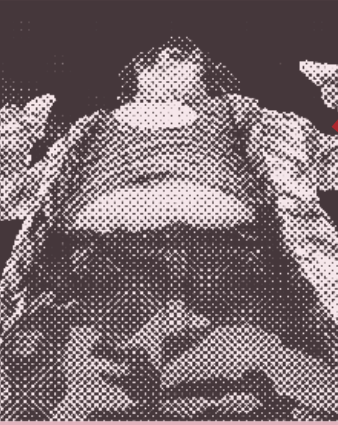


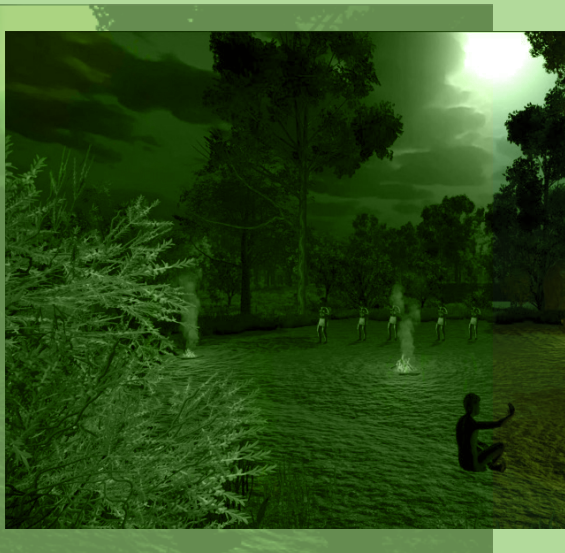
By
Olivia
Acciarito



Portals of the Otherworld



Realities Reimagined



I would like to begin first by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which I live, study, and exist, and on which this publication was written, the Bunurong/Boonwurrung people, and the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. Sovereignty is not, and has never been, ceded.

I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and future, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who may be viewing or reading this work.

I recognise and acknowledge my place on these lands as an uninvited occupant, who has benefited from colonial occupation through default of my whiteness. Like the rest of my family, I am a trespasser on this land and with each step, I recognise that, however implicitly, I participate in a history of cultural dispossession that to this day, lacks any real means for reparation and reconciliation.

There is an ongoing cultural amnesia that permeates the white collective consciousness, one which remains ignorant of the brutality and violence that is inflicted on Indigenous peoples, and which forms the basis of Australian identity. Growing up as a third-generation Italian Australian woman, it is easy enough to distance oneself from the settler-colonial identity through a denial of involvement in historical acts of trauma; to turn a blind eye to the power and privilege which continues to silence the stories and knowledge which are weaved into this sacred land we tread.

I recognise that deferring to an ignorant disconnection from the initial point of colonial contact makes me complicit in the colonial discourses and structures which continue to ferment. Regardless of semantics, we do not exist independently of one another. Australia's racial pasts, the damaging effects of which are still felt today, and the possibility of an Indigenised future is one we all play a part in and have a responsibility toward.

We all have a role to play in creating space for, and upholding, the relationships of reciprocal empathy, social practices, deep listening, and respect for the unique knowledge, connection, and practices held and continued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of our living, breathing land.



Acknowledgement of Country

Positionality

We do not move through this world, as independent entities. As we move through space, we weave¹ tapestries, collecting stitches of memory. People and places become the fabric through which we collage our lives, stringing together moments and encounters which become reciprocally entwined.

The history of Western research methods and epistemological enquiry privilege a white, Western voice – one which stifles and silences those who present as Other, to further erase those anathema to the colonial project. Beginning any autoethnographic research necessarily means beginning from the point of interiority. We must interrogate and situate ourselves in relation to the story and the narrative we create,² for all research is a poetic of some sorts. A practice in relationality, one must always state their positionality, recognising each stitch which has created our past, present and future. Who we are, our experiences, culture, beliefs, and learned knowledges form the way we conduct ourselves within the world – our voice does not come from nowhere.³ To practice positioning is to understand that we have a responsibility to the knowledges we seek and document, and to those whom it may affect. For you, the reader, this forthcoming positionality statement should allow you to know me, and how we relate to one another, forming a metaphorical community within which we can find common ground to findings presented through this publication. My experience of the artworks explored here are mine alone, and I cannot hope or expect that my voice will be shared by all. At the very least, I hope you will use this as a jumping board, a baseline

1 Shannon Foster, "On the Shores of the Narinya: Contemporary D'harawal Interactions with Ancestral Knowledges," in *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History*, ed. Ann McGrath, et al., (NewSouth Publishing, 2003), n.p.

2 Tony E. Adams, et al., *Autoethnography*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2014), 57.

3 Alida Goffinski, "Making Sense of ART: A Methodological Framework for the Study of Augmented Reality Art," in *Augmented Reality Art: From an Emerging Technology to a Novel Creative Medium*, ed. Vladimir Geroimenko (Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022), 32.





through which we could and should interrogate the futures presented to us, and how to create more fruitful futures for all bodies and entities in our shared community.

Born and raised in Melbourne, Australia, I had what one might call a fairly typical Australian childhood. The grandchild of Italian immigrants who came over the in wave of European immigration in the 1960s, I have always believed myself to be far enough removed from the history of British colonisation on this land as to absolve myself from the ongoing subjugation of Indigenous lives on this land. My education throughout my formative years seemed to affirm this distance – it was not until my university education that I recognised my place on this land as an uninvited visitor, with a responsibility to critically engage with the ways in which settler-colonialism arrests and suspends the possibility of non-white, alternative futures, and privileges the continuation of others. As a non-Indigenous person moving on this land, although my worldview is not Country, I am on Country, and in Country. We all, therefore, have obligations to this understanding, whether we choose to realise this or not.⁴The future and its realisation is one which affects all of us, and one in which we all play a role in the restitution of those versions of hope and existence which have been destroyed through the Western colonial project. If the future is a “place of conscious reflection on the past and our place within it,”⁵ then we must all first understand our relationship to the pasts which construct it, so that we may begin the process of reconsidering and reworlding that which is yet to come.

4 Jock Gilbert and Sophia Pearce, “Buninyong – Gol Gol – Melbourne (AU), 14:00 AEST, ZOOM Video Conference, 31 March, 2021,” in *The Politics of Public Space*, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 385.

5 Anne Chahine, “Future memory work: unsettling temporal Othering through speculative research practices,” *Qualitative Research* 24, no. 2 (2024): 201, DOI: 10.1177/14687941221129804.



***“Ello warawara
naruwai burudi”***

***To know tomorrow,
we
must first
know***



Introduction

Why Portals of the Otherworld?

To understand *Portals of the Otherworld*, it may first be useful to understand the way in which I arrived at this publication. I have always been drawn to the potentiality of art and its experience as a social process. Art itself can be transformative in its phenomenology, having the potential to change the way we think about ourselves, and our relation to the past, present, and future. Whether a passing interaction, or taking the time to sit and be present with an artwork, allowing its affectations to wash over you as if a tidal wave, the experience of art is one which stays with us – one which, whether it has incited *jouissance*, ire, or confusion, forces us to return to a place within ourselves to question why we feel a certain way.

I have often felt, through my induction at the university art school institution, that membership or entrance to the world of high art and culture to be slightly suffocating and exclusionary. The hallowed halls of the museum or the art gallery, with its pristine whiteness and expulsion of the body from the white cube,⁶ forcing one to move about the gallery space as if on a conveyor belt, the eye roaming from wall to wall, careful not to leave so much as a trace of hair or dust behind, does not speak to a history of open access. It is for this reason that I have held a particular interest in public art; art which facilitates those daily interactions that one isn't necessarily mindful of, but become part of our collective consciousness and experience as a society. How is art experienced in and by the 'public', and how do certain forms of art being removed from the gallery space change how we may interact with ourselves, others, and our material realities and environments? These are the questions which pushed me toward *Portals of the Otherworld*.

"Where to from here?" is a question I often find myself interrogating in my head. Within our social moment, one is never too disconnected from ques-

⁶ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, 1st ed (Lapis Press, 1986).

tions of the future. As we bare witness to an ever changing world, where financial, economic, health, and social crises seem to flash across our screens in a chaotic flurry, one crisis quickly forgotten as another rears its head, we become suspended in an ironically frantic moment of stasis, where the future lingers in the present,⁷ prolonging time and the impossibility of realising alternative futures to the ones presented to us by the machine of capital and colonisation of the Western world. In a world seemingly without hope, where the ability to imagine otherwise seems an act of futility, creative and hopeful futures have become more important than ever. Western colonial hegemonies think in binaries. Whether it be man/woman, black/white, savage/noble, the Western temporal conscious demands that 'here' be metaphorically distanced from 'there', a superfluous construct in which one condition necessitates the arrival of another. The same can be true for the interplay between creativity and destruction. In fact, one only need to look to Picasso to understand this prevailing thought – "before every creation comes destruction."⁸ This is an ontology particular to Western thought – the Hindu trimurti figures Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu in place of the cosmic functions of creation, destruction, and preservation respectively.⁹ Similarly, the word 'kuumba' in Swahili has a double meaning, referring to "an act of spontaneous creativity but also creativity as leaving one's community more beautiful than one has found it."¹⁰ Colonial futures imagine the demise of that which presents as anathema to its pursuit of linearity and ever-growing progress – it cannot exist without destruction, for nothing can exist in a triangulated matrix in a Western worldview. If we continue to hold this view, only thinking creatively when there has been complete decimation of our socioecological and environmental structures, then I fear it may be too late. At the precipice of total disaster, now more than ever we must question our futures as they are presented to us. We must deconstruct the Western frameworks which consign them as providence.

This is the basis of Portals of the Otherworld. Portals of the Otherworld asks us to think creatively about our futures by adding a future dimension to act of remembering the past.¹¹ In doing so, we are prompted to radically reconstruct the possibilities of our present moment to allow for future transformations, exposing the future not as a fixed element, but inherently mutable and malleable. Through the lens of alternative futurisms such as Indigenous futurism, queer futurism, and eco-futurism, public artworks by Australian artists Brett Leavy, Alison Bennett, and Leah Barclay will be analysed to as to explore how encounters with locative XR public art interventions can (re)construct our relationship to one another, as well as our material and conceptual understandings of public space. Collapsing the past, present and future through a psychology of disincarnation¹², the works recover the existence of erased publics from within urban space by

7 Martin Savransky et al., "The lure of possible futures: On speculative research," in *Speculative Futures: The Lure of Possible Futures*, ed. Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky, and Marsha Rosengarten (Routledge, 2017), 1.

8 Alfonso Montuori and Gabrielle Donnelly, "Why Creative Futures?," in *Routledge Handbook for Creative Futures*, ed. Gabrielle Donnelly and Alfonso Montuori (Routledge, 2022), 13

9 Montuori and Donnelly, "Why Creative Futures?," 1

10 Montuori and Donnelly, "Why Creative Futures?," 14.

11 Chahine, "Future memory work," 190.

12 Christiane Paul, "Virtual Reality," in *Digital Art* (Thames & Hudson, 2023), 68.

revising and imploding settler futurity, allowing for multivalence to enter our negotiations of space, time, and the future itself. To think through the ideas of futurism is no longer idealistic, but contingent.¹³ The public art encounters explored in *Portals of the Otherworld* create a paradigm shift, transgressing the boundaries of space, whereby hope becomes generative of radical inclusive futures¹⁴, capable of freeing us from the clasp of the colonial, capitalistic, Anthropogenic present.

