in a world that becomes worldly by this very engagement)’. For Nancy, this magnitude, which denotes proximity with the world in its measured totality, also brings total responsibility. Referring to the domains of large numbers, the expanding size of a computer memory, and unfathomable figures of casualties produced by wars and natural catastrophes, Nancy considers this exponential ‘excess’ as its own measure, which demands total responsibility in that ‘it is approximation of totality’. In other words, ‘the measure of the modern world is itself the “excessive” mode of infinity’. Here, Nancy’s notions of measure and responsibility links to a critique of the excessive mode of producing infinity which, in relation to the digital context, can be understood as exponentially growing data, databases and data servers that are necessary to facilitate processes of ‘measuring’ and approximating the real, as demonstrated in the examples of algorithmic predictions based on past data.

351 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, pp. 177-78.
352 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 178.
353 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 179.
Against the Future?

Contemporary global crises – such as rapidly growing inequality, pandemic, war, migratory crises, and ecological instability – bring the idea of the future closer to the ruins of a failed capitalist project. The latter has been driven by the narrative of progress opening an infinite horizon of possibilities for the accumulation of profit. Since the ideal of the better future is tinted with the impending climate catastrophe that also functions as the figure of limit, an attempt to rethink the present-future relation beyond the modernist conception of ‘progress’ and postmodern ideas of futurity acquires urgency. In this section, I consider Steyerl’s treatment of the present-future relation in the installation *This is the Future*/Power Plants as offering an alternative proposition for thinking about present-future relations and as a demand to ‘heal the present’ now. Having already discussed the role of machine learning in shaping future predictions based on past data, it is necessary to understand how this installation critiques the idea of a linear temporality driven by finality, which eventually contributes to the annihilation of the present. In this part of the chapter, I will continue a discussion on the unfolding narrative in the video with a focus on the final sections *Power Plants* and *Hêja’s Prediction*. In the final part of this chapter, ‘Recon/struction’, I will explore how the spatial arrangement of projection and screen technologies used in the installation contributes to a critique of the logic of algorithmic prediction and the ideology of the future.

In the following sequence, *Power Plants*, which also refers to the sculptural part in the installation ‘Power Plants’, questions around technology and power are addressed in relation to the idea of the future. In this sequence, the techno-utopian future as represented by a growing solar power enterprise is contrasted with the sunlight that enables life, growth, and creation. In the final sections of the video, these references bring us back to the notion of ecotechnics, which addresses nature as creation beyond the logic of means and ends (see page 44). In this sequence, axes of temporality are reversed to bring the future closer to the present as a mode of resistance to the ideological notion of a techno-utopian futurity. After the exposure of Steyerl’s body to the hazards waiting in the future, this sequence starts with Kojey Radical’s music composition mixed with spoken word. This musical interception leads to a moment of transformation that distorts the logic of linear temporality: ‘Hêja transited into the future by slipping into the cracks in between the seconds.’ Throughout this sequence, the images of flowering cacti and other plants keep growing and morphing. They are the plants that Hêja is looking for in the future, and each of them have different healing qualities, from treating social
media addiction to producing power from the sunlight (see Figure 55). Although Hêja predicts that this trajectory of the future is unlikely to take place, the sequence acts as an invitation to imagine a transition into the future where the healing qualities of plants have the potential to alter the future by healing the present:

*Murinum Futuris. Whoever has a sick brain, from social media addiction, pulverize this plant and mix it with silicone, thus making a paste. Sisymbrium Irio Futuris. Its chemistry attaches to political endorphin receptors in the brain, thus making it unsusceptible for hate speech and austerity propaganda. [...] Rosebay Willow also called bombweed. This plant produces delicious oxygen and sequesters CO2. This superpower is shared by almost every other plant on the planet. All these plants literally produce power. They transform sunlight into energy.*

This part of the video indicates a movement from the fantastical qualities of AI predicting the future, to the quite ordinary power of nature transforming sunlight into energy, which is here re-presented as extraordinary. Transformation of sunlight into energy, in other words photosynthesis, is further emphasised by Kojey Radical in the accompanying spoken word element that reflects on the conditions of life on Earth. It intimates that the energy of the sun is
Figure 56. Still from Hito Steyerl, *This is the Future/Power Plants*, 2019, HD video, colour, sound, 16 min.

Figure 57. Still from Hito Steyerl, *This is the Future/Power Plants*, 2019, HD video, colour, sound, 16 min.
the main driving force towards the future as ‘growth’, which captures multiple meanings, from photosynthesis of plants to the global economy that relies on energy consumption and production, as well as solar energy as one of the renewable energy sources. This set of images and descriptions of powerful plants appearing in the video takes place as a continuous repetition across the twelve-channel video installation dispersed across the LED panels in the space that makes up the ‘digital’ ruderal garden.

