**Filozofski vestnik**
ISSN 0353-4510 | Volume 44 | Number 2 | 2023 | 393–416
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# Conversation with Jill H. Casid and Anna Campbell

**Keywords**
Anthropocene, Necrocene, decay, aesthetics, contemporary art, queer, trans*, transition

**Abstract**
The conversation with Jill H. Casid and Anna Campbell is a reconceptualization of several themes to develop an aesthetic that incorporates notions of the necropolitical and redefines the concept of the Anthropocene as the Necrocene. The Necrocene implies an era marked by death, decay, and the consequences of human impact on the environment, as well as a critical reflection on the choices individuals and societies make that contribute to the transition from the Anthropocene to the Necrocene. These reflections serve as cautionary tales or reflections on the unsustainable path of the Anthropocene. An important reflection in the interview is how queer and transgender people are using art and assemblages to refuse the terms of the current tensions of the culture wars.

## Pogovor z Jill H. Casid in Anno Campbell

**Ključne besede**
antropocen, nekrocen, propadanje, estetika, sodobna umetnost, queer, trans*, prehod

**Povzetek**
Pogovor z Jill H. Casid in Anno Campbell predstavlja rekonceptualizacijo več tem za razvoj estetike, ki vključuje pojme nekropolitike in redefinira koncept antropocena kot nekrocena. Nekrocen implicira obdobje, ki ga zaznamujejo smrt, propadanje in posledice človekovega vpliva na okolje, pa tudi kritičen razmislek o odločitvah posameznikov in družb, ki prispevajo k prehodu iz antropocena v nekrocen. Ta razmišljanja služijo kot



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svarilne zgodbe ali razmislek o nevzdržni generalizaciji antropocena. Pomemben razmislek v intervjuju se nanaša dalje tudi na vprašanje, kako kvir- in transspolne osebe s pomočjo umetnosti in asemblažev zavračajo pogoje trenutnih napetosti kulturnih vojn.

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Zoom, June 9, 2023

From May 15 to 17, 2023, we had an amazing number of topics, references, theory and practice in the framework of the events of Jill H. Casid and Anna Campbell in Ljubljana.[1] We propose the form of an interview to clarify and reflect.

## Part 1

**Marina Gržinić**: We have divided this interview into different parts. The first part is called vocabulary or clarification. The starting point, of course, is the question: what is the Necrocene? And in that context, the difference between Necrocene and Anthropocene, because we usually use just use the term Anthropocene. What this Necrocene[2] could mean? Of course you have written texts and everything is there, but the way this is actually interpreted is that people do not understand what this could be. So my question is direct. Let us clarify these super important terms, coinages that you use to excavate the big house of theory, of philosophy.



1 See "Nekrocen, javna spolnost in avtonomija," ZRC SAZU, Filozofski inštitut, May 15–17, 2023, https://fi2.zrc-sazu.si/sl/dogodki/nekrocen-javna-spolnost-in-avtonomija.

2 Casid first develops their concept of the Necrocene in Jill H. Casid, "Necrolandscaping," *Natura: Environmental Aesthetics after Landscape*, ed. Jens Andermann, Lisa Blackmore, and Dayron Carrillo Morell (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2018), 237–64. The term "Necrocene" was first used by historian Justin McBrien to give a name to the shadow double of the Capitalocene but also its internal process of necrosis, a self-consumption born of capitalist extraction and accumulation as traumatic injury and surplus death not just birthed by extinction but as a process of "becoming extinction." See Justin McBrien, "Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene," in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), 116–37.

**Anthropocene. Plantationocene. Capitalocene. Necrocene.**

**Jill H. Casid**: You could certainly argue that the last thing we need is another name for the Anthropocene. And I think that, in the U.S. context and in the English-speaking world more generally, there is perhaps not a little exhaustion with what might seem to be merely a play on words. But to be grappling not only with climate change, but also with the sense that our epoch is really presenting us with the problem of extinction, I think renaming is actually necessary to describe particular historical origins and how they mean differently. I am thinking, for example, of the important work of Donna J. Haraway and Anna Tsing, who argue for not just the centrality of the plantation but position the plantation as turning point by calling our epoch the Plantationocene. Others insist, instead, that this is a particular history of capital.[3] By calling the Anthropocene the Capitalocene, the very name makes the condensed argument that it's not just humans who are responsible for our condition, but capital.[4]

I do not want to replace those terms at all. In fact, I think with them. But I call our scene the Necrocene because what I think is lost in both of these formulations is an earlier starting point, and that is the history of capitalism, which begins not only with the transatlantic slave trade, which is certainly central, but also with the attempt to colonize and settle through a form of displacement, transplantation, and replantation that has the genocide and genocide of indigenous peoples at its core, rather than as a sort of side effect.[5]

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3 According to Haraway, the participants in a recorded conversation for *Ethnos* (University of Aarhus, October 2014) collectively generated the term "Plantationocene." Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 206. See also Donna J. Haraway et al., "Anthropologists are Talking—About the Anthropocene," *Ethnos* 81, no. 3 (2016): 535–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1105838. For Haraway's discussion of both Capitalocene and Plantationocene along with her term "Chthulucene," see Donna J. Haraway, "Introduction" and "Making Kin: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene," in *Staying with the Trouble*, 1–8, 99–103, 206.