Portals of the Otherworld democratizes the act of creative thinking. Through encounters with digital public art, especially those explored here, creativity is extended from individual works of a usually masculine 'genius', to a way of thinking through dysfunctional social patterns in the "everyday, everywhere, everyone"¹⁵ – to change our ways of being, doing, and relating.¹⁶ Digital public art is uniquely placed, then; unlike the plastic arts, our analysis must solely be focused on the psychosomatic and the sensorial. The works presented ask us to "respond to the insistence of a possible that demands to be realised,"¹⁷ furnishing new social realities that ask us to think beyond our settler colonial reality, to come up with new propositions of creative futures where all bodies are welcome and co-exist. *Portals of the Otherworld* asks us to stand in the divides that place us away from one another; to come together with humility and openness to another; to heal across racial, cultural and ecological lines;¹⁸ and to create futures which benefit us all.

Portals of the Otherworld is structured in four parts. The introduction introduces key concepts which form the framework through which public artwork will be analysed. Each of the remaining three parts centres around a particular co-futurism, and a public artwork through which these concepts converge to push the public to image new ways of imagining their futures. The alternative visions spiral from one another, calling into question normative paradigms of time and space, so as to recover futures through our own reimagination of how we exist, and who exists, in public. I would encourage you to think of this book as speculation in itself, making material and "reaching out from interpretation and analysis to imagine...alternate possibilities."¹⁹

13 Jill Bennett and Saskia Beudel, *Curating Sydney: Imagining the City's Future*, 1st ed (NewSouth Publishing, 2014), 22.

14 Bronwyn Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," in *The Routledge Handbook of Australian Indigenous Peoples and Futures*, ed. Bronwyn Carlson, Madi Day, Sandy O'Sullivan, and Tristan Kennedy (Routledge, 2023), 16-17.

15 Montuori and Donnelly, "Why Creative Futures?", 13.

16 Montuori and Donnelly, "Why Creative Futures?", 13.

17 Savransky et al., "The lure of possible futures," 10.

18 Sarah van Gelder, "Creative Futures Begin With Reckoning With an Unjust Past," in *Routledge Handbook for Creative Futures*, ed. Gabrielle Donnelly and Alfonso Montuori (Routledge, 2022), 170.

19 Alexis Lothian, *Old Futures* (New York University Press, 2018), 24.



“Public” art vs “Public” space

In order to make sense of what is being asked through this publication, it may first be helpful to interrogate why we should delineate between “public” art and “public” space. By its very essence, is not most art – be it in a gallery space or on a street corner – “public”? And is any space that is not the domestic home, a “public” space?

Public Art

The conflation of the words “art” and “public” have long since been entangled in an almost awkward, uneasy relationship. As Malcolm Miles explores:

A definition of ‘public art’ is fraught with the contradiction that whilst modernist art has occupied the hermetic space of the white-walled gallery, art forms more closely linked to areas of everyday life have been marginalised by the art established as lacking aesthetic quality.²⁰

‘Public art’ itself is a term which eludes definition. These definitions have oscillated between the physical and social²¹ – either appearing in situ, or engaging issues which are pertinent to the socio-politic. All art is public in this sense, creating a publicising vector²² which often propels the work above its singular creator. At the same art, despite its public nature, all art is also necessarily private, as it demands an experience that is uniquely constructed by our inner, conscious reception.

Taking this, how might we then go about creating a definition of “public art” which seems to honour its unique position within the art world? If public art is still a “suppositional child”²³ to the artworld, then, just as public art has left the art gallery, we also must leave the traditional confines of art

20 Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City*, 1st ed. (Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 87.

21 Martha Radice and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier, “Introduction: Encounters with Art in the Urban Public,” in *Urban Encounters: Art and the Public*, ed. Martha Radice and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 5.

22 Hilde Hein, “Ephemeral Objects and Pluralised Publics,” in *Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2006), 122.

23 Martin Zebracki, “Introducing geographies of public art: Interrelationships between artwork, public space and beholder,” in *Public Artopia: Art in Public Space in Question* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 4.

as a purely aesthetic experience in order to understand the particular space which public art holds within the social consciousness. It must be viewed as having an agenda dedicated to urban futures, as opposed to "aesthetic reductionism or art market success."²⁴

For our purposes here, I propose a definition of public art which understands it as that which renegotiate the social identities we create for ourselves, and that which bring public space into being²⁵ by bringing communities into visibility within public space. The artworks we are speaking about here are temporary interventions in their locative sites. I feel this is an important distinction to make. Being a transient agent in their urban fabrics, these works become poetic, presenting an alteration of difference and provoking controversy as to our own subjectivities. Through the presentation of alternative narratives, past memories are ignited through modes of "collective remembrance".²⁶

In extending beyond the institutional space, public art in this definition has a radical potential for changing the way we interact with, and inhabit, public space. Public art allows for collective imagination as to the very fabric of the city,²⁷ imbuing an ethics of care for the communities created and defined by different public artworks. It enables new formations and as Jill Bennett and Saskia Beudel explain, is "prospective rather than representational – a means of recasting and reanimating space."²⁸

Public Space

If public art is defined as those works which bring public space into being, then what exactly is public space? It is easy to defer to public space as anything outside the private dimension of the home. However, this treats public space as a matter of fact – space is never a given, and public space is something which must be continuously produced.²⁹

Our models of public space in its current form date back to Hellenic and Roman societies. The Greek ideal of public space was organised around the people; as Jack Self explores, rather than being tied to geographical location, the "people defined the city...there was no distinction between the people and the city."³⁰ Understood this way, public space becomes less material, and more metaphorical of the activities that take place within it. A site of exposure, public space is only realised through negotiation,³¹ made active and agentic when voices participate within it, socially produced as

24 Malcolm Miles, "Convivial Cities," in *Art, Space and the City* (Taylor & Francis, 1997), 191.

25 Jill Bennett and Saskia Beudel, *Curating Sydney: Imagining the City's Future*, 1st ed. (NewSouth Publishing, 2014), 33.

26 Martin Abbott, and Jennifer Minner, "The art of resisting mega-event amnesia: reconstructing urban memory post-expo in Sydney and Brisbane," *City* 28, no. 3 (2024): 463, DOI: 10.1080/13604813.2024.2366119.

27 Bennett and Beudel, *Curating Sydney*, 47.

28 Bennett and Beudel, *Curating Sydney*, 74.

29 Lesia Prokopenko, "Changing Space," in *The Routledge Companion to Art in the Public Realm*, ed. Cameron Cartiere, and Leon Tan (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 392.

30 Jack Self, "London (UK) – Melbourne (AU), 09:00 BST – 18:00 AEST, ZOOM Video Conference, 16 April, 2020," in *The Politics of Public Space*, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 107.

31 Tania Davidge, "Federation Square, Melbourne," in *The Politics of Public Space*, Volume 1: Public Lectures in Contentious Places, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2020), 85.

publics engage with and within it. Public space, therefore, can be conceived of as “patterns of social relations”³², which shift and become constituted by the co-presence of multivalent publics brought into contact within it. It can be momentary and ephemeral, tied to a collective subjective experience as opposed to a built environment.

Understood properly as a space defined by the variation of people who exist within it, the importance of the interstice between public art and public space becomes realised. Western creation of material and dematerial public spaces are created around exclusion – they undermine the “itch of adjacency”³³ necessary to the health of public space. The future of the urban city can only work through “constructing a public space of difference, a space where we encounter people who are different to us.”³⁴ Inclusion is a necessary engine of public space, and the intervention of public art within the city allows excluded publics to occupy a space within settler colonial societies which they have not been granted the right to by the hegemony – or rather, have existed beneath its veneer. Public art allows for these invisible counterpublics to be made visible, interpellating the audience’s comfort through disembodiment of the self, and a concomitant embodiment of interrupting publics. This interpellation subverts the Habermasian notions of public space,³⁵ fragmenting the ‘universal’ public into a range of counterpublics which renegotiate the affective space of the city itself. Public art is the trace which anticipates the transformation of space and time itself.³⁶

32 Martha Radice and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier, “Introduction: Encounters with Art in the Urban Public,” in *Urban Encounters: Art and the Public*, ed. Martha Radice and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 7.

33 Mark Jacques, “Lincoln Square, Carlton,” in *The Politics of Public Space, Volume 1: Public Lectures in Contentious Places*, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2020), 26.

34 Kim Dovey, “Enterprise Park, Melbourne (AU), 7 March, 2018,” in *The Politics of Public Space, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places*, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 281.

35 Radice and Boudreault-Fournier, “Introduction”, 9.

36 Prokopenko, “Changing Space,” 392.

To change life...

we must

first

change space



Futurism, Alternative Futurisms, and the Power of Speculation

Thinking through the future has often been decried as a useless project, conflated with the philosophical pursuit of utopianism. Always elusive, the future evades our physical grasp – as much as we may barrel towards it, it always seems to move further away from us. So what use is it to think of the radical potential of public art through the vein of alternative futurisms?

If we cannot place the future in a literal place, then we must think of it psychologically. To think of the future is to consciously reflect on our present,³⁷ to bring forth remembrances of the past to create memories of a better future. Futurism gives materiality through speculation to the concrete operations of a better, future imaginaries through temporal collapse. We cannot build what we cannot imagine, so to be able to envision – and in some cases, ‘see’ – the existence of a multiplicitous public becomes of principle importance.

It is worthy, however briefly, to note that we are explicitly talking about alternative futurisms. The Italian Futurist art movement of the early 20th century became co-opted by early Fascism through its radical ideology and celebration of violence as a necessary evil for the transformation of society. Where alternative futurisms embrace the past as a way of creating more egalitarian futures, traditional futurism involves a wholesale rejection of the past,³⁸ aiming to liberate through dynamism, industrialism and modernity global publics from the ‘suffocating’ prongs of the past.

Alternative Futurism – or Co-Futurisms

Futurisms, such as the Indigenous, queer, and eco-futurisms explored here, democratise future thinking and providence, diversifying the way we make sense of the contemporary “in relation to the past and future”³⁹. The future

37 Chahine, “Future memory work,” 201.

38 James Martin, “Intersecting Planes: Futurism, Fascism, and Gramsci,” in *One Hundred Years of Futurism: Aesthetics, Politics and Performance*, ed. John London (Intellect Ltd, 2018), 113.

39 Chahine, “Future memory work,” 190.

of the hegemony is fundamentally premised on notions of erasure in the pursuit of linear progress. Stifling in its nature, hegemonic futurism imagines itself as a place of exclusion, where membership and existence is premised on ones ability to fit into the constraints of conquest and subjugation. For the future of the global North to continue, non-participating bodies, as well as the environment itself, must be quelled and erased.

