

# **A Sunken Trembling Recalled Dimly**

**16. 03. 2011 - 18. 03. 2011**

## **The Otolith Group.**

To live and work in London in 2011 today is to be exposed to an experience of social, cultural, political, financial, educational, economic, public and aesthetic crisis that bears little resemblance to the appearance of the crisis within Germany. Today, we in Britain find ourselves walking, dazed, appalled, exhilarated, through an ideological junkyard, strewn with the discredited rubble of market fundamentalism. Around us lies the shards of business ontology; the wreckage of capitalist realism that has possessed us for thirty years and that destroyed itself in the banking crash of September 2008. Our government proposes to restore order with the same systems that caused the damage in the first place; much contemporary culture disavows any existential sense of crisis, proceeding as if the beliefs that sustained those systems had not been destroyed and discredited. Between those that sense the possibility for constructing a new culture from the wreckage of discredited beliefs and those that want to reconstruct old privileges upon that new wreckage runs a fault line that divides Britain today. It is this antagonism, directed against those attempts at restoration; an antagonism that seeks, in whichever way possible, to participate in the destruction of a resurgent disaster capitalism, that explains the intensity peculiar to Britain in 2011.

It is from within this condition of crisis that this event emerges; we bring the crisis with us; we bear the crisis; we, each of us, are the crisis. Each of the three evenings thus constitutes an episode, extracted from preoccupations that impress themselves upon us; each evening can be understood as a portal into obsessions that prey upon our exhaustions. From these evenings will emerge, eventually, a new work, that will bear little or no resemblance to any of the ideas discussed and yet could not become sensible without immersion within those ideas. These evenings are conversations between forms of speaking, methods of listening and styles of viewing, each of which unfolds in a time of thinking that cannot be calculated in advance of intention. We are seized by questions that we cannot formulate, answers that we cannot articulate and enthusiasms that take hold only to leave us uncertain, unsure, unstable. These evenings might be understood then as attempts to constitute a space in which to articulate affective states that possess us but which do not belong to us.

## **Abstraction and System in an Age of Recessional Aesthetics**

**16. 3. 2011.**

**18:00 - 24.00**

In Frieze, October 2009, theorists Nina Power and Michael Sayeau argued that the current economic crisis has its 'origin in financial instruments of such complicated construction that even their users are said not to have understood exactly what they were and how they worked. How does one illustrate a credit-default swap? How would one shoot a video of a counterparty failing to pay up on a sketchy derivative trade?' However difficult it is to represent these transactions, the duo insisted, it is clear that 'we live in the midst of a series of abstractions that constitute much of our experience of reality'. Therefore, any 'portrayal of contemporary capitalist society, artistic or otherwise, cannot do without an investigation'. How, then, can we visualize the economy? In Susan Buck-Morss's 1995 essay 'Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display', quoted by Power and Sayeau, Buck Morss points out that because the economy is not an 'empirical object among other worldly things'; for it to be

‘seen’ by the human perceptual apparatus, it has to ‘undergo a process, crucial for science, of representational mapping’.

Evening 1 is therefore informed by a close reading of ‘specific portrayals of the real character of abstraction’ and of ‘representational mapping’. These portrayals and mappings, each of which are quite distinct in method and approach, nonetheless operate as contemporary forms of recessional aesthetics, a term initially formulated by Hal Foster and David Joselit in October in 2009 and since taken up by London based artists Brad Butler and Karen Mirza of no.where in 2010.

Evening 1 explores modes of abstraction that seek to visualise audible the economy as system, as map, as fabulation, as abstraction and totality.

The evening begins with the screening of the documentation of a performance of the NASDAQ Vocal Index. In 2003, Swedish artist Ola Pehrson developed the NASDAQ Vocal Index, a software programme that converted the financial graph of the NASDAQ Shares Index into music notation to be sung by choirs composed of corporate staff.

Atlantropa (Samuel Stevens, 2009, 19. 5 min) is a documentary fiction located in the Straits of Gibraltar that reimagines an abandoned vision of globalization between in order to assemble a dystopian present that links North Africa to Southern Europe and the European Union.

At Sea (Peter Hutton, 2007, 50 min) makes visible the maritime economy that Allan Sekula and Noel Burch have called the forgotten space of globalisation.

Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway will present Black Shoals Stock Market Planetarium, their digital art project conceived and exhibited in 2004. Black Shoals Stock Market Planetarium is a project that converts financial data into digital information that it visualises as a constellation of the night sky.

Evening 1 will conclude with a discussion between Lise Autogena, Joshua Portway, Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar on the implications of the Black Shoals Stock Market Planetarium for visualizing the economy as a whole.