4 According to Jason W. Moore, the term "Capitalocene" originates with Andreas Malm. Moore and Haraway both began using the term before finding each others' work in 2013. See Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*. See also Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016).

5 With what they call the "orbis hypothesis," climate scientists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin propose 1610 CE as the "golden spike" origin point for the Anthropocene which they correlate to Native genocide and enslavement. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin,

It is certainly also my effort to make the presence of death—the ordinariness of necropolitics which is not so extraordinary but right there—palpable in the naming. I use "Necrocene" to foreground necropolitical violence and to shift emphasis from death as extinction, death as abstract state, death as the opposite of life, to death as felt, material presence and active process by giving us death as a scene in which we are vulnerably situated. So the term has a double meaning, because it emphasizes at the same time that necropolitics is central to our understanding of the Anthropocene. The renaming is also to insist on the death or end of man in another way. As others have done, Necrocene refuses to uphold the centrality of man because even to make man a destructive primary actor is to make him the central actor one more time. To retain the "Anthropos" of the Anthropocene performs a kind of terrible boomerang that invokes the end of man only to reinforce man's claimed ability to act, so that it might seem falsely that it is up to sovereign man to engineer a technical solution. This replacement of the Anthropos with the Necro is to insist on focusing not only on death, but also on a particular form of death that is not the extinction that is yet to come, but, rather, the end that has already taken place.

Necrocene also names the everyday presence of erosion for which I use the phrase "being undone." In thinking with how to do things with being undone in the Necrocene I am not looking for agency in a kind of sovereignty that can imagine moving outside of the felt and experienced forms of erosion, but actually looking to think and act in a way that could be understood as the other side of death, which is decay and the forms of erosion, that I call doing things with being undone.[6] I see these concepts as interlinked. That is, the Necrocene, Necrolandscaping and this formulation of doing things with being undone.



**Gržinić**: So if we turn to Anna, the question of undoing and unlearning in your presentation, Anna, you actually talked a lot about this process of unlearning. It was possible to capture the historical ways and also the explanation in your specific practice as this tradition. And my question would be if you can reflect on this notion or if you have another suggestion. What could be the process by

"Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519 (March 2015): 171–80, https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14258.

6 Jill H. Casid, "Doing Things with Being Undone," *Journal of Visual Culture* 18, no. 1 (April 2019): 30–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412919825817.

which we actually shake up a system of terms, but not only that, we just shake up a system of terms that we are forced to use and we use them and think of them just rhetorically, while they are already doing many, many things in terms of building our way of thinking otherwise.

**Alternate Methodologies**

**Anna Campbell**: I think the productive potential of undoing and unlearning is something that really excites me, so I really appreciate that prompt in that connection. From the perspective of someone who is a professor professionally, this idea of pedagogy is so central and teaching that seems to be in conflict with undoing and unlearning is something that I think has led me to translate my theoretical practice and my work in the studio-based practice to the space of the classroom. When I think about it, that prompt of undoing or unlearning it does not mean that I have to unlearn something in order for this kind of engagement to happen again, but to really think alternate methodologies, alternate ways of working. This is expressed particularly beautifully when Saidiya Hartman[7] talks about Esther Brown[8] and thinks about archives and the radicality of what might not be captured in the archive. What we need to do to unlearn is to think and analyze differently, to respond differently, address differently whatever scraps materials of research, of the archive, of the traces of history that we have instead. What that does is that it really also pushes the centrality of academics primary tools sort of off the table, and I think for this reason it is not a preferable way to work.

But that pushing that's decentering is really the critical gesture. I would also say that someone like Paolo Freire[9] or bell hooks[10] talking about Paolo Freire, which can be even a little bit more exciting sometimes, has been a really help-



7 Saidiya V. Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (July 2018): 465–90, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-6942093.

8 Saidiya Hartman gives, what she calls, a "speculative history" of Esther Brown, a young black girl living in Harlem in the early 1900s. From the case file of Brown charged as vagrant and wayward, Hartman narrates "the open rebellion and beautiful experiment produced by young black women in the emergent ghetto, a form of racial enclosure that succeeded the plantation." Hartman, "Anarchy of Colored Girls," 470.

9 Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 1993).

10 Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

ful entry point for me to bring a studio-based practice into a non-studio based environment.

The lesson in the studio, of course, is that we all make sculpture, and the instruction is not to exactly copy any sculpture that already exists. The instruction is also not to take parts of how other people have put together a sculpture and then make a five-parameter sculpture, right? Rather, you are supposed to synthesize and generate something all your own, and you are supposed to do it without too many guardrails and without too much oversight from the professor.

Especially in the context of my class, where we are curating an exhibition together, this idea of decentering the role of the professor and having people work collaboratively in committees provides an opportunity to collaborate creatively and expansively, but also to reject the passivity that's actually common in a conventional U.S. learning environment.