The process of thinking through co-futurisms displaces Western heterotemporality, engaging with the past and the posthuman⁴⁰ to trouble belonging in the future. These futurisms perform an act of radical revisioning, moving between temporalities and materialities of the past and future to reignite existence in the present. In this sense, in applying the lens of co-futurisms to the artists' works explored in *Portals of the Otherworld*, the public artworks become a means of "recasting and reanimating place"⁴¹ beyond the "prison house"⁴² of the here and now, where the past is used to recover ways of being which were suppressed beneath the footholds of settler-colonial futurity. In bringing forth an encounter with erased bodies, these forms of futurism extricate all from the injustice of a future which is barreling toward wholesale destruction.

I have often wavered between the term 'alternative futurisms' and 'co-futurisms'. It should be noted that when speaking about Indigenous, queer, and eco-futurisms, it is preferred that we use that term 'co-futurisms'. In order to move beyond the domain of providence offered to us in settler-futurity, we must also acknowledge the ways in which we speak about the future. If the hegemonies of the Western world are premised on an exclusive membership where the right to exist is maintained through binary distinctions, then to suggest these futures as 'alternative' tends towards the notion that they are only "in opposition to hegemonic futurism."⁴³ To define them as alternative is an affirmative action which maintain the binaries that places the Other as spatially separated from the realm of the future itself, negatively categorising them as to what they are not.⁴⁴ In doing so, we do a disservice to the futures offered by Indigenous, queer and eco-futurism – what should be realised is the radical potential they offer to the way we imagine our futures.

Speculative Futures and the Radical Potential of Hope

Of course, any discussion of the future can be decried as futile by some. Here, we are not purporting to know the future, nor to suggest that in thinking through futurism to understand the ability of public artworks to change our conception of public space and our role in, we can create the futures we desire as a matter of certainty. After all, the future will always be a figurative concept for once it arrives, it is simply known as the present. The effect

⁴⁰ Michael Boyden, "Heterotemporality and Posthumanism in Alternative Futurisms," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 50, no. 1 (March 2024): 71, DOI: 10.6240/concentric.lit.202403_50(1).0004.

⁴¹ Bennett and Beudel, *Curating Sydney*, 74.

⁴² Jose Esteban Munoz, "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 1.

⁴³ Taryne Jade Taylor, "Introduction to CoFuturisms," in *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms*, ed. Taryne Jade Taylor (Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 44.

⁴⁴ Taylor, "Introduction to CoFuturisms," 44.

of thinking through futurism, and the act of speculating, is about creating future memories,⁴⁵ ones which elevate our understanding and knowing of the present and reject the notions of history and tradition as regressive or somehow primitive by connecting our future directly to notions of the past in an act of circularity. What we shape, if we are able to shape any part of the future at all through co-futurism, is our imagination of a more inclusive future.⁴⁶

"We can't possibly live otherwise until we first imagine otherwise."⁴⁷

This model of the creation of future memory does not conceptualise the future as something material to grasp. Anne Chahine puts it rather succinctly when she notes that rather than an act of sterile manifestation, the orientation of thinking about and for the future creates a space in which the future becomes "forethought, afterthought and in-between thought."⁴⁸ Derived from the notion of speculation itself, which is born of the poetic capacities of the mirror to bring together visible and invisible in the pursuit of theoretical imagining,⁴⁹ future memory "uses the future as a space in time to look back from"⁵⁰, as place to think from and with, as opposed to thinking to the future. It is a temporal location to interrogate the accepted conditions of the current moment.⁵¹

Such thinking performs a declarative and hopeful protest – specifically, a protest against the temporal constraints of the Western world. The creation of future memory through futurism in this sense has a particular utopic vein. Often drawing sighs of resignation and ire, the very utterance of the notion of utopianism draws frustration from those for whom utopianism has been co-opted as a vehicle for the totalitarian.⁵² Properly construed, however, utopianism is an impulse, drawing flexible cartographies⁵³ which enables us to chart the "not yet"⁵⁴. Co-futurisms do not necessarily seek to promote a seemingly 'perfect' world – to do so would be to replace one authoritative structure with another. Rather, thinking utopically through co-futurism, utilising the tension between the 'here' and the 'not yet here', creates a heterotopic extraterritoriality, through which an "exterior glance"⁵⁵ is placed on our society. Reframing the utopian through the co-futurist in this way makes hope agentical⁵⁶, grounding possibility and potentiality in action

45 Chahine, "Future memory work," 201.

46 Donald L. Lawler, "Certain Assurances: The Utilities of Speculative Fiction in Shaping the Future," *Mosaic: an interdisciplinary critical journal* 54, no. 2 (June 2021): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mos.2021.0018>.

47 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 17.

48 Chahine, "Future memory work," 195.

49 Savransky et al., "The lure of possible futures," 5.

50 Chahine, "Future memory work," 199.

51 Chahine, "Future memory work," 201.

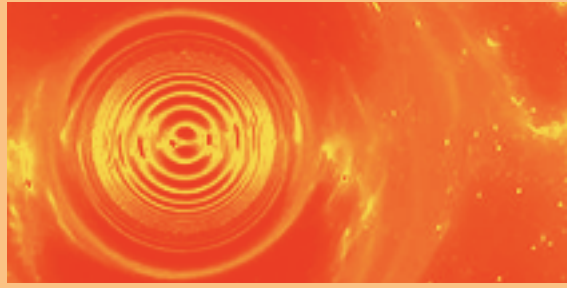
52 Mathias Thaler, "Varieties of Utopian Thinking," in *No Other Planet* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 59.

53 Thaler, "Varieties of Utopian Thinking," 62.

54 Anna Gilarek, "The temporal displacement of utopia and dystopia in feminist speculative fiction," *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, no. 3 (2015): 35, <https://www.cceol-com.ap1.proxy.openathens.net/search/article-detail?id=428728>.

55 Thaler, "Varieties of Utopian Thinking," 54.

56 Montuori and Donnelly, "Why Creative Futures?," 10.



Portals and Wormholes

The choice to focus on artists working specifically within the field of extended reality (XR) mediums was not a flippant choice. When we speak about public space, we often locate ourselves within the material; yet in our contemporary lives, so much of our ‘public’ experiences take place in digital world. As such, we must extend the scope of our understanding of public space beyond the material and begin to ask: how do we negotiate our public space through the experience of the digital – specifically, the digital worlds curated and presented in public art encounters? When materiality and immateriality are blurred, what happens to our embodied experience of space and existence?

By extended reality works, I am referring to those works which use Augmented Reality (AR) or Virtual Reality (VR) networks to create in situ, “technosomatic involvements”⁵⁷ which induce the audience at a phenomenological level to experience immersive realities,⁵⁸ whilst simultaneously reflecting on their own position in relation to these anamorphic worlds. It is a contemplative space created, one which collapses the binaries between the self and the world,⁵⁹ becoming one with the digital spaces the viewer inhabits through disembodiment and a lack of control. These works blend the private and the public spheres through the creation of “affective atmospheres”⁶⁰. Each of the artworks use XR mediums in particular ways, disappearing or making apparent the environment and the body, orchestrating psychosomatic interactions to create a hyperawareness of the body within space, inscribing one’s subjectivity as part of a mediated public space. Rather than interventions which use the infrastructure of our built environment, XR public art, as the ones to be explored here, broaden the typical site of ‘public space’ to create hybrid digital spaces which occur in the corporeal, simultaneously displacing our sense of the real to open up possibilities of what

57 Goffinski, “Making Sense of ART,” 28.

58 Goffinski, “Making Sense of ART,” 31.

59 Paolo S.H. Favero, “Immersive Images,” in *The Present Image* (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2018), 61.

60 : John Craig Freeman, and Mimi Sheller, “Editors’ Statement: Hybrid Space and Digital Public Art,” *Public Art Dialogue* 5, no. 1 (2015): 5, DOI: 10.1080/21502552.2015.1013402.

occurs on the site onto which an variation is augmented.

Before we move further, it is important that we make the distinction between VR and AR.

Augmented Reality

Augmenting reality through new media involves “render[ing] the invisible visible.”⁶¹ Augmented reality should be distinguished from virtual reality – almost figured as a ‘step below’, augmented reality blurs the virtual and the real through overlaying the former onto the latter, creating a doubling of experience whereby the senses are required to interpret and make sense of the real against the digital, and vice versa. Physically dislocated, AR requires mediation of the body’s navigation through space. AR art, especially that which occurs in a public space, is spatially fixed; acting as an “intangible object”⁶², Amanda Starling Gould notes that it still “manages the traditional artistic act of taking place: it happens and it inhabits place.”⁶³ It demands the same of the viewer, as well as the bodies it projects through its frame.

Through mapping virtual imagery onto familiar spaces, AR creates portals which extend beyond our current imagination. Often, when one thinks of AR, we think specifically of 3D imagery being projected onto space through a vessel such as a smartphone or tablet. Augmented reality should rather be thought of simply as the augmentation of physical, locative space, which can change our auditory, ocular, or somatic understandings of space,⁶⁴ – a virtual apparition. In being thought of as specifically targeting the body as opposed to targeting the locative sight, we can use augmented reality to query our relations to public space as it currently exists as the two realms amalgamate, even if only momentarily.⁶⁵

Virtual Reality

Virtual reality (VR) is more extreme than AR in its immersive environment. Where augmented reality involves overlaying digital interventions onto space, creating a blurred experience of corporeality to reflect on our embodied experiences within space and our effect on it, virtual reality involves entering an immersive world, to the effect that the real is completely extinguished. Where AR fixes our experience of the body to a site through locative encounters, virtual reality “denies the physicality of our bodies.”⁶⁶ This should not be thought of binaristically;⁶⁷ through VR, disembodiment does not automatically mean that the body cannot be experienced in any de-

61 Christiane Paul, “Augmented and Mixed Reality,” in *Digital Art* (Thames & Hudson, 2023), 75.

62 Amanda Starling Gould, “Invisible visualities: Augmented reality art and the contemporary media ecology,” *Convergence* 20, no. 1 (2014): 27, DOI: 10.1177/1354856513514332.

63 Starling Gould, “Invisible visualities,” 27.

64 Rachel E. Clarke, “Merging Spaces: Augmented Reality, Temporary Public Art, and the Reinvention of Site,” in *Augmented Reality Art: From an Emerging Technology to a Novel Creative Medium*, ed. Vladimir Geroimenko (Springer Cham, 2022), 137.

65 Clarke, “Merging Spaces,” 137.

66 Paul, “Virtual Reality,” 68.

67 Christiane Paul, “Augmented Realities: Digital Art in the Public Sphere,” in *A Companion to Public Art*, ed. Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie (John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 323.

gree. Rather the relation between the two realms should be thought of as a rare occurrence of both/and.⁶⁸ Through the radical insertion of the body into a space which completely fills the viewer's perceptible experience, virtual reality "[expands] the agency enabled by our embodied condition."



Temporality

“When we talk about art entering public space, shouldn’t we also look at how it interacts with the realm of time and what time it takes place in?”⁶⁹

When we discuss futures, it is imperative we acknowledge the organisation of the temporalities we are discussing.⁷⁰ If public art – and particularly XR public art – produces public space, then we must also discuss its concomitant paradigmatic shift of linear time. Through co-futurism and the concept of future memory, in which time is pushed forward and back into the present, public art creates its own autopoietic universe.⁷¹ The interstice of public art, co-futurisms and XR works creates a temporal inclusivity which rejects the dominant, singular temporality, pluralising⁷² our temporal presents and exposing time as a pattern of becoming,⁷³ as opposed to a fixed form of geometry.