Following the images of flowers, a new set of visuals appears: time-lapses of a sea view with the sunset that quickly transforms into rapidly moving clouds, eventually cutting to the scene of a view from the outer space, then replaced by the streets of Tokyo in Japan (see Figures 56, 57). Colourful imagery of streets populated with billboards acts as a commentary on the 1980s, a time when the imagination of the future was sparked and driven by the economic boom, introducing neo-modernity and igniting the cult of electricity and electronics. Here, the significance of consumerism – specifically its role in the continued growth and connection to algorithmic predictions that perpetuate growth by generating an unrestricted demand for products, including electronic devices – refers to a discussion on digital capitalism and the abundance of electronic waste deposited in former colonies in Chapter 3. This urban dream of the Tokyo streets, the promise of future economic growth while drawing data from the past, is here presented as trapping society in the imagination of the future produced by the algorithmic feedback loops. This scene further reflects on the idea that the AI industry contributes to totalising control of the future societies because the predictive algorithms can only repeat the past imaginaries in their predictions. Consequently, this could be seen as a critique of the erasure of other reference points for imagining alternative future trajectories. As Lista observes:

Invasive predictive algorithms are now working blind – operating in the name of profitability in all different fields of human and posthuman activity – to predetermine a future where the space of the present and the multiplicity of what is possible are annihilated.355

This reference to the annihilation of multiplicity and space to think about the present is further emphasised by Héja in relation to the idea of the future itself, which exposes a logic of profitability that drives a deterministic conception of future:

355 Lista, pp. 113-129 (p. 117).
The network is predicting I am looking for my garden, I go looking for it in many colourful places that look like the future looking in the twentieth century. In this future wealth trickles down, power comes from Fukushima and technology is rational.

In this excerpt, it becomes clear that the future imaginary of the previous century delivered a different kind of reality than that predicted by the algorithmic logic. The violent background of climate, socio-economic, and political crises in the twenty-first century is suggestive of the trajectory of the infinite expansion of global economy reaching its finality, touching the planetary boundaries.

This part of the video engages with temporality as a form of resistance to evade linearity of history. Instead, the infinite number of different temporalities unfold at the same time, destabilising the measurement of time based on historical events and human experience. Here, the temporality of predictive algorithms, that predict the future based on past data, reveals an embedded idea of the future that has no reference to the future as arrival, contingency and interruption, but to the logic of profitability. In addition, in the This is the Future/Power Plants installation we are presented with the limitations of conceptualisations of the future. The limitations are presented through the juxtaposition between the unfolding narratives of the future predicted by the neural network and Hêja, which I discuss in the next section on recon/struclion in relation to the spatial arrangement of the projection and LED screens.

Recon/struclion

The installation title, This is the Future/Power Plants, collapses the now and what is yet to come, as is suggested by the statement appearing in the video: ‘The future always starts in the present, it is always now.’ This is also a reflection on the literal portrayal of the closest prediction to it, one located 0.04 seconds in the future, given the video is made entirely of images predicted by the neural network. The video might not be proposing a new conceptual model of temporality per se; however, it considers and brings the future closer to the present, both conceptually and practically. Steyerl’s invitation to consider the future as here and now, rather than a projection based on predictions fixing the future reality into a project or a point in
time, resonates with Simon Critchley’s call to resist ‘the ideology of the future’. By rejecting the ideological narrative of progress embedded in the notion of the future, and bringing it into the present as taking place here and now, the installation simultaneously directs attention to the present as a site of resistance against the future-oriented.

This aspect of resisting a future predicted by the algorithms is further emphasised in the final chapter of the video, Hêja’s Prediction, in which Hêja begins by saying: ‘I will never enter the future to look for my garden. Because it is already here. Because whatever the future will be, it always starts here and now. This is all I can say.’ In this moment, the video presents another kind of prediction that is based on human experience, which reiterates resistance to the logic of profitability embedded in the algorithmic predictions of the future. In this moment, the projection screen suddenly becomes a transparent glass sheet opening onto the structure of the future ‘garden’ situated behind it, followed by Radical Kojey’s voice saying: ‘This is the Future’. The shifting from opacity to transparency of the screen in the This is the Future/Power Plants installation adds a moment of rupture. In this moment, the narrative unfolding in the video becomes a part of the spatial arrangement of the digital ‘garden’ structure.

In this instance, the screen acquires a quality of an opening which introduces the viewer to the installation environment, and creates a link between the images of the ‘future’ generated by the neural network and the installation in which a visitor is surrounded by Hêja’s ‘power plants’ displayed on LED screens. This sudden shift from opacity to transparency extends the narrative into a physical space by revealing the future ‘garden’ as taking place ‘here and now’. However, the space of this ‘garden’ does not imply religious promises or arrival of utopian/dystopian future. On the contrary, this effect adds another material layer to the narrative, which situates the visitor in the future reality – the figure of the limit which is pressing onto the present. It is further emphasised by a glitching, disintegrating voice, repeating ‘This is all I can say’ after the screen becomes transparent (see Figure 58). This sentence was recorded by Steyerl herself to train the neural network how to predict the future and manifest it, by repeating the recording in an artificially simulated voice. We hear the sentence breaking up because what the neural network can say about the future is merely a glitching remix of recorded sounds, eventually losing any meaning. These words function as the only input of data from which it can make a

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prediction or a sense of what is coming next. This sound effect reiterates Steyerl’s point that the future always starts in the present: the future is always now. Simultaneously, it reveals limitations of technology, one otherwise considered a reliable source for predicting future scenarios or calculating risks of economic growth that the unknown brings.