**Necrolandscaping**

**Gržinić**: Thanks for this alternate methodology. I want to go back to Jill, because of the way you phrased Necrocene and Anthropocene and capitalism. And capitalism was really important, as you say, as a mode of death. I'd like to know more about the necrolandscaping, because there are some elements that are, first of all, central to your work, and secondly, if possible, can be connected to Black histories. Because Black histories are key to developing practices that we White people can only observe as also there's a lot of meandering inside the regime of Whiteness, to take things and just adopt them. So my question would be how these Necrolandscaping and Trans Black histories might work in parallel or against each other, because you use all these sources and terms in your writings and reflections, in your films as well.



**Casid**: Necrolandscaping has at least a double edge. It's the term both for the refusal to see the signs of the aesthetics of the green response to climate change, the aesthetics of turning everything into a kind of apparent green blanket, a sign of flourishing, to see through that as aesthetics, of understanding landscaping as a killing mode of dis-Indigenation and extraction. But not just extraction. Extractivism has become such a dominant mode of understanding the killing force of capitalism that I think we overlook the extent to which dis-, re- and

transplanting has historically but also at this moment, been one of the primary agents of the scene we are in, which I call the Necrocene.

And while the Plantationocene in some ways takes us there and does the really important work of bringing a particular form of colonial capitalism, slavery, and forced enslavement into focus, it's not connected for many people's imaginations perhaps to the everyday and microscopic ways in which in the present, landscaping continues outside what might be called a plantation, taking this terrible work off our hands by giving us an apparent sign that all is well, but hiding the extent to which that verdancy is a mode of violent, destructive transformation, and in fact the opposite of what looks and thrives.

The way I have been thinking with both trans scholarship and a long Black radical tradition and Black trans feminist thought is profound work. I think that one of the things that we have been talking about, which is how to position yourself as a White person, is a really important issue that's at the center of hoping that there's not just a method, but also a politics that's more than just solidarity, a way of connecting across the different ways in which we are vulnerably situated. But I see vulnerability and transversal vulnerability as a way of making connections where they may not yet exist. I look at it that way and try to find something in between or moving across that argument that differences do not matter now because we are all at risk of extinction now. I refuse that politics that insists that thinking Blackness and in the space of Blackness is only the work of people of color. I join a number of scholars here, including Nicholas Mirzoeff,[11] who insist that the task is undoing Whiteness. And that that's a task for White people to do. I would say that the need of undoing Whiteness is also the need to work to undo and unlearn certain forms of fascist nationalism, as well as a regime of species exceptionalism and a policed regime of binary gender.



I would understand these as necessarily interlinked forms of oppression that, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore[12] so beautifully puts it, require an imaginary of abolition that I think also emerges excitingly from the other side of necrolandscaping. I

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11 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *White Sight: Visual Politics and Practices of Whiteness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023).

12 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays Toward Liberation*, eds. Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano (London: Verso, 2022).

see in necrolandscaping and modes of being and becoming composted, modes of deformation, in thinking about what I call "going to seed," a kind of latency, a coming apart that makes matter no longer readily harvestable and extractable, as a model for a different kind of cross-species but also vulnerable mode of working in the space of what is unworking us, and a kind of non-sovereign mode of dealing with what would seem to only destroy us.[13]

And while the site of the plantation is certainly an important site, I see in the work of Maria Thereza Alves,[14] which I discussed in my talk, an indication that what we think of as the sites transformed by colonization cannot be considered separately. For example, if you think of capitalism as a central waste system, then it's about following the waste. So, for example, if you follow the ballast and the dumping of ballast, you can see in the small places where it breaks out how the covering green begins to break apart and we find instances of the kind of intrusions of difference that I see as small micro-locations of places of potential. And when I think of trans, I am really interweaving together trans, transgender, transculture, and transvulnerability with transculture, with trying to find some kind of mode of contact across in our different ways of being undone.[15]

**Queer Histories**

**Gržinić**: That was so precise and wonderfully spelled out, this potentiality that is simply not visible or that is completely negated. Great. So if we move on, Anna, as you also talked a lot about queer history in your talk, a question: What and how do we do or what is this queer history? Things are not so clear, especially when we think about the former Eastern European context where there is no relationship to such possibility. There is only a relation to queer history in



13 Casid, "Doing Things With Being Undone."

14 See also Jill H. Casid, "The Unsettling Anarthistorical Call of Acknowledgment in the Necrocene/Das Ent-Setzen: Der Ruf einer Anarthistory nach Anerkennung im Nekropozän," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 128 (December 2022): 108–21.

15 Casid elaborates what they call thanatographic praxis via artist Joy Episalla's work with the photogram or what Episalla calls the "foldtogram" a vulnerable material praxis of a kind of melancholy joy to unfold photography's wild performativity as a way of living our dying through an unresigned care for the dead and disposable to alter the terms of our dying in the assembly of a queer trans*feminist commons. See Jill H. Casid, "Thanatography: Working the Folds of Photography's Wild Performativity in Capital's Necrocene," *Photography and Culture* 13, no. 2 (March 2020): 213–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2020.1754658.

art practice, or when you go to the streets or maybe demand basic human rights that are really important. But then when we get into institutions, history and so on, how do you think and define the potentiality of queer history?