All time, especially that in Australia, is shaped by the particularities of time according to Europe and the invention of historicism – otherwise known as white settler time. Historicism, as a tool of the colonial powers, assumed that “there is a universal temporality which all peoples inhabit as well as a universal narrative of human development.”⁷⁴ In understanding time as fixed in this way, always pushing forward, narratives of the Other formed, categorising bodies and places as either ‘in time’, or ‘out of time’. Denial of the coeval rejected existence of other histories of progress and being, affirming power binaries which saw the propulsion of the West as dominant. Despite expanding notions of the ‘beginning of time’, for the West, time has always felt linear – “an empty container for events and history...a narrative of progress,”⁷⁵ which is never neutral. According to chronopolitics, like the turning hand of a clock, Western time leaves behind those who cannot fit into its rhythms of reproduction or advancement.

69 Prokopenko, “Changing Space,” 392.

70 Savransky et al., “The lure of possible futures,” 4.

71 Prokopenko, “Changing Space,” 392.

72 Chahine, “Future memory work,” 197.

73 Savransky et al., “The lure of possible futures,” 4.

74 Laura Rademaker, “60,000 Years is not forever: ‘time revolutions’ and Indigenous pasts,” *Postcolonial Studies* 25, no. 4 (2022): 552, DOI: 10.1080/13688790.2021.1971371.

75 Rademaker, “60,000 Years is not forever,” 546.

Cofuturisms through public art present a “time revolution”⁷⁶, disrupting one dimensionality in favour of the multivalent. This experience of a time revolution is distinctly one of the Western heterotemporal. The idea of living beyond Western time is a practice of resistance that has been utilised by minority groups and cultures since time immemorial. It may be difficult to imagine time as existing otherwise. However, as Laura Rademaker encourages:

it is more appropriate to think of revolution in the older sense, not as rupture, but as turning: turning around, and turning towards. A reorientation might allow settlers to see a multiplicity of time, if only we looked in that direction.⁷⁷

Throughout the pages that follow, we should pay attention to the ways in which the public art encounters explored crumple, fold, and tear time.⁷⁸ The temporalities they present are ones where time is marked by “the unexpected eruptions of the (im)possible”⁷⁹; futures where our social ecology is made stronger through heterogeneity.

⁷⁶ Rademaker, “60,000 Years is not forever,” 556.

⁷⁷ Rademaker, “60,000 Years is not forever,” 556.

⁷⁸ Savransky et al., “The lure of possible futures,” 4.

⁷⁹ Savransky et al., “The lure of possible futures,” 7.



***We are what we
imagine. Our very
existence consists
in our imagination of
ourselves. Our best
destiny is to image,
at least, completely,
who and what and that
we are. The greatest
tragedy that can befall
us is to go unimagined.***



A future that remembers – A short story by Cienan Muir

Lost diary pages from a First Nations time traveler reveal a future where Country breathes, technology listens and the past is anything but gone.

Diary Entry 5 - Date: ??/??/????

I am a man removed in future, in time, of space.

Something feels different... like I'm suddenly where I'm meant to be, with my community, my family, my knowing, my Country.

This morning, I stepped outside, eager to explore this place. Everything is different here. The buildings and homes, a seamless blend of environment and technology, are unlike anything I've seen before. They seem to breathe with a life of their own. And the people... well, the people look like me. Like my family. Like us.

What is this place?

The city – or whatever it is called -- seems to have been designed through a Blak lens, guided by the principles of Community and Country. Natural boundaries flow where the land dictates, and Songlines remain untouched, unbroken. Vast zones for ceremony and tradition encircle sacred places, their roles in life as vital as ever. Here, technology doesn't dominate; it harmonises. Each house, each skyscraper has a heartbeat, their materials drawn from their surrounding environment. Every pulsing breath gives back to the Land and to the people inside.

As my eyes wander, I notice the details in these structures: I can see influences from my culture, Aboriginal designs, ways of working with Country. Homes meld with trees, buildings are cloaked in greenery that could have only grown over centuries. Shield motifs, stories, knowledge from my time, my Earth, my community.

Each design, each structure carries the mark of the Peoples who shaped it, the Country and their [knowledges. The technological advances here are

unlike anything I've seen. Trees send commands to artificially intelligent machinery. It feels like the Country has been restored to an untouched time, but machines now answer to the Land.

Even the flowers are embedded with tiny blinking lights, each with a purpose.

At the heart of this place is knowledge, a library. This is where I find the answers I do not have. Time, I learn, is measured differently here. It flows with rhythms of the Land, dictated by ecosystems... a construct which shows the criticality for Community and Country to view each in order to measure time by... Interesting.

This library is alive. It is a Geodesic Dome, cradling an ecosystem of wisdom. Trees projects holographic information when asked, while the waters act as rechargeable batteries, dispersing life and energy to each unit of greenery to convey their knowledge. Elders walk among them, guardians (or book-keepers) of this living archive.

Diary Entry 6 – Date: 10/06/3045

I understand now – this place is not meant for me. Mum always taught me to walk with purpose and respect. And though this land feels like Home – like drifting to sleep to the sound of family murmuring over cups of tea, like waking up to a lounge room full of my cousins fighting over what to watch on TV – it is not mine. I must walk with respect, accepting that my presence does not grant me rights over this place, only responsibility. My footprints here must be delicate, gentle.

Today's adventure: a visit to my Ancestral grounds – or at least, where they should be (if my navigation system is correct). What should be a two- or three-hour journey on my Earth happens in an instant here, thanks, I'm sure, to a complexity of organic and technological advancement. I'd like to keep thinking it's just magic. I stare at the busy transit map (which looks like our PTV map). If only this map was clearer, I think – and as though it heard me, the map promptly declutters. I point to my destination.

Suddenly I am there, my Home.

But different.

The Country is lush and full. Red Gums rise like sentinels, some hosting inorganic machinery – melded, not imposed. Others have grown into towering structures, Mega-homes sheltering many, like giant apartment skyscrapers.

The River teems with life. A cross section of robotic and bio-organic beings, each one working for the health of their ecosystem, the waterways. As I draw closer, I hear the knowledge coursing throughout the River. Another library, perhaps?

This spot, this spot on the River. I recognise it as our swimming spot.

As kids, I remember coming down here to swim during the peak of summer. Mum, dad, my cousins, Aunties and Uncles. Our Family Days spent by the River, our medicine.

And now, ironically, in its place, a hospital. Not the kind I remember from my time, but a sanctuary of care, both above ground and beneath it. A mix of technological machinery and organic medicinal items...

Diary Entry 7 - Date: 11/06/3045

I'm not sure if I'll ever find a way back... I'm not sure if I want to. If I went back what would be different, what would change?

Would we continue to rip through the environment to the point in uninhabitability? Using the Land to serve the people only, and discarding it as soon as that service stops?

I think I'll stick around here a bit more...⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Cienan Muir, "A Future That Remembers," ACMI, accessed October 20, 2025, <https://www.acmi.net.au/stories-and-ideas/future-remembers/>.

Indigenous Futurism



***Gadigal Dreaming – The Sacred Country of
the Gadigal People (2022), by Brett Leavy***



Indigenous Futurism

Settler-Futurity, or the Erasure of Indigenous Existence

To experience the world, for our subjectivities to be constructed and our identities made, we are interpolated into the world. Interpolation is always connected to some kind of binary categorisation, at the heart of which is a relationship of power and control. The moment a 'we' is constructed, we are always already in the act of exclusion. If all inclusion is based on membership of some kind, then access to the futures of settler nations require our interpolation as either contemporaneous, or non-contemporaneous bodies. In this sense, time itself functions as a broker of power and privilege, providing access to those who mould themselves to Western conceptions of modernity. Settler futurity is contingent upon the erasure of Black bodies, to such a degree that the colonial survivance it seeks must designate Indigenous peoples and ways of being as temporary and static – something to be left behind in the past, unable to be coalesced into their homogenising and unified form of linear time. Colonisation, then, is much a project of territorial domination as it is one of temporal control.⁸¹

To understand this in the Australian context, we must trace back to the initial moment of British invasion, and the indoctrination of terra nullius on the land. More than simply deeming the land empty, the doctrine of terra nullius gave way to something more acidic, relying on markers of material time as evidence of humanity. As Carter espouses in *The Lie of the Land*, "this was the visual and spatial rhetoric of colonisation"⁸² – it depends on a poetics of temporal representation. In the absence of markers of colonial time, the colonisers assumed ownership. Domination is wrought through control,⁸³ and assuming ownership of both space, place, and temporality, allowed the construction of Indigenous subjectivity as "temporary"⁸⁴, their demise already determined through a "death imaginary."⁸⁵

"The structures, systems, and stories of settler colonialism, then, guide what future settler societies can look like."⁸⁶

Settler futurity has always positioned First Nations peoples and futures as a "relic of the ancient past"⁸⁷, foreclosing the possibility of any alternative future other than merely 'dying out', or assimilating to the coloniser's culture on the expulsion of any trace of the particularities of Indigenous ways of being and living.⁸⁸ One only need to look to our founding document, the

81 Mathias Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurism," *College Literature* 50, no. 2-3 (2023): 445, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2023.a902225>.

82 Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, 1st ed (Faber and Faber, 1996), 6.

83 Anique Vered and Grace Gibson, "A Decolonial Dreaming," in *Histories, Myths and Decolonial Interventions: A Planetary Resistance*, ed. Arti Nirmal, and Sayan Dey (Routledge, 2022), 149.

84 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 10.

85 Lindsay Nixon, "Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism," in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, ed. Tiffany Lethabo King et al., (Duke University Press, 2020), 332.

86 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 15.

87 Vered and Gibson, "A Decolonial Dreaming," 149.

88 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 11.

Australian Constitution, which prior to 1967 did not configure First Nations peoples as an active section of the sociopolitic, going so far as to relegate them to subhuman, closer in relation to fauna than to 'civilised' humanity; or to the eugenical policies leading to the Stolen Generation, where ones blood determined their membership and inclusion within Australia's future. To impose temporal sovereignty was to portray the conception of Australia as the moment of British invasion, such that Indigenous people exist outside of time, somewhere backward⁸⁹, as a legitimising means of the colonial project. Linear time through settler futurity is a "structural mater, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape."⁹⁰

Indigenous Futurism

"The future is Indigenous"⁹¹

If settler futurity commands an erasure of Indigenous bodies from spatiality and temporality, then Indigenous futurism is a radical act of critical consciousness, a form of revision which reignites the precolonial in the present,⁹² as a means of directing social dreaming around the visioning of new futures which are fundamentally otherwise to that demanded by hegemony.

Most commonly associated with science fiction literature, Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon coined the term, which asks us: what if settler logics were not the dominating ontologies of our current society?⁹³ Explored through artwork, Indigenous futurism as a lens of enquiry provokes the (re) memorialisation and new media materialisation of Indigenous culture and ways of living as existing in a dichotomous position of both temporal reality and atemporality, inhabiting circular time as a way to materialise an embodied life force which is capable of survivance against erasure. It is a recovery of Indigeneity "as a political force"⁹⁴; it is important here that the language we use is one which acknowledges the unbroken chain of spiritual and cultural continuity of Indigenous expression, always imagining their futures, despite repeated attempts at cultural and actualised genocide.