Alongside Steyerl’s treatment of the future as taking place ‘here and now’, I would like to discuss how Nancy’s conception of the present helps to further conceptualise This is the Future/Power Plants in terms of its treatment of temporality. Nancy considers the present in terms of proximity to the world and the arriving future. This idea is discussed in his book on the Fukushima nuclear disaster which took place in 2011, when an earthquake created a tsunami causing incalculable devastation. In the context of this event, Nancy writes that this disaster calls for a recognition of the end of the future. According to Nancy, ‘Fukushima forbids all present: it is the collapse of future goals that forces us to work with other futures. Let us try
in fact to work with other futures – but under the condition of the ever-renewed present.\textsuperscript{357} Here, the present is considered in terms of arrival, open-endedness, and rejection of the logic of finality:

\begin{quote}
I mean not an immobile present but a present within historical mobility, a living sense of each moment, each life, each \textit{hic et nunc} [here and now]. A sense that is characterized by exposure to its own infinity, to its incompleteness [\textit{inachèvement}], a sense that, dare I say, suffices by its very insufficiency – instead of the search for \textit{logos} that always wants a \textit{sufficient reason}.\textsuperscript{358}
\end{quote}

As Nancy puts it, such an approach towards the present is the opposite of the general equivalence produced by a configuration of capitalist logic and technology: ‘this nonequivalence exists by the attention brought to these singularities – to a color, to a sound, to a smell’.\textsuperscript{359} Furthermore, Nancy views this approach as a demand for the equality of incommensurables: ‘to demand equality for tomorrow is first of all to assert it today, and by the same gesture to reject catastrophic equivalence. It is to assert common equality, common incommensurability: a communism of nonequivalence’.\textsuperscript{360} For Nancy, as it is for Steyerl, thinking about ‘tomorrow’ necessarily relies on questions, such as: ‘what assembling could we invent? How can we assemble the pieces of a world, of various worlds, of existences that cross through them? How can we assemble ourselves, “us,” all beings?’.\textsuperscript{361} These questions refer to Nancy’s and Steyerl’s attention towards the ever-renewing present, which can determine ‘tomorrow’ by demanding the opposite of general equivalence.

At the time of creating her \textit{This is the Future/Power Plants} installation, Steyerl also explored modes of resistance to counter the logic of general equivalence in her projects associated with community gardening, manure, and plant cultivation. One of the recent projects, representing this shift, is \textit{FreePlots} (2019) – a site-specific installation and a mobile garden through which the artist performs a kind of material transubstantiation (see Figure 59). Using the money received for her artwork that is now stored in a freeport, Steyerl bought horse manure to fertilise the plants growing in the community gardens. After a long time of dealing with warfare and

\textsuperscript{357} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{358} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{359} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{360} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{361} Nancy, \textit{After Fukushima}, p. 35.
devastation in her practice, the artist is now investing in the creation of a collective soil. The latter is a space for thinking about the ways one can engage in the idea and practice of reconstruction. Or, as Steyerl noted, it is ‘about ways to engage with the material world which would be focused on growing, and maybe even something like healing. Plants are entities that are able to do that’. Steyerl’s commitment to create such spaces for reconstruction and healing in the face of global crises gestures towards a necessity to engage with the social present as a time of growth – slow and communal – one that resists the fast and individualistic neoliberal capitalist ideology of the future, that which is both as an indicator of ‘successful’ economy and always given political priority. The site-specific installation *FreePlots* engages with temporality through the biological matter that connects community gardens across

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different countries. This thought appears to reverberate in the multi-screen installation *This is the Future/Power Plants*, where the digital ‘garden’ is presented as a space for producing alternative narratives of the future. In this installation, a stark contrast emerges between the steel construction and vibrant, colourful, ‘predicted’ plants, creating an imaginative space to consider the ruderal garden of the future as a space dedicated for reconstruction. In *This is the Future/Power Plants*, the digital plants ‘growing’ from the olivine pebble floor are presented as having a capacity to heal the present.

This attention to the ever-renewing present in the *This is the Future/Power Plants* installation lends itself to Nancy’s concept of struction and the possibility of mapping modes of rupture that critique the logic of finality embedded in the ideology of the future. Drawing on Nancy’s idea of struction and Steyerl’s active engagement with practices of reconstruction, I propose to consider this installation as a site of recon/struction. Recon/struction here alludes to a process of continuous creation in common. The prefix re- refers to repeating an action again and in a better way, con- signifies being-in-common, and struction a continuous creation. Although the construction of the world is inevitably linked to the process of extraction of materials, resources, or data, for Nancy it also refers to the logic of the ‘Supreme Constructor’, which signifies the constructionist paradigm in general. Nancy proposes a rethinking of the constructionist paradigm in this contemporary moment of crises, as struction instead of construction. A reimagining of creation itself outside the constructionist paradigm, ‘struction is liberation from the obsession that wants to think the real or Being under a schema of construction and that thus exhausts itself in the pointless quest for an architect or mechanic of the world’.363 This idea of struction leads us to consider the present moment, which converges with the approaches explored in Steyerl’s installation, such as the ruderal garden, that is presented as a space of recon/struction. Ruderal plants that only grow in places affected by environmental disasters or human activity (building sites, war zones, extraction sites) are, in this installation, directing us towards imagining and creating alternative future pathways after the catastrophe of the present. Thus, when considered as a site of recon/struction, the installation functions as a mode of resistance in its attempt to rethink present-future relations. In this process, it also attempts to configure the world in terms of creation rather than construction. This leads to a critique of the logic of construction embedded in the architecture of databases that facilitate the idea of total and dominant vision of the world, and an idea

363 Nancy and Barrau, pp. 53-54.
rejected by the *This is the Future/Power Plants* installation. In that installation, the ‘predicted’ plants of the future are transformed into elements that contribute to creating alternative worlds of more-than-human entanglements that disrupt the logic of absolute identity and sovereignty. Thus, Nancy’s approach to ecotechnics as constituted of ‘elements’ that escape the constructionist paradigm allows us to consider struction as ‘their assemblage [that] does not refer to a first of final construction but to a kind of continuous creation where what is constantly rekindled and renewed is the very possibility of the world – or rather the multiplicity of worlds’.