**Campbell:** Another moment where for me method ends up being really incredibly central in that say the difference between gay history or LGBT history and queer history would be that methodological commitment to pushing the boundaries of what is considered history or historical, what can be imagined or what can be understood as evidence, how we can position ourselves other than just as strictly objective observers from the outside, plays a really central role. One thing I can say, perhaps building on the work I have shared with you, is that when I am making editions, for example, I am not thinking about conventional monumentalism, where there's some kind of central, large, you know, public, unchanging, unmoving, entirely static kind of mark of a particular moment or to represent history. I am really thinking about a rhizomatically distributed, unstatic, potentially moving scenario.

For example, the handkerchief series *Pride, that old Bitch*,[16] was done on the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprisings[17] with the idea that we do not need bronze sculpture to monumentalize certain figures. What we do need, however, is some kind of ongoing, shared, relational, and communal connection rooted in a just uprising that advances the values and practices of people like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson.[18] So the legacy would be honored not by a series

[16] See "Pride, that old Bitch," Anna Campbell, accessed September 22, 2023, https://annacampbell.net/Pride-that-old-Bitch.

[17] Holding onto a certain version of Stonewall insists that the first pride was a riot. However, the central but obscured role of Black butch lesbians and trans women of color is at the heart of the contested commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots that took place at the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York City on the night of June 28, 1969. Consider, in contrast, Anna Campbell's sculpture *Battering Ram for Sylvia, for Marsha, for Stormé* (2018) composed of a parking meter, a mirror ball, steel, lumber, and hardware. See "Apparatus for a Dream Sequence," Anna Campbell, accessed September 22, 2023, https://annacampbell.net/Apparatus-for-a-Dream-Sequence.

[18] On the planned monuments to trans activists Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, see, for example, Scottie Andrew, "A Bust of Marsha P. Johnson Went Up near the Stonewall Inn as a Tribute to the Transgender Activist," CNN, August 30, 2021, https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/28/us/marsha-p-johnson-bust-new-york-trnd/index.html.

of literal whitewashed bronze sculptures in Christopher Street Park,[19] but by, for example, the tradition of marching, perhaps even more so by the Dyke March,[20] which refuses to get a permit and has marched without a permit and without collaboration with law enforcement since it has been held.

What that might look like outside the U.S. is hard for me to imagine or project. But I also think that many of my colleagues think that part of what might be really crucial to thinking about history is thinking about narratives that are less constrained by conventional forms of documents or evidence, and thinking about ancestors and thinking about modes of survival in ways that don't just, for example, help us replicate contemporary power structures, but help us imagine alternatives, so that a different kind of history might reinforce the idea of a missing queer history.

## Part 2

### Modes of Undoing

**Jovita Pristovšek:** Well, then we come now to the second part, which has to do with your work in relation to movements, to activist movements, to consider them as a possibility of opposition to the current state of affair. And since you both have already pointed out quite a few possible ways, also with regards to modes of undoing, ways of thinking, can we go at all beyond certain blockages, line of no trespass that come up in theory.

For example, in Afropessimism,[21] which presents the figure of the slave as a threshold that we cannot "pass," or rather, "work with or through" if you are



19 Christopher Street Park is now the site of the Stonewall National Monument. See "Christopher Park / Stonewall National Monument," NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, accessed September 21, 2023, https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/christopher-park/.

20 On the New York City Dyke March that started in 1993, see "Herstory of the Dyke March," NYC Dyke March, accessed September 21, 2023, https://www.nycdykemarch.com/herstory.

21 One of the beginnings of what came to be known as Afropessism would be Saidiya V. Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Hartman's conversation with Wilderson about the book's propositions regarding the afterlives of slavery. Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003): 183–201, https://doi.org/10.1215/quiparle.13.2.183. But a key foundational texts also include Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University

White. So I am interested in how you see your work in relation to Afropessimism. For example, can Afropessimism be seen as opposition to the current "state of mind" in the US, and can Marxism be seen as relevant opposition to neoliberal global capitalism? Perhaps we'll start with you, Jill, and ask you another question, Anna.

**Casid**: Well, one of the difficulties with formulations like Afropessimism, I think, is that you can end up—and I do not mean to say that you do—making more of a monolith than may be there. I think the work of Saidiya V. Hartman, Frank B. Wilderson, and Che Gossett is very important in showing how anti-Blackness is not analogizable.[22] Perhaps I am still most excited by the way Christina Sharpe[23] describes anti-Blackness as an overall climate and within that total climate finds ways to work in and with what she describes as "the wake." There is something about this particular kind of mourning work that speaks to me deeply. But I would also say that I find it exciting that it is not about overcoming the past, but thinking about how to work in it and with it. An important aspect of that is . . . I have learned, I think, to do the more humble, microscopic, limited, slower work of understanding each situation as one in which you not only have to check your privilege, but also find ways not to reinforce or repeat Whiteness.