If speculation is an inherent function of futurist thinking, then we must also acknowledge the principle of speculation as always existing in Indigenous Australian cosmological and cultural practices,⁹⁵ rooted in the practice of stargazing and astronomical traditions. As Pierce elucidates:

If we understand celestial speculation as a practice of spatial and temporal orientation, then we can affirm it has been practiced by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial... because speculation is a method of cosmic relation, it is also

89 Lou Netana-Glover, "Indigenous Futures and Deep Time Connections to Place," in *The Routledge Handbook of Australian Indigenous Peoples and Futures*, ed. Bronwyn Carlson, Madi Day, Sandy O'Sullivan, and Tristan Kennedy (Routledge, 2023), 304.
90 W.E.H Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, 1st ed (Black Inc. Agenda, 2009).

91 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 9.

92 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 17.

93 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 16.

94 Carlson, "The Future is Indigenous," 17.

95 Joseph M. Pierce, *Speculative Relations: Indigenous Worlding and Repair*, 1st ed. (Duke University Press, 2025), 2.

a form of making sense of the world and our place in it.⁹⁶

To speculate in Indigenous ontologies is to tell an ongoing story, and care for those whose existence has been traded for the power of cultural domination. To speculate is for the past to exist as spectral,⁹⁷ haunting in the crevices of Western historicism, as one simultaneously gazes out onto it

Through art, this speculation becomes a representational and symbolic act, whereby Indigenous ancestral knowledges are placed in futures that are technological, creating a convalescence between the two. Indigenous knowledges become a technology⁹⁸ to be preserved and cared for through a matrix of empathy and relational living with other beings, both human and non-human. Indigenous peoples' place is restored as the controlling agents in how these knowledges exist in the future, as opposed to the settler. Indigenous futurism is thus both site and an act of conscious creation, through which Indigenous peoples reclaim their place in the future.⁹⁹

(Re)winding Time

"A long, long time ago is right now, and the galaxy far, far away is right here, right now."¹⁰⁰

Speculation in Indigenous futurism is temporally complex,¹⁰¹ allowing one to metaphorically traverse time through an embodied experience, especially through the vessel of artwork. Just as the core of Indigenous Australian philosophy is the concept of relationality, so too does this extend to the interrelation of the past, present, and future which, through the view of futurism, "flow together like currents in a navigable stream."¹⁰² In actively recreating time, Indigenous futurism rejects the centrality of linear time, troubling the authority of Western historicisation. For those Indigenous artists, it becomes an act of inherent decolonisation, and coming into contact with these works as a non-Indigenous person has a strategically postcolonial, or anticolonial effect. It is not about a complete "cognitive estrangement"¹⁰³ from space or time; rather, it is an embodied experience of duality, capable of reassessing the "dominant temporal imagination and the colonising imaginary"¹⁰⁴ as asphyxiating, and confronting the possibility of alternatives through the transcendence of Indigenous knowledge.

96 Pierce, *Speculative Relations*, 6.

97 Pierce, *Speculative Relations*, 7.

98 Nicole Ku'uleinapananioliko 'awapuhimelemeleolani Furtado, "Indigenous Futurism," in *The New Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Mark Bould et al. (Routledge, 2024), 26.

99 Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurisms," 433.

100 Suzanne Newman Fricke, "Introduction: Indigenous Futurisms in the hyperpresent now," *World Art* 9, no. 2 (2019): 119, DOI: 10.1080/21500894.2019.1627674.

101 Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurisms," 449.

102 Newman Fricke, "Introduction," 118.

103 Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurisms," 443.

104 Nilges, "The Temporal Imagination of Indigenous Futurisms," 437.

“When we talk about art entering public space, shouldn’t we also look at how it interacts with the realm of time and what time it takes place in?”

Case Study: Gadigal Dreaming – The Sacred Country of the Gadigal People (2022), by Brett Leavy

Virtual Songlines

Brett Leavy is a self-proclaimed “Virtual Heritage Jedi”¹⁰⁵, most notable for his work through his Virtual Songlines project. A descendant of the Kooma People, Leavy’s Virtual Songlines forms the umbrella project under which his public art interventions are staged. Conceptualised as a ‘toolkit’, Virtual Songlines represents an indigenised form of knowledge collection, utilising cultural protocols and methodologies¹⁰⁶ to appropriate the concept of the third archive. Virtual Songlines is a digital tapestry of First Nations Indigenous culture and storytelling, mapped geospatially onto a digital map, and experienced through mediums such as augmented and virtual realities, as well as gamified modes.¹⁰⁷ As Leavy describes, Virtual Songlines

Simulates cultural heritage landscapes to recognise and reimagine the traditional Welcome to Country for the digital age.¹⁰⁸

Developed in collaboration with the Australasian Cooperative Research Centre for Interaction Design, Virtual Songlines grounds the user in principles of Indigenous ontological ways of being, imbuing the virtual landscape with traditional knowledge, oral histories, custodial practices and placemaking, so as to create a clash of time in which the user is transported to the pre-colonial, through futuristic technology. Working with traditional owners and local communities, Virtual Songlines blends the tangible and the intangible, transforming the static digital site into a living, relational ‘place’ on which “spiritual significance [is] as real and vital as the physical ground itself.”¹⁰⁹

The mapping of cultural knowledge through Virtual Songlines is multi-dimensional, extending both space and time beyond Western understanding. Virtual Songlines tracks change along both the “linear, cyclical, and spiritual”¹¹⁰, projecting history, Indigenous seasonal time, and ancestral knowledge onto a hybridised google mapping system, such that the ghost of the built city exists as an irregular protrusion. In this way, the past becomes

105 Brett Leavy, “Brett Leavy on Reconnecting With First Nations Culture and History Through Virtual Reality Technology,” interview by Indio Myles, Impact Boom (November 4, 2021), <https://www.impactboom.org/blog/2021/11/03/brett-leavy-on-reconnecting-with-first-nations-culture-and-history-through-virtual-reality-technology>.

106 Brett Leavy, “Digital Songlines: Digitising the Arts, Culture and Heritage Landscape of Aboriginal Australia,” in *Information Technology and Indigenous People* (Idea Group, 2007), 159.

107 Leavy, interview.

108 Brett Leavy, “Virtual Songlines,” Virtual Songlines, accessed October 12, 2025, <https://www.virtualsonglines.org/>.

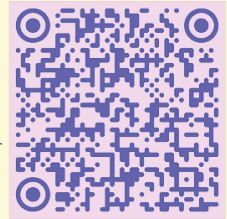
109 Leavy, “Virtual Songlines.”

110 Leavy, “Virtual Songlines.”

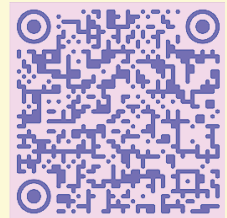
ever-present,¹¹¹ creating a “living social environment”¹¹² which understands place “as it exists and has always existed from a First Nations perspective.”¹¹³

About Gadigal Dreaming

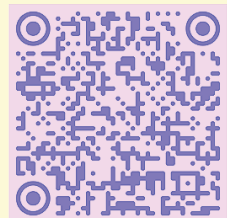
Staged at the International Convention & Exhibition Center (ICC) in Sydney, *Gadigal Dreaming – The Sacred Country of the Gadigal People* (2022) functioned as a public artwork, which intervened in public space in the form of a ‘time machine’ experienced through the viewer’s mobile phone. Accessible through QR codes, *Gadigal Dreaming* is experienced as augmented reality ‘portals’, through which the virtual extends endlessly through a small frame in our occipital field, pressing the immaterial onto the material in a 360° augmentation. These augmentations represent traditional cultural practices, such as corroboree, and fishing practices, combining audio and traversable plains



which immerse the viewer in experiences of the past. In this way, through the experience of *Gadigal Dreaming*, viewers realise the culture and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as living and breathing, an ecosystem which exists beneath the colonial flattening of landscape and heterogeneity.



It is an important element of the artwork itself that the user remains in their physical world, whilst ‘inside’ the world presented through *Gadigal Dreaming*. Often, when thinking of virtual reality environments, one expects the ability to manipulate the environment to some degree. Through *Gadigal Dreaming*, the viewer is both inside and outside the world, both embodied and disembodied, mimicking the poetic enjambment of the ancestral with the hypermodern – their interaction is similar to that of a literary text; whilst unable to change the contents of the book, what is manipulated and malleable is the imagination impressed upon through the reactivation of cultural



¹¹¹ Leavy, “Virtual Songlines.”

¹¹² Leavy, “Virtual Songlines.”

¹¹³ Leavy, “Virtual Songlines.”

knowledge. In anchoring this imaginative activity to the viewer's material subjective experience,¹¹⁴ the imagination becomes tied through referentiality to our lived experience, creating memory. Wyeld and Leavy explain this as a mimetic experience¹¹⁵ which mirrors the "virtual reality"¹¹⁶ at the heart of the Dreaming; as a time when Ancestral Beings gave shape to the land as they moved over and through it, "inhabiting it as a literal coalescence of spirit and matter"¹¹⁷, Gadigal Dreaming gives shape to Country through simulation, recovering the ancestral in the here and now.



Through creating a memory of space through imagination, Gadigal Dreaming deconstructs notions of the "real" as solid in Western culture.¹¹⁸ Binary separation between abstraction and reality, subject and object, are not concepts which figure in Australian Aboriginal ways of being¹¹⁹ – the representational and the subjective, is the real. When experiencing Gadigal Dreaming, the virtual thus becomes an actualised projection (the real-virtual), expanding our horizon of what space can be, and how publics can be brought into being.

Creating the public through the virtual

If we are thinking about how alternative futures are recovered through Gadigal Dreaming, then we must have recourse to how Leavy creates a counter public within space through the real-virtual. In configuring Indigenous bodies in space, both past and present, Leavy's artwork works through Indigenous futurism to install publics and counterpublics which imagine an alternative space where Indigenous people are embodied, denying their expulsion treated as providence through settler-futurity and the design of the public city.¹²⁰

Being a 360-degree experience, it is interesting to note that when the phone is turned toward the physical body, there is a metaphorical dismemberment which occurs. If one was to stick their hand out in front of the camera when viewing Gadigal Dreaming, they would not see a virtual hand in its place. This is an element quite unique to Gadigal Dreaming, at least in the context of augmented reality art. In constructing the experience in this way,

¹¹⁴ Rosanne Kennedy and Ben Silverstein, "Beyond presentism: Memory studies, deep history and the challenges of transmission," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023): 1620, DOI: 10.1177/17506980231203645.

¹¹⁵ Theodor G. Wyeld et al., "The Re-presentation of Country as Virtual Artifact in Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Using a Game Engine," in *Gaming Cultures and Place in Asia-Pacific*, ed. Larissa Hjorth and Dean Chan (Routledge, 2009), 195.

¹¹⁶ Wyeld et al., "The Re-presentation of Country as Virtual Artifact in Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Using a Game Engine," 195.