This multiplicity of worlds resonates throughout the narrative and the installation space of *This is the Future/Power Plants*, opening towards a present where nature and technology are not thought separately but together, as a disruption of the logic of construction which is based on extraction, appropriation, and abstraction – the catastrophe of the present.

In the section ‘Recon/struction’, I explored how *This is the Future/Power Plants* engages in an experiential critique of general equivalence, which absorbs wars, ecological crises and natural disasters under one firmament, reducing existence to units of value. The installation was approached in relation to Nancy’s ideas of struction, and considered the ruins of the catastrophe of the present as a space for a possibility. Even if it is an idealistic approach, this is an invitation to consider a renewed understanding of the world as ‘emergence’ and ‘creation’, one which resists the ideological notion of the future as a source of profitability. In this chapter, I considered Steyerl’s critique of the data-driven society immersed in the ‘mirages’ of algorithmic ‘magic’ while contrasting it with the personal Hêja’s search for a future garden. In so doing, the search brought us back to the present time explored as a tangible and material relation with the world, where the notion of the future itself becomes uncertain, shaped by computational propaganda, past data, and fake news. The installation itself in this way performs an opening onto the present by disrupting the ‘mirage’ of the approximation of the future in 0.04 seconds, and situating the ruderal garden made of ‘digital plants’ as a space to plant the seeds of resistance, which begins with the acknowledgement that the future is taking place here and now.

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364 Nancy and Barrau, p. 52.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed Steyerl’s installation as an invitation to consider the entrenched power structures that entangle beings, environments, industries, and machines on a planetary scale. The installation also encourages us to imagine alternative modes of existence that resist ideological future narratives. By combining references to nature, digital technology, and an interrogation of the present-future relation, Steyerl exposes visitors to the ever-growing ecotechnological landscape that consists of beings and environments in a web of intersections and transactions on a planetary scale. This landscape is explored in relation to the artist’s approach to spatial arrangements of the screens which are used to generate a rupture, a gesture that invites us to interrogate the catastrophe of general equivalence rendering everything into a source of profit in a data-driven society. Drawing on Nancy’s ideas of struction and general equivalence, while rethinking the present-future relation, the installation site is approached as a space for recon/struction. Steyerl’s installation reiterates the importance of the present for thinking about the future as taking place ‘here and now’, and not as the approximation of the future based on past data. Thus, it could be said that This is the Future/Power Plants exposes exponentially growing systems of automation that are used to anticipate people’s behaviour and predict the major societal movements. However, these systems driving the society are also explored as inevitably failing to calculate the unknowability of the multiple futures and their trajectories taking place in the present. This leads to an understanding that the desire for objectivity proliferates ingrained political, ideological assumptions observed in AI language, which is fast becoming a universal lens through which the world and the future are perceived, calculated, managed, and owned.
Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored to what extent contemporary artists’ moving image installations can facilitate a space for rethinking the notion of immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene. To address this research question, I focused on three case studies, formed of artworks by Rachel Rose, Sondra Perry, and Hito Steyerl. Across the chapters of this thesis, I have explored the installations’ capacities to reconfigure immersion as resistance to the logic of self-sufficiency, extractivist practices and total vision. The objective of this thesis has been to elaborate on the concept of immersion as an experiential critique of processes that reduce existence to units of value, while moving away from general discussions on the immersive effects of IMAX, 4DX cinema and Extended Reality (XR) technologies. By drawing attention to the artistic strategies employed in these artworks – which navigate the ambivalence of digital technology through post-production techniques, such as compositing, chroma keying, simulation tools, and machine learning systems – my analysis contributes to a philosophical consideration of art as a space for configuring onto-ethical resistance to the reductionist logic of the future as perpetuated by the techno-capitalist landscape. Drawing upon Nancy’s philosophical framework, I have approached immersion as an experiential critique of the Capitalocene while considering the self in terms of environment, technology, and relations in the ecotechnological world.

In considering each artist’s engagement with projection and digital screen technologies as a critical intervention that reimagines modes of being beyond the logic of abstraction, appropriation, and extraction, I have discussed how these installations generate encounters that invoke an onto-ethical understanding of the world. In other words, I have approached art as generating encounters that make us feel, as Nancy puts it, ‘a certain formation of the contemporary world, a certain shaping, a certain perception of self in the world’.\footnote{Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Art Today’, trans. by Charlotte Mandell, Journal of Visual Culture, 9.1 (2010), 91–99 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412909354265>, p. 92.} Although this project departs from discussions on activist art and environmentalism,\footnote{See T. J. Demos, Beyond the World’s End: Arts of Living at the Crossing (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); T. J. Demos, Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017); T. J. Demos, Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016); Linda Weintraub, What’s Next?: Eco Materialism & Contemporary Art (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, 2019).} I have considered the activating potential of these installations’ capacities to open an immersive space for
relations and positions. In so doing, this thesis joins discussions on art as activating rather than activist, inviting us to rethink the notion of resistance itself, in tandem with Bal’s approach to art as a generative space to explore affect as an artistic-political strategy. My research findings have significant applications that contribute to urgent discussions on how contemporary art can activate onto-ethical thought through artistic strategies that shape our understanding of ecotechnological entanglements. Thus, these research findings also contribute to a growing scholarship in media art exploring artistic strategies that aim to disentangle complexities of contemporaneity.