And I suppose I also consider the work of Palestinian artists, but also Jewish scholars and artists in the Diaspora who refuse to accept Whiteness and think about how to refuse, but also the exceptional situation of the Holocaust as really important, it's not about leaving behind the figure of the slave, but understanding relationally and transversally the carceral apartheid regime of our time, which is arguably not just the state of Israel, but certainly vitally centrally so.



Press, 1982) and Sylvia Wynter, "'No Humans Involved': An Open Letter to My Colleagues," *Forum N. H. I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 42–73.

22 Of the many key texts, see, for example, Saidiya V. Hartman, "The Dead Book Revisited," *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (October 2016): 208-15, https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.6.2.0208; Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020); and Che Gossett, "Blackness, Animality, and the Unsovereign," *Verso Blog*, September 8, 2015, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/2228-che-gossett-blackness-animality-and-the-unsovereign.

23 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

And the example of the way the state of Israel has used necrolandscaping both as a means of extraction and as a means of planting trees to cover the uplifting of villages is a key example of how landscaping has been and continues to be a key aspect of propping that regime in our time.

But I also see, say, the work of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, their installation and artists' book *And Yet My Mask Is Powerful*, but also more recent work.[24] They're more known in a way for reanimating the archive of resistance in the modes of group assembly and dancing. But another important aspect of their practice that gets less attention is their interest in traces such as thistles and cacti that seemingly miraculously appear as signs of where to return to, and even as a way to create a space for the right of return by pushing through the thick cover of the Israeli state that disguise the remains of the removal of those villages. You can see the resistance in cacti and thistles emerging as a trace of a still present potential for thriving. I realize that I have been doing this all along, but I wanted to give, I suppose, a more sensory, potent but also different kind of image or figure for a way of thinking about transversal vulnerability that insists not only on this kind of miraculous dismantling of Whiteness, but on a microscopic undoing of Whiteness through a different kind of solidarity in the diaspora.[25]

**Transversal Vulnerability**

**Pristovšek**: That opening of space you offer via transversal vulnerability is really, really important. Alessandra Raengo in one of the liquid blackness issues said that race is everybody's business because it is constructed with everybody's senses.[26]

**Casid**: Exactly.



**Pristovšek**: I very much appreciate this opening that you are putting forward. So I also wanted to ask you, Anna, about the artistic practices. What are the practices that influence your work? What practices do you think form an oppo-

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[24] Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, *And Yet My Mask is Powerful* (New York: Printed Matter, 2017).

[25] Jill H. Casid, "With Palestine Still," in Larissa Sansour et al., "The JVC Palestine Portfolio," *Journal of Visual Culture* 20, no. 2 (August 2021): 363–66.

[26] Alessandra Raengo, "Blackness, Aesthetics, Liquidity," *Liquid Blackness* 1, no. 2 (April 2014): 5–18.

sition to the current state of mind, to capitalism, and of course are relevant to your practice?

**Campbell**: I was trained as a sculptor and I worked on a public art commission before I graduated. So the discussion about who the public is and what kind of art the public wants or needs and how that relates to the idea of monuments and memorials is kind of a cloud of questions that has been haunting me for quite a while. I would also say that this kind of loose affinity for practices that sculpture produces always plays very strongly with connections to and diversions from tradition. And part of that push and pull has to do with a kind of mechanical studio practice, you know, casting, etc. Both in my own work and in my teaching, I am critically connecting some of these traditions to digital fabrication processes. So things like sea and sea routing and laser cutting and 3D printing, where people negotiate a workflow that moves from digital to mechanical fabrication and sometimes back and forth a few times.

What's interesting about that is that at different periods of time, people have the skills or the capacity, the familiarity, maybe even the sense of permission or comfort to work in different ways, for example, with their hands or through a screen. And that leads to the fact that there's a kind of workflow that no one is good at because it requires such a wide range of modes of working. And so there's been at this point, I think, a lot of interesting scholarship around ideas of failure and thinking about how we might use these tools, which were in some ways really presented to us with this idea of a very utopic future. I mean, the promises that were made about what 3D printing would enable have evaporated into thin air. And now we are kind of back to that, but maybe there will be 3D-printed houses. So there's kind of a cycle of promises and realizing that we are still living in the same world where those promises cannot be realized because the problem was never producing more things. The problem was always workflow.



Now when I think about the discourse that this impossible workflow can bring into focus or make dominant for people, whether it's in the gallery or in the classroom, I honestly find that really exciting. We think about *The 3D Additivist Cookbook*[27] as a great example of the first moment of an articulation of counter

[27] Morehshin Allahyari and Daniel Rourke, eds., *The 3D Additivist Cookbook* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2017), https://additivism.org/cookbook.

strategies and a kind of hacking in not just a screen-based way, but in a physical way, cultural expectations and power dynamics through this sort of media. And being able to do decolonial work, thinking about the ways that the accumulation of data is its own violence, and so how can artists who work with different forms of data push back against that. I think that there's also for me some really rich untapped kind of material metaphors around thinking, for example, the idea of the 3D printed object as a copy without an original, and how that might offer us some things around discourses of gender and authenticity that are potentially really quite rich.