## **Geoaesthetics, Terracentricity, Hydropolitics, Petropolitics**

**17. 3. 2011**

**18: 00 - 24: 00**

Evening 2 will explore different aesthetics, poetics, methods and operations for rendering visible contemporary hydropolitical and petropolitical struggles. What these methods share is the desire to contaminate economic discourse with other modes of thinking so that the economic narratives of hydropolitics and petropolitics instead begin to take on the appearance of philosophical horror and extraterritorial speculation. The evening is informed by the concept of terracentricity as formulated by historian Marcus Raediker and the notion of geophilosophy, initially formulated by Deleuze and Guattari and since elaborated by philosophers affiliated with British journal Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development.

In the Introduction to Collapse VI: Geophilosophy, editor Robin Mackay posed the question: ‘Is there nevertheless an enduring bond between philosophical thought and its terrestrial support, or conversely, is philosophy’s task to escape the planetary horizon?’ The evening is

informed by the thinking of the philosopher Reza Negarestani whose book *Collapse: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* is a work of theoretical fiction, political theology and speculative demonology that situates the pipeline odyssey of oil as an entity that lubricates the War on Terror and the desert archaeologies of the Middle East.

Evening 2 consists of the screening of a number of films.

*Aab va garmaa* (Brian W. Rogers, Nilofar Naraghi, Nazanin Naraghi, 2010, 16 min) reconstitutes forensic objects-industrial films, amateur footage, archival newsreels and excerpts from Feroz Farokhzad's only completed film, which attest to the post- Mosaddegh political abstractions of the winter years of 1979-1988 Iran. The film unfolds a nonlinear history of occluded Middle-Eastern modernisms, architecture, quarantine, transnational alliances, geology, image production, and petropolitics.

*Hydra Decapita* (The Otolith Group, 2010, 33 min)

From 1993 to 2002, the Detroit based electronic music duo Drexciya released a series of recordings that imagined a fictional world system entitled Drexciya, populated by the subaquatic descendants of Africans drowned by slavers during the Middle Passage. The fabulation of Drexciya provides a point of departure for *Hydra Decapita*, a work that summons a series of spectres of capital in order to convene a seance that evokes contemporary economic abstraction.

*Yek Atash/A Fire* (Ebrahim Golestan, 1961, 24 min) documents the efforts to extinguish a fire at the oil wells near Ahwaz, Iran, that raged for several months.

Theorist Reza Negarestani will give a Skype presentation on oil as the lubricant of archaeological, historical, political, economic histories.

Brian W. Rogers, Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar will discuss the implications of Negarestani's speculative demonology of oil in relation to questions of terracentricity, geophilosophy and geoaesthetics.

The evening will conclude with a screening of *Lessons of Darkness* (Werner Herzog, 1992, 60 min). The extraterritorial perspective of *Lessons of Darkness* sheds an occluded light upon oil as an ancient and obscure force of horror.

## **Radiophonic Terrains**

**18. 3. 2011.**

**18.00 - 24.00**

Evening 3 explores the potentials and the legacies of the audio-essay. Between the Scylla of sound art that is often sterile and the Charybdis of noise which applauds itself for its vanguardism, the audio essay offers possibilities for pursuing new modes of documentary fiction. The postwar projects pioneered by the Radio Ballads of Charles Parker, Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger, the Solitude Trilogy of Glenn Gould and the hyperstitional works of Gregory Whitehead and Susanne Treister offer hints that by no means exhaust the field of the possible.

Evening 3 will consist of a series of playbacks of recordings.

The Secret King in the Empire of Thinking (The Otolith Group, 2011, 22 min) is a redescription, set in the future, of Jack Kirby's 1978 visualisations commissioned for the unrealized film Lord of Light, that was based on Roger Zelazny's 1967 science fiction novel Lord of Light.

Radar Traces (Mark Fisher, 2008, 45 min) is a hauntological reworking of interviews conducted with female radar operators working at Bawdsley Radar Station in Suffolk from 1943 to 1945.

LondonunderLondon (Mark Fisher and Justin Barton, 2006, 90 min) is an epic two-part redreaming of the auditory geography of London, assembled from a number of mythologies of near futures

(In)action (Rayya Badran, 2009, 3 min 34 seconds) is a cinephonic investigation of delay and repetition at a demonstration, recorded and rendered inaudible in Hamra, Beirut in 2009.

Justin Barton and Mark Fisher will discuss the potentials of the audio-essay in relation to On Vanishing Land, their forthcoming soundtracked by Burial. This audio-essay takes as its starting point a 2006 walk that the authors made along the Suffolk coastland, starting at Felixstowe container terminal and ending at Sutton Hoo, near Woodbridge in order to explore the Suffolk terrain as a geography of the *erie* that is here distinguished from the unsettling modes of the uncanny and the weird. On Vanishing Land explores connections between the ghosted narratives of MR James, many of which were inspired by Suffolk's coastland and Brian Eno's *On Land*, whose unsettled ambience auditions an auditory geography announced in track titles such as Lantern Marsh and "Unfamiliar Wind (Leeks Hills)", both of which are named after Suffolk locations.