This need to highlight a duality of immersion in the context of moving image installations and the planetary scale of ecotechnological entanglements was instigated by the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Confronted by the effects of the global health crisis, I have engaged with these artworks in the context of Nancy’s thoughts on a corporeal ontology that actively resists the logic of profitability against the existence of the world being subsumed into the realm of calculation, exchange value and efficiency. The pandemic, a product of globalisation itself, generated a momentary capitalist asphyxia, which reiterated the urgency to think about the value of existence as a source of resistance to the logic of economic profitability that otherwise transforms relations into transactions. This moment framed my approach and led to my consideration of sensation as ontological plurality rather than as measurable interiority. I approached ontological plurality by drawing on the idea of the body as situated beyond the logic of substance and interiority, and instead as sensation, tension and intensity emerging at the intersections of technologies, environments, bodies, and objects. This approach was generated by my experience of the pandemic that exposed how a body must always exist on the threshold of inside and outside, a sensation emerging only at the limits of touch, a contact and separation simultaneously. The pandemic thus generated a space to think about vulnerability as a source of resistance, which contests the logic of the functionalisation of sensation and sense, especially touch, as can be seen in digital systems.

368 See Oliver Grau and Inge Hinterwaldner, eds., Retracing Political Dimensions: Strategies in Contemporary New Media Art (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).
Returning to the body at the time of the pandemic reiterated a need to constantly rethink value outside the logic of profitability. As the philosopher Achille Mbembe puts it:

> Returning to the body also means returning to the Earth, understood no longer as appropriated land around which enclosures are erected in keeping with the logic of division and the repression of those who do not count, but instead as an event that, in short, fundamentally defies any idea of appropriation or “frontierization.”

During the pandemic I explored this return to the finite body and the finite Earth in the chapters dedicated to discussing these artists’ engagement with projection technologies and screens. The artworks were approached for rethinking immersion as an experiential critique of the logic of profitability – a driving force behind the ideology of the future. In Chapter 2, dedicated to a discussion on Rachel Rose’s installation *Everything and More* (2015), I investigated how the spatial arrangements of the installation reconfigure relations between gravity and weightlessness, which I approached in relation to the experience of the pandemic and Nancy’s notion of resonance. In that chapter, I considered sensory perception as a tension of being, one situated on the threshold of the inside and the outside, and which configures sense and sensation as taking place at the limit and always exposed to exteriority. While immersed in the context of the pandemic, I explored this installation as a vehicle for navigating a journey back to Earth and its finite materiality as a point of reference for rethinking relations and co-existence as being-with.

In Chapter 3, I focused on Sondra Perry’s practice to consider her approach to the installation space as a site that facilitates an experiential critique of fungibility in the context of digital capitalism and race. As discussed in the chapter, the human body, functioning as an exchange value and exploited as a space for commodification, requires critical approaches that situates the self in relation to the ecotechnological environment. Throughout the chapter, I explored how Perry critiques the racialising logic of fungibility, turning her body into a site of resistance through emerging tensions between flows of capital, data, and bodies. I approached this in relation to Perry’s *Flesh Wall* (2016–2020) installation, which refers to the ongoing violence of enclosures, the disruption of relations and the transformation of existence into units of

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profitable value. In Chapter 3, I also discussed tensions between Nancy’s concepts of expeausition and ecotechnics in relation to Perry’s practice. This tension highlighted the limitations of Nancy’s approach to skin as an exposure of existence in terms of circulation and dispersal, specifically when considering this framework in relation to critical race theory. Perry’s practice extends this framework for addressing co-existence as co-exposure to violence, which invites us to consider historical processes that enabled, and continue to enable ecotechnological entanglements. In Chapter 4, I discussed Steyerl’s installation *This is the Future/Power Plants* (2019) in relation to Nancy’s concept of struction, which I used to approach this installation as a site of recon/struction of the present, outside the ideological and extractive projection of the future that shapes contemporaneity. While addressing these questions, the chapter also explored the role of the artificial intelligence (AI) industry in shaping the trajectory and idea of the future itself. I considered this in relation to Nancy’s ideas on the present as a mode of resistance against general equivalence, inviting us to be critical of the constructionist paradigms that support the techno-capitalist paradigm.

Although a suspension of mobility, production and consumption caused immense global disruption, it also opened a new space to relearn how to navigate the present, devoid of narratives of progress. The present – which is marked by increasing uncertainty, the inundation of mortality, and the exponential growth of socio-economic inequalities – invites resistance to teleological and utopian techno-capitalist projections of the future. I engaged with this critique throughout the chapters of this thesis in relation to the artists’ use of screens and projection technology as a way of rupturing and interrupting the techno-capitalist logic of the future – a logic that also shapes the present. Following Nancy’s notion of being-with, this momentary rupture from within the techno-capitalist landscape at the time of the pandemic created tangible tensions between co-existence and the processes that reduce existence to units of value. Despite the exposure to uncertainty and mortality brought about by the disruption of the pandemic, I embraced this moment as an opportunity not to turn away from the crises of the present but to remain exposed to them. In other words, being exposed means ‘to endure our encounter with catastrophic loss by allowing ourselves to sense it’.

Although this thought emerges in Nancy’s book on the catastrophe of Fukushima – as mentioned in Chapter 4 – the experience of the pandemic also entails staying with this exposure to finitude, remaining exposed to this

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opening. Instead of reducing the experience of the pandemic to absorption by general equivalence, this thesis embraces it, records it and learns from this moment of rupture. I hope the discussions that make up the corpus of the thesis, and which also consider the events that took place at the time of writing it – such as the global health crisis, SpaceX’s launch to the International Space Station, Black Lives Matter protests, and the war in Ukraine – will inspire further thinking about the role of art and theory as coming together to remain exposed to the present and future catastrophe(s) that necessitates being as being-with. This thesis contributes to an understanding of value beyond the logic of profitability, economic growth, and the expansion of new frontiers. Thus, following Nancy’s approach to globalisation, which he also considers as world-forming (mondialisation), I have approached the ecotechnological immersive landscape as holding a possibility for meaning to open beyond signification, as circulation of sense that forms the horizon of being-with.