¹¹⁷ Wyeld et al., "The Re-presentation of Country as Virtual Artifact in Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Using a Game Engine," 195.

¹¹⁸ Wyeld et al., "The Re-presentation of Country as Virtual Artifact in Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Using a Game Engine," 197.

¹¹⁹ Wyeld et al., "The Re-presentation of Country as Virtual Artifact in Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Using a Game Engine," 202.

¹²⁰ Tony Birch, "Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne (AU), 15 April, 2018," in *The Politics of Public Space, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places*, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 187.

the viewer experiences the duplicity between absence and presence,¹²¹ such that where the Indigenous body is erased from the modern city, so too is the contemporary body removed from the ancestral space. The experience of space by the viewer thus becomes subject to a greater empathy, enabling the viewer to inhabit the space in a fundamentally different way¹²² than if one were to experience a corroboree, for example, on site. Leavy plays on de Certeau's notion of space as a concept generated through interaction¹²³ – becoming a 'spirit' or 'ghost' of the present,¹²⁴ space is created in the digital through their interaction with the narrative presented.

The augmented reality experience of Gadigal Dreaming has a special faculty to reconstitute the Indigenous body within space. There is no denying that the modern city grid, flattened the land to push Indigenous peoples further and further from its centre, leaving behind only static objects.¹²⁵ Whilst our make-up of our cities differs now, there is a particular effect of viewing Gadigal Dreaming on a phone, as space becomes superseded by the virtual. Whilst most examples of AR overlay a singular object onto our physical space, Gadigal Dreaming pushes this to the extreme, replacing a section of our vision with an ever-extending virtual world, one in which the Indigenous bodies within have agency, moving freely as if unbothered by the gaze of the viewer, engaged in corroboree, and traditional fishing and camping activities. It is here that we note that when viewing some of the VR experiences, we can see the seams of the digital frames which, when stitched together, give the illusion of the spherical. Rather than registering cognitively that the world we are experiencing is a digital creation, what we instead feel is this sense of being put on display, contained within a fishbowl. Perhaps this experience is unique to non-Indigenous viewers, as it creates an experience which calls into question the construction of the process of othering. Revealing the vitality beneath, what becomes static and stifling in space is settler colonial societies and Western culture.

In this way, the virtual becomes a place in its own right¹²⁶ as the difference between the real and the seemingly unreal meet, creating a public of variation and promoting a meditation on the condition and future of the space we inhabit once Indigenous bodies are made physically present and existent. This is a public space which is felt, rather than seen¹²⁷; whilst I cannot purport to know the feelings of an Indigenous persons encounter with this work, from a non-Indigenous point of view, in denying the view¹²⁸ of the built landscape to creep into the augmented space, one feels difference as it is placed in front of them, making the public visible to itself and to others,¹²⁹

¹²¹ Keziah Wallis and Miriam Ross, "Fourth VR: Indigenous virtual reality practice," *Convergence* 27, no. 2 (2021): 317, DOI: 10.1177/1354856520943083.

¹²² David Robinson et al., "When the virtual becomes actual: Indigenous ontologies within immersive reality environment," in *Ontologies of Rock Art: Images, Relational Approaches, and Indigenous Knowledges*, ed. Oscar Moro Abadia, and Martin Porr (Routledge, 2021), 417.

¹²³ Wyeld et al., "The Re-presentation of Country as Virtual Artifact in Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Using a Game Engine," 195.

¹²⁴ Leavy, interview.

¹²⁵ Stephen Gilchrist, "Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia," in *Everywhen: the eternal present in indigenous art from Australia* (Yale University Press, 2016), 22.

¹²⁶ Robinson et al., "When the virtual becomes actual," 414.

¹²⁷ Theodore G. Wyeld and Brett Leavy, "Reaching Out to a Younger Generation Using a 3D Computer Game for Storytelling: Vincent Serico's Legacy," *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2 (2008): 46, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A191905597/AONE?u=monash&sid=bookmark-AONE&id=f2d15de9.

¹²⁸ Wyeld and Leavy, "Reaching Out to a Younger Generation Using a 3D Computer Game for Storytelling: Vincent Serico's Legacy," 46.

¹²⁹ Self, "London (UK) – Melbourne (AU), 09:00 BST – 18:00 AEST, ZOOM Video Conference, 16 April, 2020," 115.

looking into the past to recover alternative visions of the future, and what lurks beneath the surface of our current environment.

There is something to say of the recovery of the land through Gadigal Dreaming, too. Put aptly by Paul Carter, a Western way of living – a particular colonial way of living – appreciates “[the ground] only in so far as it bows down to our will.”¹³⁰ Colonial flattening of the land had the effect of “institute[ing] one system of memorialisation at the expense of another”¹³¹, where the land was neutralised to erect the artificial built jungle. Gadigal Dreaming functions somewhat as an x-ray of space, replacing the European sign of modernity – the spectacular building – with the Indigenous substance which has always existed behind the veil. If we refer back to the Dreaming and the creation story of the Ancestral Beings, who intimately tied matter to place, what becomes clear is that despite their erasure from space, an Indigenous public has always existed within the public space of the city.

The ‘Now’ of Deep Time

“[D]eep time . . . is a big, big story. The big stuff goes forever, time ropes and loops and is never straight, that’s the real story of time.”¹³²

If an inherent element of Indigenous futurism as a lens is the destruction of linear temporalities, then we must examine how, in viewing Gadigal Dreaming, we experience synchronicity with the rhythm of the “everywhen”¹³³. Our temporal experience of Gadigal Dreaming can be understood in line with the Bergsonian principle of *durée*; if Indigenous time is thought of through its relational principle,¹³⁴ where by the past effects the present, which effects the future and vice versa, the representation of the ancestral past seems to slow down our subjective experience of time by intersecting lines of time, all of which converge through the screen of the mobile phone. The fundamentally alters our own relationship to settler time, reimagining time as sinuous, and able to be entered from multiple points through the momentary union of temporal distinctions. We feel time converge as we experience the work, binding the viewer in a metaphysical spirit of the everywhen itself. Like time travellers, the viewer lands within an environment in which their presence does not affect those within. Time is experienced by the body, so denying a physical presence in the virtual past denies the flow of time as processed by the viewer.

For many Indigenous Australians, the cultural memories of the Dreaming do not just preserve the past, but make a claim for the present, such that deep time of the past also constitutes the “deep present”¹³⁵. In reactivating the landscape and the bodies replaced by the built environment, Gadigal Dream-

130 Carter, *Lie of the Land*, 2.

131 Carter, *Lie of the Land*, 6.

132 Tara June Winch, *The Yield* (Hamish Hamilton, 2019), 2, quoted in Rosanne Kennedy and Ben Silverstein, “Beyond presentism: Memory studies, deep history and the challenges of transmission,” *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023): 1609, DOI: 10.1177/17506980231203645.

133 Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*.

134 Kennedy and Silverstein, “Beyond presentism,” 1618.

135 Kennedy and Silverstein, “Beyond presentism,” 1621.

ing allows for an “eternal becoming”¹³⁶, where the footsteps of ancestors mark the present. Gadigal Dreaming approaches time as elastic, such that it denies being reduced to the singular or totalising as with colonial time, effectively making all time ‘now’.¹³⁷

To make all time ‘now’ through Gadigal Dreaming, also makes Indigenous people part of the ‘now’ in which the viewer is experiencing the work. Their presence is constantly being made, to the point that to remember the future through memory, we are positioned to consider our relationship to existent Indigenous bodies within space as we move through it, constantly meditating on the ‘deep now’ we are a part of, and are yet to inhabit within the future. Noting that we have a relation to the deep now is to note that all humans exist on Country, and it is our responsibility to reimagine the design of future spaces to reflect that truth;¹³⁸ it is an imperative that Indigenous communities can see themselves reflected in public space.

136 Kennedy and Silverstein, “Beyond presentism,” 1615.

137 Rademaker, “60,000 Years is not forever,” 552.

138 Sarah Lynn Rees, “Melbourne (AU), 28 September, 2020,” in *The Politics of Public Space, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places*, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 258.

Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present.

Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing





Frank O'Hara, “Having A Coke with You”

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne
or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian
partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yoghurt
partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches
partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary
it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as still
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles

and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint
you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them
I look

at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world
except possibly for the Polish Rider occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick
which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together the first time
and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism
just as at home I never think of the Nude Descending a Staircase or
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank
or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as carefully
as the horse
it seems they were all cheated of some marvellous experience

which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you about it¹³⁹

139 Frank O'Hara, "Having A Coke With You," All Poetry, accessed October 20, 2025, <https://allpoetry.com/Having-A-Coke-With-You>.



Queer Futurism



Virtual Drag (2016), by Alison Bennett

Queer Futurism

The death drive of reproductive futurism

Queer futurism is difficult to understand without recourse to the normative. In relation to queer lives, settler futures manifest themselves as what Lee Edelman has convincingly propositioned as “reproductive futurism”¹⁴⁰ – the neo-liberal ideology which erases the possibility of queer lives within future spaces through recourse to guaranteeing the temporal logic of “the Child”¹⁴¹.

It is interesting that Edelman proposes this as a both neo-liberal and conservative concept.¹⁴² No matter where one places themselves along a political axis, reproductive futurism is pervasive, mimicking the seeming inescapability of hegemonic social constructs which demand order from its inhabitants. Pulling this apart, it becomes easily understood. If we interrogate any political movement from any faction, whether it be the anti-choice and anti-LGBTQIA+ movements of the far-right, to the push for sustainable futures by the neo-liberal left, each is organised around, what Robin Williams’s would call, ‘doing it for the kids.’ The foundation of all political movements is a “teleological valuation”¹⁴³ of the future which sees the vitality of future generations. In this way, Edelman’s ‘Child’ does not necessarily refer to a literal population of children, but rather becomes a “symbol of possibility...that affirms and authenticates a given social order.”¹⁴⁴

This positioning of the Child is necessarily heteronormative; it cajoles around heterosexual politics of reproduction, such that the future of queer lives are abandoned as a matter of having a futile value on the concept of the future as posited by normative, colonial societies. If the primary goal of all future oriented thinking is to reimagine a way of living that enhances the lives of our future children, then heteronormative settler futures deconstruct the value of queer futurism through the imposition, elevation, and protection of thinking which, at its core, organises space and time around the linear continuation of the nuclear family, to the abandonment and disappearance of queer ways of being, and the visibility of queer bodies.

To be clear, for Edelman, this does not mean that queer lives are futile – rather, Edelman embraces what is called a “queer negativity”¹⁴⁵, in which queer identity becomes the “avatar of social death”¹⁴⁶ and symbolic of the psychoanalytic death drive; a deconstruction of providential futures through a complete refusal to occupy a position of future thinking. In doing so, the binary between hope and refusal is reaffirmed to the benefit of the heter-

140 Angela Jones, “Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice,” in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. Angela Jones (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

141 Vitor Blanco-Fernandez, “Thinking the future otherwise: Queer futures and queer utopia,” *Time & Society* 33, no. 4 (2024): 440, DOI: 10.1177/0961463X241258307.