There is something very exciting to show up in this moment where we have a series of technologies that end up being quite diagnostically helpful in terms of helping us understand how the culture is currently manifesting. One way maybe I can find a connection with Casid's work is the idea that to turn this plantation machine is a way to insist on it being a technology with a particular workflow with operators.[28] I similarly think this getting into working with contemporary technologies is a way to continue the conversation. Not only just in the ways that you structure your research but in any number of ways where critique may unfold.

**Hacking and Games**

**Pristovšek**: I remember in your presentation in Ljubljana, I was struck by how the space is really gendered and how these everyday objects are gendered. I have to admit that I did not even realize that a simple object could have all these gendered meanings. I think that's the kind of agency we find in your practice with this mode of undoing, questioning of what is public sex and what is public gender.



**Campbell**: I think it's maybe often the case that for those who are, you know, not the intended users or operators, there's often the potential to kind of deconstruct a little bit. In the context of the studio. I think that's also why the very masculinist space of working with digital tools and digital design, and because it's such a strong example of gatekeeping, also ends up being a place where the

[28] Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

voices of people like Porpentine[29] or Anna Anthropy,[30] both transwomen who do a lot of work with hacking and games, bring very different questions, goals, etc. that end up being ways to peel away aspects of those interfaces that might otherwise be taken for granted.

## Part 3

**Vesna Liponik**: We are finally approaching "the body," the crucial topic of the issue. So my question would be how to think the body and also agency and in connection to that, the relation between subjects and objects in the context of necropolitics and the Necrocene and what you are talking about. We have this humanistic construction of the subject and the body that is based on the objectification of the Black body and all that is not human. So how can we rethink and reconceptualize these concepts? What would be the alternatives if we do not want to fit into this tradition of liberal humanism?[31]

### A Body Disintegrated, a Body Dispersed

**Casid**: I think that the imaginary of, to take the example of the work of Maria Thereza Alves that I talked about in the lecture, has something to do with the seeds unwittingly carried along in throwaway dirt that allows us to reproach not only the landscape but also the body via a figure that is so central and to think the dispersal of a group body.

So the ways that we describe displaced persons, people who have been flung across is the diaspora, right? The dispersed seed. And yet that dispersed seed is central to this hetero-patriarchal imaginary of a particular form of reproduction.



[29] Porpentine Charity Heartscape is a video game designer, new media artist, writer and curator based in Oakland, California. See https://xrafstar.monster/.

[30] Anna Anthropy is a video game designer, role-playing game designer, and interactive fiction author and is the game designer in residence at the DePaul University College of Computing and Digital Media. See https://w.itch.io/.

[31] Liberal humanism encompasses the major philosophies of the bourgeois Enlightenment such as rationalism, empiricism, and utilitarianism; the economic principles of bourgeois ideology (such as rationality, laissez-faire, and free competition); the political principles of democracy, individual rights, and constitutional government; etc. The common feature of liberal humanism, then, is a commitment to "man" whose essence is freedom (of choice). It assumes that the subject is the free, unrestricted author of meaning and action, the origin of history.

And the seed, which is not only carried along without clear agency, but is also evidence of a destructive, extractive waste process that nonetheless weirdly endures because it can go into a kind of hibernation mode, feels like a kind of, of thinking of both the pre- and post- body, a body disintegrated, a body dispersed that is not just about a lostness, searching for an originary home, but a way of holding on and even emerging not necessarily into what we expect a body to look like.

And in that I see tremendous potential. I mean, the regime of the visible, surveilled body that looks like a body and it holds no promise for those of us who don't resemble that form. And that's why I see what I would call a process of a kind of queer or trans deformation too. And in that echo also the echo of the deformed, right?

The deformed that would be understood to be not only lacking the proper appropriate form, but to be more than grotesque, to be unable to perform what is expected so that alliance also with disability and ability feels really crucial here as a way of imagining something that's both anti- or before the human and after the human. And that's where I would also introduce yet another concept, which would be processes of inhumation. If you think of the English term "to inhume," that is the same term for what we would describe as despicable anti-human practices. It is also the term for burying in the ground. This idea that to destroy the human is to bring it down to the level of the humus, to the level of the earth. But that's precisely where we need to go. I mean, it's where we've been put despite ourselves. And yet, if we're going to hold ground, hold on to a destroyed planet and I don't see another place to go then getting down into the ground and into the earth feels like where we need to be. And so it's in that inhumation that's placed on us that I see a weird kind of potential, which is not the emergence of a body that looks like a body.



**Melancholy**

**Liponik**: Thank you. That was perfectly said. Since you have already talked a little bit about the aesthetics and seeds, I'd like to ask you to maybe elaborate a little bit more on that in terms of form and content and also in terms of the concept of melancholy, which I think was very important to both of you.