While facing the crises of the present at the time of the pandemic, Nancy’s philosophical framework – which considers the unknown of the future in an ecotechnological world devoid of meaning and ends – allows us to consider immersion as an experiential critique of the calculative and extractive economy systems that constitute this global interdependence. It is an invitation to rethink immersion as co-existence, as being-with while enduring the rupture of sense and meaning. While addressing the ambivalence of the global interconnectivity that facilitates flows of data and capital, I have approached immersion through the notion of touch, and through resonance as a reconfiguration of sensibility towards an openness of the world. This approach has further contributed to an elaboration of Mondloch’s concept of critical proximity, which is useful here for considering the environment of moving image installations as an ethico-political space that directs attention to more-than-human entanglements. Drawing on Nancy’s philosophy, which rethinks being as being-with, I elaborated on my approach to immersion in relation to the ‘oceanic turn’, which directs thinking about co-existence, interdependence, and relations through the realm of water and its flows, which rupture the logic of self-sufficiency and absolute interiority. The liquidity, fluidity, and aquatic environments referenced throughout all three installations – in relation to outer space, the digital Atlantic, and the future – were seen as reconfiguring an onto-ethical understanding that encourages a radical shift in the perspective of one’s relation and position in the immersive ecotechnological world.
The implications of this thesis’s findings are grounded in its interdisciplinary approach, which merges philosophy, contemporary art, and media theory, while also drawing on scholarship from film studies. This interdisciplinary approach contributes to developing an understanding of immersion in terms of experiential critique. In this context, immersive experience is approached beyond an onto-theological framing of sensation in terms of interiority, and instead – drawing on Nancy’s thought – moves towards a non-appropriative rupture of touch that refers to sensation as ontological plurality. I have extended my approach to immersion through listening and touching, as an opening towards planetary thinking. This re-conceptualisation of immersion through Nancy’s philosophical framework departs from a phenomenological approach defined through vision, and instead embodies an anti-ocular perspective in philosophical thinking. This approach to immersion through resonance and rupture exceeds signification and opens sensation as an ontological plurality that reconfigures the self as always existing in relation to exteriority, shaped and folded by it. Therefore, interiority for Nancy is preceded by exteriority, which, in the context of digital systems, contributes to rethinking the self as emerging at the intersections of the technological, environmental, and relational dimensions.

This project, which emerged at the time of the pandemic, also marks a possibility for future research of the artworks made during the pandemic to assess how they engage with and activate the politics of the present. In terms of the philosophical aspects of this research, future directions could involve non-Western thought in discussions on planetary thinking or becoming planetary: for example, Mbembe’s book *The Earthly Community* (2022), which explores and enacts planetary thinking at the time of the pandemic from the perspective of African cosmogonies. In addition to this study’s contribution to emerging scholarship on planetary thinking that addresses global crises from an ecotechnological perspective and offers a framework for the experiential critique of the Capitalocene, it also provides conceptual tools for approaching immersion as a critical interrogation of the use of digital technologies in the context of contemporary art. Instead of absorbing innovative immersive technologies that contribute to the measurement of sensation and the reduction of the body to sensory experience, this study introduces a critical framework for thinking about immersion as a means of interrupting a reductionist approach to sensation that serves the attention economy.\(^{371}\) Thus,
the limitations of this project could be further explored in relation to developing a critical framework around XR art production. For example, there is a need for similar frameworks in the context of the art projects produced by Acute Art, which entertain the idea of immersion as a spectacle rather than as a critical space. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, a critical framework for addressing immersion as experiential critique entails attending to the role of technology, and to how artists employ it to activate and reconfigure a critical engagement with the present. I hope that this thought will continue to reverberate throughout the context of contemporary art, resonating with artists and curators, as well as with media theorists interested in this philosophical approach, and will further considerations of immersion as a site of resistance, where relations and positions are directed towards reimagining modes of being-with in the continuous process of world-forming.
Appendix

Interview with Rachel Rose by Geistė Marija Kinčinaitytė
24 February 2021, 7 pm GMT, online (Zoom)

Geistė Marija Kinčinaitytė: How important for you is philosophical thinking in relation to your practice? Have you thought about Gilles Deleuze’s concept of fold in relation to your moving image practice?

Rachel Rose: For me making art is a spiritual practice. What’s the difference between a spiritual or theoretical question? I am not so sure. It is cool you have mentioned the fold because I have done some work on Deleuze in grad school, but I am not approaching the work academically in that way. Each work starts with a very subtle feeling, almost banal, which leads to an even more obvious, basic question. Making the video is a way to piece that feeling that I might have inside of me or the question that comes from that feeling through sites, moments in time and history that are outside of myself. So, the work becomes almost like a balloon that is blowing up, or something like a way of connecting this thing that feels so quietly inside to stuff that’s real on the outside. It is not a philosophical question. I am not thinking about it when I do it.

GMK: In one of your interviews, you talk about video editing as a tool, which allows you to navigate questions around the boundaries, barriers, and thresholds. I am interested in your thinking about the inside and the outside, which materialises in your installations and in the video editing itself. Could you please explain in more detail how exactly you are using editing (for example, compositing) as a tool to navigate this question around the edge, which permeates your practice? What does an edge mean to you?