The discussion will take place with critic Rayya Badran, critic and artist Brian Rogers and Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun.

Evening 3 will conclude with a presentation of new music composed and performed by Dopplereffekt.

## Programme

16.03.2011 Mittwoch | Wednesday

18:00 – 18:30 Nasdaq Vocal Index | Film

18:30 – 19:00 Samuel Stevens, Atlantropa | Film

19:00 – 20:00 Peter Hutton, At Sea | Film

20:00 – 21:00 Lise Autogena & The Otolith Group, Abstraction and System in an Age of Recessional Aesthetics | Talk

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17.03.2011 Donnerstag | Thursday

18:00 – 18:20 Brian W. Rogers, Nilofar Naraghi, Nazanin Naraghi, Ab va Garma | Film

18:30 – 19:00 The Otolith Group, Hydra Decapita | Film

19:00 – 20:00 The Otolith Group & Brian W. Rogers, Geoaesthetics, Terracentricity, Hydropolitics and Petropolitics | Talk

20:00 – 21:00 Werner Herzog, Lessons of Darkness | Film

18.03.2011 Freitag | Friday

18:00 – 18:30 The Otolith Group, The Secret King in the Empire of Thinking | Audio-essay  
18:30 – 19:20 Mark Fisher, Radar Traces | Audio-essay  
19:30 – 20:00 Mark Fisher & Justin Barton, LondonunderLondon | Audio-essay  
21:00 – 22:00 Raya Baddran, Mark Fisher, Justin Barton & The Otolith Group, Radiophonic  
Terrains | Talk  
22:30 – 23:30 Dopplereffekt | Music

## Biographies

Joshua Portway and Lise Autogena

Joshua Portway (UK) and Lise Autogena (Denmark/London) have been working together since 1991. In their ambitious multimedia collaborations, they have explored our relations to the networks, economies, geographies and technologies that surround us and how our human experience is changed by incorporation into these systems. Using complex technologies and visualisation of realtime data streams, their multilayered installations explore a sense of global presence, time and human interdependence. Their projects include: Black Shoals Stock Market Planetarium ([www.blackshoals.net](http://www.blackshoals.net)); Most Blue Skies, Ping, The Sound Mirrors Project and The Thor Heyerdahl Globe.

Rayya Badran

Rayya Badran is a writer based in Beirut. Her work focuses on the performative nature of the voice as well as on characteristics of aurality in film and music. She completed an MA in Aural and Visual Cultures from Goldsmiths College, London in 2008 and was recently writer-in-residence at the Delfina Foundation. Her first publication entitled Radiophonic Voice(s) was produced in the framework of Ashkal Alwan's Homeworks 5: A forum on cultural practices in April-May 2010, Beirut.

Justin Barton

Justin Barton is a writer and sound artist for whom theory consists of maps for escaping from ordinary, dead reality, and for whom art is a perceptual, oneiric and hyper-abstract means of escape. He and Mark Fisher made London Under London, and they are currently working on a new audio-essay, On Vanishing Land.

Dopplereffekt

Dopplereffekt is Gerald Donald and To Nhan Le Thi. The group formed in 1995 and has released music on Dataphysix, International Deejay Gigolo, and Replex. Their work is characterised by investigations into contemporary physics research, musique concrète, digital and modular synthesis, and detroit techno. The group maintains uncertain affiliations with Heinrich Mueller, Drexciya, Arpanet, Japanese Telecom, and Der Zyklus."

Mark Fisher

Mark Fisher is the author of Capitalist Realism and the editor of The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson (both Zer0 books 2009). His writing appears on his well-known blog k-punk and in The Wire, Frieze, Film Quarterly and Sight and Sound. He teaches at the University of East London, Goldsmiths, University of London and the City Literary Institute, London. He collaborated with Justin Barton on the acclaimed audio-essay londonunderlondon, and the pair are now working on a sequel, On Vanishing Land.

## Ola Pehrson

Ola Pehrson (1964–2006) was born in Stockholm, Sweden. He studied art at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, and received a master of arts degree in 1997 from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm. Pehrson's solo exhibitions include those at Galleri Lars Bohman, Stockholm; Galeria Noua, Bucharest; and Collective Gallery, Edinburgh. His work has been included in group exhibitions in Sweden at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and the Malmö Konsthall, and in Japan at the Yamaguchi Museum of Art. Hunt for the Unabomber was included in the 9th International Istanbul Biennial in 2005 and the 27th São Paulo Biennial in 2006.

## Brian W. Rogers

Brian W. Rogers (born 1983) is an artist and theorist based in San Francisco and Los Angeles. He studied Rhetoric at UC Berkeley and is currently working towards Ph.D. candidacy at UC Santa Cruz. His work is formally engaged with questions of abstraction, cybernetic theory, the essayistic and audiovisual archives.

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