**Casid**: I suppose part of the excitement here for me is thinking always with forms of matter, decayed, despised, deformed, out of place, but also out of time as a resource for a refusal to move on into the normal. And an aspect of that is aesthetic, but it's also for me affective. That is an understanding, in melancholy, a mode of relating that makes space for—maybe the best way to put this would be just—strange affective realignments. So ways that joy, rage, despair, I mean, I don't even know how to describe a kind of grief that is allowed no public space. That inconsolable and kind of mad grief that would hold with, stay with, stick with the forms of matter out of place in time that I think we all and those of us surveilled, despised also are. The relations then of form and content, I suppose it's a way of insisting on the deep form and the beyond discontent. You know, the what can't be contained. And I think one of the things that can't be contained now would be that surfeit of weird joy and mad grief. I think I'll stop there. I think there is a real contact point in our work. I keep thinking about, among many things, those urinal dividers that you did that feel pertinent here. By way of shorthand let's call it *You know it pisses you off . . .*[32]

**Campbell**: It's a sort of paragraph-long citation from the book *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*.[33] Well, there are two kinds of conflicting text in it. So I suppose that kind of fits also the sense of how aesthetics and motion might present mul-

[32] For the sculpture, see "Apparatus for a Dream Sequence," Anna Campbell, accessed September 22, 2023, https://annacampbell.net/Apparatus-for-a-Dream-Sequence.

[33] The full title is *You know it pisses you off, because like today, everything is so open and accepted and equal. Women, everyone goes to where they wear slacks, and I could just kick myself in the ass, because of all the opportunities I had that I had to let go because of my way. That if I was able to dress the way I wanted and everything like that I, Christ, I'd have it made, really. Makes you sick. And you look at the young people today that are gay and they're financially well-off, they got tremendous jobs, something that we couldn't take advantage of, couldn't have it. It leaves you with a lot of bitterness too. I don't go around to the gay bars much any more. It's not jealousy, it's bitterness. And I see these young people, doesn't matter which way they go, whatever the mood suits them, got tremendous jobs, and you just look at them, you know, they're happy kids, no problems. You say 'God damn it, why couldn't I have that?' And you actually get bitter, you don't even want to know them. I don't anyway. 'Cause I don't want to hear about it, don't tell me your success. Like we were talking about archives, you know where mine is, scratched on a shit-house wall, that's where it is. And all the dives in Buffalo that are still standing with my name. That's it, that's all I got to show." Kennedy, Elizabeth L., and Madeline D. Davis, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (New York: Penguin, 1994).* See "You Know It Pisses You Off," Anna Campbell, accessed September 22, 2023, https://annacampbell.net/You-know-it-pisses-you-off.

tiple semi-conflicting narratives, but it's a series of urinal dividers that are done in this really maybe the turn of the 20th-century sort of deeply, deeply complex wood inlay with different ribbed in lines of text. And the text is pulling from the English translation of Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*.[34] And so it's this incredibly charged language about doing and being undone with another person and a kind of plane taking a part of the body and the erotic and connective power of that. Losing yourself in this other person or through this other person in a way that also is not shy about the violence of how that might happen or feel. As a strong way of acknowledging its potency. And so if you wish to read the text and it's, you know, it's meant to be very pretty. It's meant to kind of really draw you in, you end up positioning your body really tightly in this constrained area that puts you either on display to other people in the space or very, very close to someone who might be looking at the adjacent panels. And so there's something about risk and vulnerability that gets insisted on spatially. But I want to return to the title that I mentioned, and it's a quote by a butch lesbian who would have come of age now decades ago and is talking to these researchers. And, you know, there's a generational gap between myself and these researchers and then the person that they're talking to and the discourse is this really enraged insistence that what is available and accessible to contemporary lesbians and contemporary being this other generational moment so exceeds what she had access to and what she had to give up in order to be herself. And that that would have been in describing the culture in which women are not allowed to wear pants and that that being a sort of astonishing transgression. And what it does for me is that it kind of enunciates this almost unthinkable debt to another generation that couldn't possibly be repaid. The final line is something like, you know, all these archives, my archive is carved into a shit house door. And so it also instructs at the same time for people who are looking at these dividers to also think about that gap of what is not in the archive, what people might have used alternately as archival spaces and to read the urinal dividers, then also differently. And then I suppose it's worth tagging that the architectural device of the urinal divider is also not one that's supposed to be accessible to anyone who identifies as a woman. So it's also inviting that other space of transgression as well. That I think does on the one hand a kind of proto-trans solidarity in the work and a retroactive sort of openness of thinking expansively about the source of the quote and



[34] Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, trans. David Le Vay (New York: William Morrow, 1975).

really pushing, I think, some difficult historical context at the same time that it acknowledges what Audre Lorde would call the power of the erotic.[35]

## Part 4

**Gržinić**: I want to close the interview by going back to Jill's practice. Jill, we did not actually get to ask you about your film work. And your film work is impressive because it has this theoretical influence, of course, but the way you put the images, the text, and the essayistic element together is not just a realization, but really a deep exploration of the ways in which we can work with the images and how we contextualize them as we try to also pursue questions that arise from your theoretical work. So it would be very important to reflect on your methodology. How do you enter the film practice, what is your approach to your films from your point of view, from your theoretical point of departure? How do you work, what kind of aesthetics do you actually construct? Do you have a name for the way you call your films, if we can look at your work, because they are more than just the experimental film? That's how I see them. They are like little engines. I like this term from Donna Haraway when she talks about the coyote.