RR: One of the things that I love about editing is that you first put your footage in bins (folders). I use binning to typically sequence footage shot by date, location, time, etc. I use them (bins) to subjectively organise material. Sometimes I do that by rhythm (slow, fast). I also do it by colour or feeling. In any given project there would be 60 sequences or more, many different versions of the film.
The next thing is that I always think about how the edit foremost aligns with a viewer’s body. I taught myself how to edit, and a big influence was Walter Murch, who wrote in *The Blink of an Eye* (1992) about lining up the cut when the actor blinks. When the actor blinks, as a viewer you experience a larger apparatus’ blink that synchs you in the position of the actor. So, although often I am not working with actors, sometimes I think about what he means by this ‘synching’: how do you sync the viewer into the thing that is happening internally through how you are cutting the film? Obviously, there are ways to think about it in terms of speed, how long or short is the shot, when are long shots coming, when are short shots coming, but also thinking about how do you sublimate the cut when you have no edit at all? This is for me also related to how the work is installed. Therefore, for example, when I made *Everything and More* (2015), I was trying to think about the work as having very few cuts. When the cuts there were, they were to feel almost like light flashes instead of a cut itself. In *Everything and More*, all of the work is composited together, so the movement from the kitchen table ingredients into the pool and out has no cut. And the movement from the concert into the water and back is created by just a simple light displacement effect so that the kitchen ingredients displace part of the image in the water and so forth. I was trying to come up with all the solutions I could not create cuts. This is totally in contrast with, for example, *A Minute Ago*, in which the cuts are harsh, abrupt, and which is true to what the work is also about: this relationship between collage and catastrophe, this experience of catastrophe as collage, as a cut and paste. Therefore, if I were to sublimate the cut in *Everything and More*, it would be wrong for what I am trying to say in that work.

**GMK:** I am curious to learn more about the specifics of each *Everything and More* iteration. I saw your installation in London in 2016, which is my main reference point for a discussion in the thesis. However, it is fascinating how you are working with the specifics of each exhibition space and adjust your video projection to it. Could you please elaborate more on the processes in your approach to each space? How does it influence your experimentation with the viewing conditions, choice of the screen, adjustment of the video projection in relation to it, and the use of sound system?

In terms of the specifics of the screen, I have in mind the CNC knitted screen used in Kunsthaus Bregenz (Austria) for a projection. Could you please tell me more about that screen, its fabrication, and what effects it produces in the installation? Then, I am interested to hear more about the placement of the LED screen in a windowless room at the Fridericianum, Kassel.
(Germany). In the context of Lafayette Anticipations, please elaborate more on the screen’s placement in the room full of windows, reflections, and natural light.

Do these different viewing conditions open up a new context for your work shown in London and New York where you equally treat the video projection, translucency of the screen and the natural light coming through the window behind the screen? How does it complicate the work conceptually but also perceptually since the effects of translucency in other installations have disappeared? Also, in Fridericianum, this effect of translucency also acquires a different meaning because it exposes the material structure of the LED screen.

**RR:** When I made *Everything and More* for the Whitney Museum, I was thinking about this oscillation between imagistic and literal, real space. I had this room with the window wall, and I wanted there to be this flickering that was in line with when there was darkness or blackness in the image and when there was full colour. So, I returned to the space during installation and edited the film in relationship to putting the semi-transparent scrim in front of the window. So, the idea was that when there is black in the image, the image becomes transparent to the world, and you are placed inside the world, from the Whitney Museum looking out the window, and when there is colour in the image, you are in the world of the film. I wanted it to feel like, in a way, as a viewer you are moving between 2D and 3D worlds. It felt related to David Wolf’s experience moving from the void in outer space and pure blackness to coming back to Earth. Of course, there is not always that option when there is no window, as in Bregenz, because the building is like a bunker, and it is quite medieval. There, the use of glass is not the way that it functions at the Whitney or 180 Studios, which is a modernist idea of transparency and fluidity between yourself and the world outside. The use of glass in Bregenz is heavy and thick. It almost makes you feel like you are inside. It almost feels like dark lamps in a deep heavy medieval church or something like that. Or the glass feels like a thick old stained glass. Therefore, this space is not about transparency; it is about being inside, opposite to the Whitney or 180 Studios. I was thinking about how to create this movement between 2D and 3D without using transparency or the view outside. To do that, I used the CNC knits. For example, it is a modern way to essentially do tapestries. Working together with the fabricator in Japan, we wove images from the film itself into the screen surface. When the film hit that moment on the screen, that woven image, for a second or 30 seconds depending on the film, would feel like it would acquire weight, almost functioning as a relief sculpture. It would appear like it had some
kind of density, a bit like 3D. So that was the way of translating the underlying thing I was trying to do in two other instances.

In Fridericianum and Lafayette, those buildings were different (Lafayette – no isolated glass; Fridericianum – no windows at all or closed). I was thinking about embedding this transparency and opacity in the screen itself, in how the light comes out of it. The LED screen does that because when it is black you can see right through it and when there is colour it holds. So that’s an example of one thought moving through three different types of architecture and then the buildings to do with it. In addition, I truly love the installation at the São Paulo Art Biennial. The curator and I chose a spot on the second floor because of the window overlooking a tree.

One thing to say, I am always interested in this gravity, weightlessness, 2D, 3D aspect, and I guess, in my heart, I am true to the material. While VR is cool and would like to do something with it one day, I am interested in flat space. For example, in terms of sound design, it is always stereo and never 5.1 sound because to me it is too illustrative of dimensional space, and I actually like to keep things flat. Here is the screen, it is in front of you, here is the projector, here are the speakers, you are only hearing sound from left and right, keeping everything flat, I would say. I treat flatness as a mechanism for allowing the viewer to go somewhere.