142 Rachel Silverbloom, “Hope as Refusal: Queer, Feminist Futurity,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 49, no. 4 (2024): 810, <https://doi.org/10.1086/729910>.

143 Silverbloom, “Hope as Refusal,” 809.

144 Silverbloom, “Hope as Refusal,” 810.

145 Silverbloom, “Hope as Refusal,” 808.

146 Silverbloom, “Hope as Refusal,” 808.

onormative; the normative will always thrive where that which is defined through negative categorisation (i.e., queer as being 'not straight') refuses to fight back with hope, consigning them to a status of disembodiment within public space and reducing their potentiality to enact transformation towards better futures. Edleman's conception implores queer bodies to continue with business as usual, for anything else is merely futile in attempt.

Queer Futurism

"we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds."¹⁴⁷

Queerness – here more than a sexual orientation, referring instead to the complete "non-normative logics and organisations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time"¹⁴⁸ – is an "ideality"¹⁴⁹, an act of endless becoming which positions itself within the "not yet here". To think through queer futurity, then, is an act of creating breathable space¹⁵⁰ in the present through imagination of the future – to envision spaces which imagine alternatives of queer subjectivity against the death drive through finding the freedom to breathe. If reproductive futures enslave those in death, then queer future is an act of revival, a way in which those non-conforming bodies are resuscitated and reanimated.

To utilise queer futurism is to enact queer Foucauldian heterotopic spaces; to create inversions of space which subvert the normative subjugation of real public space through populating it with bodies of difference which are celebrated. In this way, queer futurism rejects the reaffirmation of normative binaries implicit in Edelman's rejection of the utility of hope and speculative future memory, maintaining the refusal of quotidian rules through the constant performativity and remaking of queerness.¹⁵¹ Queerness is a response of the future, a form of hope for alternative ways of being that always exists on the horizon. While concerned with the future, queer futurism does not make the future it envisions factual reality but rather, it is a "backward glance that enacts a future vision,"¹⁵² which problematises that idea that there can be no future for queer lives.

Queer futurism reforms the practice of refusal through the affective structure of hope. To practice refusal through queer futurism is not to accept what the heteronormative culture negates your future to as inevitable,¹⁵³ as Edelman does. Rather, it is to rethink time and space, through hoping for something fundamentally incompatible.

"To lay the foundation of something new...we must imagine the end of the

147 Munoz, "Introduction," 1.

148 Jack Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives* (New York University Press, 2005), 2.

149 Munoz, "Introduction," 1.

150 Jones, "Introduction," 2.

151 Jones, "Introduction," 12.

152 Munoz, "Introduction," 4.

153 Silverbloom, "Hope as Refusal," 817.

world, we must wish for it, we must invite it."¹⁵⁴

Queer(ing) Time & Space

To queer, and to act with queer futurity, is to become inherently asynchronous with the rhythms and pulls of time, through which new space is naturalised¹⁵⁵ by subordination to the logics of a new temporality. Engaging in the act of queering the future is therefore a place-making practice, through which space is created by the "production of queer counterpublics"¹⁵⁶ bound by an uncoordinated tempo. Queer futurism is defined by the emergence of temporal complications which insists on the creation of sites almost which are extraplanetary.

Here, the frame and scaffolding of reproduction are disassembled,¹⁵⁷ with hope becoming the circuit breaker in which the normative flow of time and historicisation is interrupted to deny the repetition of violence against queer bodies in the current timeline.¹⁵⁸ Queer futurism is arrested by the trace; queering the future is not about being ahead, but following what has been left behind, to create fertile grounds for thinking about the social possibilities of that which "has been declared useless."¹⁵⁹ It is a point of crossing the quagmire of the here and now, to "telescope time" so as to reverse it, flip it, and warp it, bathing in the fecundity of what ruptures as it shatters.

154 Silverbloom, "Hope as Refusal," 821.

155 Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," 8.

156 Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," 6.

157 Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," 6.

158 Silverbloom, "Hope as Refusal," 817.

159 Alexis Lothian, *Old Futures* (New York University Press, 2018), 11.

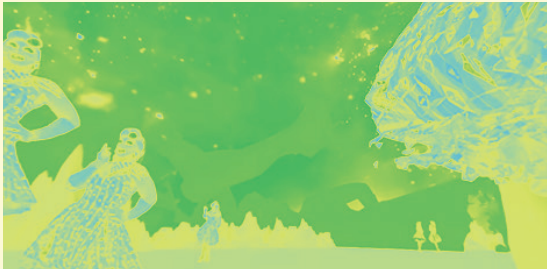
**Queerness is not yet here.
Queerness is an ideality.
Put another way, we are not
yet queer. We may never
touch queerness, but we
can feel it as the warm
illumination of a horizon
imbued with potentiality.
We have never been queer,
yet queerness exists for us
as an ideality that can be
distilled from the past and
used to imagine a future. The
future is queerness's domain.
Queerness is a structuring
and educated mode of
desiring that allows us to see
and feel beyond the quagmire
of the present. The here and
now is a prison house.**

Case Study: Virtual Drag (2016), by Alison Bennett



About Virtual Drag

Virtual Drag (2016) by Alison Bennett, developed in collaboration with Megan Beckwith and Mark Payne, staged and created for Midsumma Festival 2016 presents a radical virtual reality (VR) intervention. Premised around the creation of a series of 'encounters' with drag queens Philmah Bocks, Art Simone, Jackie Hammer, and the Transylvanian Gypsy Kings, each of which are enlarged, glitched, iterated, bent, and snapped through the virtual space which reflects the personalities of the figures themselves. More radical than Brett Leavy's intervention through Gadigal Dreaming, Virtual Drag involves the immersion of the viewer into its cosmological world inside of a head mounted VR display.



Virtual Drag speaks to the intersection between the virtual as simulation, and drag as queer 'realness'¹⁶⁰, providing a work through which the performative, standing in ironic synchronicity with the real, is layered upon the simulation, deconstructing our understanding of our present

reality as constructed and opening up a vast expanse through which to breathe. Employing 360-degree photogrammetry as an element of expanded photography, Bennett queers the medium itself; comprised from a plethora of reproduced 2D images, Bennett shifts the boundaries of the medium of photography and digital media, as the 3D model which emerges of the drag queens is fragmented and splintered. Bennett does not seek wholeness, but embraces the failure of the algorithm;¹⁶¹ much like Halberstam's seminal text, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Bennett's Virtual Drag approaches failure as a porous concept of fecundity, critically engaging failure to spear time and space, as the "untidy edges of the physical world feel like they are penetrating the visual."¹⁶²

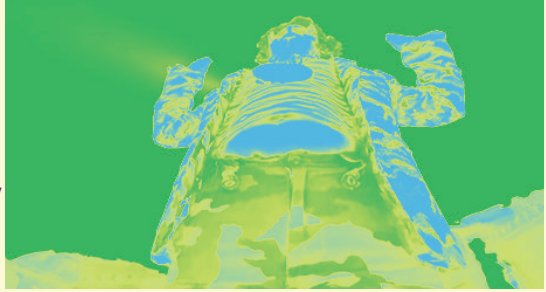
Bennett's use of VR here becomes particularly important. Through Virtual Drag, VR becomes the vessel through which the physical and normative is refused, inviting users into a space which is more dreamlike (or perhaps even

160 Alison Bennett, "Virtual Drag: Speaking Academically," December, 2015, Academia.

161 Andrew Burrell and Alexandra Chalmers Braithewaite, "Fractured and fragmented selves: Queer approaches to designing virtual experiences," *Virtual Creativity* 13, no. 1 (2023): 14, https://doi.org/10.1386/vcr_00072_1.

162 Burrell and Chalmers Braithewaite, "Fractured and fragmented selves," 14.

nightmare fuel, at some times). An act of “weird-futuring”¹⁶³, traversing a singular world through multiple environments, Virtual Drag trains the viewer to expect surprise as bodies rise from a bottomless expanse, jerk and extend, and impose on space seemingly without a care, the viewer unable to find a moment of reprieve against the disincarnation of the Virtual Drag experience. Like Gadigal Dreaming, the viewer is disembodied. Without a virtual body, our experience in Virtual Drag mimics that of queer communities in public, forced to the edges and hidden within the infill.¹⁶⁴ Virtual Drag in this sense becomes public through its appeal to differentiation.



Galactic Encounters of the Queer Kind

As touched on, Bennett’s Virtual Drag encourages active engagement of viewers in the potentiality and possibility of a queer future through encounters “within the fabric of the community.”¹⁶⁵ As described by Bennett, Virtual Drag is a work that describes

The world of human experience not as a paradigm into whose patterns we must learn to fit, but a burgeoning ecology of possibility within which we may each find our own distinctive ways of being, knowing, and interconnecting.¹⁶⁶

In expanding the virtual body of the drag queens, the viewer encounters not the singular body, nor the multiple iterations of the virtual drag in the space, but an infinite assemblage¹⁶⁷ of “corporeal convergences”.¹⁶⁸ The question we then must ask ourselves is: what does it do to our imaginations of the future to encounter those denied from it in an infinite, within a single space of the virtual?

Bennett’s use of photogrammetry comprises a system in Virtual Drag where “shards”¹⁶⁹ constitute the whole. This creation of bodies which are manufactured through rearrangement allows for the viewer to peek into the cracks, such that the viewer’s body penetrates that of the virtual drag, “swirl[ing] together, and transmit[ing] affects to each other.”¹⁷⁰ We can think of the sharp edges of Art Simone’s face, or the friction and ‘brokenness’ of Jackie

¹⁶³ Blanco-Fernandez, “Thinking the future otherwise,” 447.

¹⁶⁴ Simona Castricum, “Melbourne (AU), 26 February, 2021,” in *The Politics of Public Space, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places*, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 376

¹⁶⁵ Alison Bennett, “Queering the Paradigm,” interview by Alasdair Foster, *Talking Pictures: Interviews with Photographers Around the World* (November 15, 2022), <https://talking-pictures.online/2022/11/12/alison-bennett-queering-the-paradigm/>.

¹⁶⁶ Bennett, interview.

¹⁶⁷ Gogul, “Queer assemblage as queer futurity,” 349.

¹⁶⁸ Gogul, “Queer assemblage as queer futurity,” 349.

¹⁶⁹ Alison Bennett, “The Shifting Surface in Digital Photography” (PhD thesis, Deakin University, 2016), 145, Deakin University research repository (10536/DRO/DU:30102728).

¹⁷⁰ Gogul, “Queer assemblage as queer futurity,” 355.

Hammer's body. Through these encounters, then, a self-malleability occurs, allowing for an experience of a transformative futurity that "remains and cannot be forgotten or left behind with the simple removal of the headset."¹⁷¹ As the physical and the digital blend together in a continuum throughout the experience of Virtual Drag, the body itself is queered; much more than a standardised or regulated experience, as one is led to believe in heteronormative societies, the embodied self is an "ongoing, situated, experiential process."¹⁷²

It is the idea of the queer existing as a process in all of us that deconstructs the notion of gender as fixed and essential. Virtual Drag makes one



feel the Butlerian performativity of gender, such that through the experience, and the way the eyes of the virtual drag queens surround us (especially as in Jackie Hammer's world, where the othering gaze is inescapable), the viewer begins to inhabit the body of the 'Other', simultaneously enjoying a position of disembodied voyeurism. Here, as the subjective experiences bleed into one another, the realities of society outside of heterosexual norms are felt, encouraging reflection as to a future where this symbiotic blend between the Other and the self can be realised.