### Sensory Machines of Deformation and Destruction

**Casid**: Oh, well, I mean, the small engine is beautiful. I should acknowledge here, and I'm excited to acknowledge here, working with Jack Kellogg on the films I have been working as an artist practitioner really my whole career and in fact started out working collaboratively. I have in some ways found it impossible to think at all without thinking in terms of images, and yet also almost always with images that give us a sense of the other side of the image. And that's not necessarily apprehensive all at all by the sense of sight and images that destroy dominant images. Images that are their own little sensory machines of deformation and destruction. I called the first film *Untitled (Melancholy as Medium)* (2020–21),[36] and if I were to describe the aesthetics, but also the method of both



[35] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984), 53–59. This paper was delivered in August 1978.

[36] The film debuted in *Chapter 5, Melancholy as Medium*, conceived by Jill Casid for *Indisposable: Structures of Support after the Americans with Disabilities Act*, Ford Foundation Gallery, curated by Jessica A. Cooley and Ann M. Fox, NYC, June 2021. Featuring Jill Casid, Pamela Sneed, Abdul Aliy Muhammad and Pato Hebert from the What Would

that I screened and I'm in the process of doing research work for a third, I would say that they're all working with melancholy as a medium, not just as a topic or theme, but as a method. And by that I would say that it's not nostalgia, though. I do work with outmoded technologies.

So each of the films is also constructed in part out of a photo practice with a strange camera introduced in the 1970s. That was the first device to do what our cell phones do now and that we take for granted, and that is to condense into the same device the capacity to take, make and socially circulate images, but did so in a quite different way, which is to make a vulnerable original that has in some ways none of the properties of what we associate with photography, and that is seriality and reproduction. And the Polaroid SX-70 excites me too, because of the ways in which it—well it's supposedly the amateur's magnificent machine that releases you from making any decisions. It's also incredibly unreliable and deeply vulnerable to the weather and the fact that it often pulls away from the image it supposedly captures. The ways that it bleeds, oozes sticks. It does something I think, to insist on returning us to our material condition. I'm working with melancholy as medium as a way of refusing to move into a version of an image regime. So now photography is the sea within which we swim.

But photography that's lifted off from and is not only extractive in terms of data, but continues to lift off from the tethered, vulnerable materiality that we still live in. And so I see as a key task of melancholy as medium to return us to a felt recognition of that tethering. And so I've also often described them as films that I really want to be small, to be intimate, to refuse the illusion of being able to



an HIV Doula Do collective, fierce pussy (with core founding members Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard and Carrie Yamaoka), Pamela Sneed, and Heather Lynn Johnson. See "Indisposable: Structures of Support after the ADA, Chapter 5; Melancholy as Medium," Ford Foundation, June 9, 2021, https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/the-ford-foundation-center-for-social-justice/ford-foundation-gallery/events/indisposable-structures-of-support-after-the-ada-chapter-5/; "Indisposable: Structures of Support after the Americans with Disabilities Act," Ford Foundation, accessed September 22, 2023, https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/the-ford-foundation-center-for-social-justice/ford-foundation-gallery/exhibitions/indisposable-structures-of-support-after-the-ada/. On the film, see also Jill H. Casid, "Melancholy as Medium," in "Exploring Indisposability: The Entanglements of Crip Art," eds. Jessica A. Cooley and Ann M. Fox, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 1–6, https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.13243.

move into and through the screen on a mode of microcinema that returns us to the body not as a sovereign container, but as a delicate, vulnerable, dispersed, itchy, squirmy, uncomfortable, but also a special place.

I could keep going, but I would maybe also describe the films as essays, as film essays, but a film essay that ultimately creates the situation for a different kind of relationality between the matter of the screen image and the matter of our vulnerable, tethered bodies, and for that work have also been thinking a tremendous amount with disability justice work, disability justice aesthetics that would see in image and audio description a key mode of access that doesn't necessarily make everything transparent, but instead makes for a denser, thicker sensory experience.

And yet, while I'm deeply invested in that destigmatization of melancholy, I think I'm still so deeply, resistantly attached to a version of a queer practice that is invested in the potentials of the negative that I don't understand that version of accessibility to be utopian. I understand it to be resistant and difficult and to even exacerbate a sense of the inadequacy of the kinds of supports that we have. So I would also understand that melancholy as medium to be an exacerbating force.

**Care for the Irreparable**

**Gržinić**: I would like to thank you, especially for this last part, because you have a very clear position, especially in a Slovenian context that stays with theoretical psychoanalysis and where melancholy is a kind of taboo. This means that melancholy is worked up in the Freudian sense and is also theoretically something that is always pushed aside, and it means that melancholy today is a form that cooperates very strongly with neoliberal global capitalism. The way you outlined and explained the topic, also why to think and use it, I think was an important point to conclude the interview. To get to the idea of also thinking historically and trying to understand this, as you say, power of the negative, which in a way opens up other possibilities, also because of neoliberal global capitalism imposing positivism.



**Casid**: Optimize any and everything. Exactly. As if we can get all discomfort somehow miraculously wished away and that somehow everything can be repaired. And yet I'm insisting on a certain space of the irreparable and care for the irreparable.

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