**GMK:** Can you tell a bit more about the fractured image in the *Everything and More* installation: what effects did you use to create it, how did you achieve it, what does it reference? Also, what is happening at the end of *A Minute Ago* when the image disintegrates?

**RR:** I took a still of the fluid that I was filming for the other part, and then I made it black and white. Then, I took the luminosity of that image and used it to displace the movement of camera movement. It is a post-effect that you can do. The idea was sort of mixing everything together: a very basic shot of water, an astronaut suit at this buoyancy training place in Maryland, but it is actually like all of the air and light in-between you can feel is infused with what’s happening in the kitchen, that’s what I was thinking about when I did that.

The disintegration of the image in *A Minute Ago* at the end, honestly, not much other than emphasising that much of the film is composited: Philip Johnson, and then the sky you see outside from the house, are in-frame collages. In the end, breaking the image apart allowed the fact that pixels themselves – a form of collage – to come through. So, everything we are experiencing about this film is collage. Each time it is different.
**GK:** Immersion in the contemporary art context has become a sought-after effect facilitated by increasing use of digital technologies by artists. What does immersion in the context of moving image installation mean to you?

**RR:** Immersion for me means the flatter and more straightforward you keep the apparatus the easier for the viewer it is to become immersed. At least that’s my experience for myself. For example, you know you are in the theatre and watching actors, they are making something up and that is why you can imagine so much within it. Maybe it is a question of detail or illustration. I am thinking about my work and how it is installed while keeping it in a way cartoonish enough, so that the viewer can enter the work themselves. I think then things are too illustrated and too detailed, it suctions out the viewer or suctions out our ability to actually engage with what we are seeing, to drop in with our own projections and imaginations to what we are seeing. Therefore, I think a lot about flatness both when I am conceiving the work, making, and installing it.

**GMK:** Do you consider your installations as sites for an experiential critique towards the prevalent mediascape discourse, which itself is thought of in terms of an immersive and affective environment?

**RR:** Yes, totally. Not overtly, not attempting to do it. However, I think that any time you have a moving image work in a museum or an institutional space, that is what you are doing. Because you are saying: here, come sit and look at this thing with attention and come and see how your body meets it. That is super specific to an artwork, and it is something that a show on Netflix or watching something on Instagram on your phone or doing something in VR displaces it. One of the things that an art institutional space can hold is a consideration for how our bodies are meeting something. It is also different than a movie theatre where it is not considered. I don’t know if it is a critique or more an opportunity that I see in making these as artworks and not as films, which allows us to feel ourselves and our bodies in relationship to what we are watching. I think it is a bit of a shame in art when you see projections just in a dark black space, in a space that could become otherwise. We have an opportunity – let’s use it – that’s how I feel.

**GMK:** Do you think about your installations as sites that are materialising encounters with otherness (sense of existence/self-sensing through the other/resonance)?
RR: Yes. Don’t we all hope in our work as artists, or any artists that approach their work spiritually. I feel that where else we are going to have a place to ask ourselves about death and our relationship to it and how we feel about other than art, for me it feels like making is a way to directly look at it.

GMK: What does surface, material flatness, skin, painting, mean to you? Do they function as an opening, a potential for playing with imagination?

RR: Yes, totally. When I was working on Enclosure (2019), my most recent film, we shot it in Upstate New York, but the film is set in England, and the sky, the light in Upstate New York is nothing like it is in England. It is harsh, bright American light, not pillowy, soft, foggy like British light. What are we going to do? I kept working with the footage and the skies weren’t good enough, they were irking me, so I thought about doing some sky replacements, which we did. I was like ‘oh well’ this is totally something weirdly an expression of how people at the time thought about their relationship to the heavens. There was the idea of the Great Chain of Being, a hierarchical connection between everything up to everything down. The way the stars and the moon literally ruled agriculture, people’s relationship to seasons, and the film is about the division of land and separating of a connection, etc. Therefore, when I was thinking about all that and was looking at the surface of this footage, and I wasn’t happy with how the surface looked, the solution was to change the skies. However, as I started to change the skies, I realised I was doing something that was as an expression of a way of thinking for the characters, and so I totally believe in working with the surface also as a way of getting to what you are trying to do. If I replaced the skies not with something more celestial and sublime which is something I tried to do, maybe I wouldn’t be doing that. You see what I am saying? That’s an example of looking at the surface and allowing the surface to give way to something else.

GK: Does your training in painting somehow influence the way you are making your films?

RR: A very basic thing that you learn when you are painting is about the scale and the edge. One of the things I loved about painting was that it’s truly fundamentally about gravity even if you are painting a representation of something. If it is a rectangle or if it is a square, horizontal or vertical, you are always dealing with things in relationship to gravity. To me, it is so much what painting is about. It is also true photographically in film, but painting is a direct way to
learn that through direct experience. In addition, also, so much about this work with gravity is knowing that the edge changes everything in the centre. Therefore, thinking about edges in frames for me comes from thinking about painting or having painted. You have a physical relationship to gravity and edge in terms of the image making when you paint. I think photographically it is much more removed, it is less literally physical.

**GMK:** Are you familiar with Jean-Luc Nancy’s work?

**RR:** Yes! I was reading ‘L’Intrus’ (2002) on the heart transplant when making *Sitting Feeding Sleeping* (2013). At the time, I was reading a lot about definitions of life and death in human bodies and different cultures. His writing wasn’t a central thing, but I was thinking about it, certainly.
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