Virtual Drag encourages an acknowledgment of co-presence;¹⁷³ spectator and simulation become one, collapsing boundaries as Baudrillard does in *Simulation and Simulacra*. In imposing this collapsing of distinctions through a virtual world of "drag realness"¹⁷⁴, the VR experience becomes a structural position through which the normativity of heterosexual identities and hegemonic genders are revealed as simulations we inhabit in the real; they are fictional identities we wear and compose, disorienting the "repetition of straight narrowness"¹⁷⁵. Virtual Drag opens up the possibility of being and experiencing the body and life as other, a way of exploring Munoz's theory of queer utopianism in that they enact in the viewer a desire of inhabiting space and time in a new way.

Queer Galaxies

Bennett's Virtual Drag both creates space and feels like being transported to space. We would be remiss not to notice the environments, both visual

¹⁷¹ Burrell and Chalmers Braithewaite, "Fractured and fragmented selves," 12.

¹⁷² Burrell and Chalmers Braithewaite, "Fractured and fragmented selves," 12.

¹⁷³ Myria Georgiou, "London (UK) – Melbourne (AU), 09:00 BST – 18:00 AEST, ZOOM Video Conference, 28 May, 2020," in *The Politics of Public Space*, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 93.

¹⁷⁴ Bennett, interview.

¹⁷⁵ Burrell and Chalmers Braithewaite, "Fractured and fragmented selves," 9.

and spatial, that we are placed in within the experience. There is an interplay between the dystopian and the utopian in the aesthetics of the environments we are placed in, from the run down Gothic house ruins of the Transylvanian Drag Kings and the black expanse in which we meet Jackie Hammer, to the euphorious rainbow mountain which leads us to Art Simone, or the pink cosmological space of Philmah Bocks. When exploring these sites, there is an overwhelming auditory environment created, where we hear a Darthvader-like crackling, laboured breathing and a deep, atmospheric hum – there is the sense that we are travellers in an analogous cosmology, as if we are in the multiverse.

At the same time, those auditory elements make one hyperaware of the VR medium as one primarily of video. When the viewer enters the work, like Brett Leavy's *Gadigal Dreaming*, there is a "disembodied presentness", gently floating through the space as spectre. This play on linguistics is purposeful; opposed to a spectator which comes with connotations of agency, the spectre haunts. Whilst the viewer's orbital sphere is completely immersed in the VR experience, this lack of bodily autonomy prevents full immersion, such that a part of the self remains in the 'real' world, creating a tension between the two realms. This psychological play on the role of the viewer has its roots in science fiction, honouring the impetus of co-futurisms and opening space not where the world is necessarily left behind as that trace of the physical remains present, but where it is reimagined as one which acknowledges the adjacency required to make public space inclusionary.

If public space is socially produced,¹⁷⁶ Virtual Drag is a way of creating counterpublics through queer place-making practices in the digital, providing a framework for participation in a world that brings together the lack and glitches in our own. The public space it creates is only ephemeral, produced and maintained through interaction and the reinforcement of the visual experience. While the space itself may be ephemeral, the experience of Virtual Drag is one which is defined by the trace which it explores and leaves. It leaves the physical inherently reimagined as a "porous membrane"¹⁷⁷, which invites the remembrance of the VR experience to reform what we imagine space to be, and who it is to include, in the future. The digital is explorative of the queer heterotopic, a space which exists through affective and cognitive processing to critique the conditions of our own.

The Realness of Tempo-reality

Virtual Drag is disorienting and dizzying; we lose all sense of normative time through immersion. Time seems to extend as if flowing on forever, to the point that we lose awareness of the eye even moving through space as the image before us ever so slightly changes. When viewing the Gothic house of the Transylvanian Drag Kings, for example, one moment we are outside the space, the next within, and then again we are confronted with the belly of the Drag King himself.

This disorientation is particular of the queer experience. Sara Ahmed de-

¹⁷⁶ Davidge, "Federation Square, Melbourne," 85.

¹⁷⁷ Burrell and Chalmers Braithewaite, "Fractured and fragmented selves," 11.

scribes this inherent disorientation as “becoming oblique of the world, a becoming that is at once interior and exterior.”¹⁷⁸ The ability of Virtual Drag and the figures within the space to respawn at various moments is almost an ironic counterpoint to the reproductive futurism of the heteronormative, as those things which were already observed become re-represented (as in the multiplication of Art Simone as we peruse their environment). This representation smears our illusion of the past and present, opening up for a moment of indeterminacy. The liminal nature of Virtual Drag, contained only within a 10-minute experience, transforms the idea of queer possibility into an actual space, one which no longer conforms to the heteronormative conditions of time, or the clock of biology. Munoz shows how ephemeral art and culture practices can pave the way for queer futurity; if we are to apply this thinking, then in deconstructing both our phenomenological experience of time, and the concept of time as an organising practice which reinforces dominant ideologies, as opposed to something inherent within the world, then the multiplication and expansion of time through Virtual Drag explores queer desire and hope as a practice which is fundamentally spatial, creating space through imploding what is expected of temporality and in doing so, recovering alternative ways of inhabiting bodies within public space in our own physical futures.

178 Burrell and Chalmers Braithewaite, “Fractured and fragmented selves,” 23.

We need to regain some ancient virtues: the humility to acknowledge how much we have yet to learn, the respect that will allow us to protect and restore nature, and the love that can lift our eyes to distant horizons, far beyond the next election, paycheque or stock dividend. Above all, we need to reclaim our faith in ourselves as creatures of the Earth, living in harmony with all forms of life



Natalie Harkin, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “we are the moon”

1.

Bira | moon

one revolution ago we met under a super pink moon i
stepped out from the shadows my face tilted back to soak up
the light a crisp silhouette of a night my world slept
deep toward that transition-time slipping from one fierce day to
the next

zoom-video kicks in before audio our bodies glitch through
time zones my eyes bright you arrive with the sun
and take your first sip of morning tea

we agree on the rising heat and weight of worry the global
pace is quickening to spin-out all our tomorrows we
recognise this fight-flight tremor on the verge feel the
gravitational pull transforming every cell in every living thing our
body we are running somewhere between dogged resolve
trepidation and fatigue and like all the grandmothers before
us who created everything from nothing we know there
is so much work to do so much to do so

Yes we finally say let’s think about the moon¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Natalie Harkin and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “we are the moon,” Red Room Poetry, accessed October 20, 2025, <https://redroompoetry.org/poets/natalie-harkin/we-are-moon/>.

Eco-Futurism



WIRA (2015), by Leah Barclay



Eco-Futurism

Anthropocentric Futures

“What becomes more and more obvious is that the onset of the Anthropocene marks the “failure” of anticipated, straightened, capitalist futures, and gives way to a subjective futurelessness and disorientation.”¹⁸⁰

In all other sections, we have begun by from thinking from we are now. To do this in terms of ecofuturism necessarily means thinking about our Anthropocentric moment, especially as “colonial Australia exists entirely within the Anthropocene.”¹⁸¹ We cannot separate wholesale ecological crisis from the urbanisation of the environment, and the positioning of the land as something to be flattened for the stage of human activity within settler-colonial societies and futures. The settler-colonial is one which has never configured the land as an active agent in their conceptions of the future; no matter what form of science fiction or futuristic renderings we attend to be, the land is always contained in order for human technological excellence to flourish.

The Anthropocene is therefore a way of naming the current geological era we live in, one in which “humans themselves constitute a geomorphic force.”¹⁸² To recognise the Anthropocene is to present a particular way of thinking through the past, where all time is divided into before-human and after-human, reproducing destructive assumptions of human exceptionalism and modernisation. Representing rising sea levels, acidic ocean environments, overconsumption of natural resources and the rapid biochemical changes due to an overreliance on technological growth, the Anthropocene names the moment when the earth became indelibly marked by the human, such that any future within the Anthropocene treats the earth as merely a repository of materials for human consumption, charting the path for the decimation of any possible futures at all.

The Anthropocene has sapped “our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds, both those that exist precariously now,”¹⁸³ and those which are still possible to bring into being through realigning our relationships of empathy for those non-human and planetary. In order to recover alternative futures in which human life is viable, futures must be recovered in which the planet is figured as an agentic and forceful in space and time, to cultivate ways of meaningful symbiosis with the natural environment.

Eco-Futurism

Of all the futurisms discussed here, eco-futurism is perhaps the most dif-

¹⁸⁰ Wendelin Kupers, “Queer(ing) Moves: Beyond Anthropocene, Toward Convival, Sustainable Futures,” *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research* 76, no. 5 (2020): 288, DOI: 10.1080/02604027.2020.1778333.

¹⁸¹ Bennett and Beudel, *Curating Sydney*, 44.

¹⁸² Boyden, “Heterotemporality and Posthumanism in Alternative Futurisms,” 70.

¹⁸³ Donna J Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking,” in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (Duke University Publishing, 2016), 49.

difficult to give shape to – partly because there is not yet an accepted definition. To accept the eco-futurist is to begin to move toward the post-anthropocentric and post-human, and the harmonisation of the body with the land, such that one begins to regain an awareness of the inherent interconnectedness¹⁸⁴ between life forms. Eco-futurism asks us to consider how the to reinsert the planetary into our visions of the world, such that we reorder time and space to understand that we are both “with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story.”¹⁸⁵ Eco-futurism asks us to redirect activity toward the Symbiocene,¹⁸⁶ envisioning an empowered future in which the planet comes directly in to view through endosymbiosis as autopoietic and thus, a being not just for depletion, but for which care becomes reciprocal.

Eco-futurism involves a return to the planetary,¹⁸⁷ and a proposal to imagine the possibilities for the flourishing of life beyond the Anthropocentric moment. This planetary structure of imagining is one where the planet emerges at the hierarchy by pushing back through its own agency; decentralising human activity inverts the possibilities present to us in the Anthropocene, so that eco-futurism becomes about the creation, not of “grandiose global visions,”¹⁸⁸ but of, “situated, ethical dialogues about planetary futures beyond the social.”¹⁸⁹ Eco-futurism presents us with the task of thinking differently the providence of our very existence on this planet, stating that to assert our own existence in the future, we must necessarily conceive of an ecotopian possibility where humans merely participate as rational actors in the biotic community. Without the domination of the anthropocentric society, eco-futurism is founded around co-operation and conservation, through which public art can become one means to directly engage the public in this matrix of relational care and co-habitation.

In eco-futurism, nature and the planet is elevated to the status of a sentient being.¹⁹⁰ Such thinking is a radical revisioning, a continuous reminder that there are different ways of inhabiting time and space; in eco-futurism then, the mission changes from one of sustainability to one of mutualism. Once we begin to acknowledge and understand that the human and non-human are intertwined in a complex relationship, our exchange with the land becomes one of interdependency as opposed to dependency or obligation.¹⁹¹ It is about “becoming-with”¹⁹² and, as Donna Haraway purports, making kin¹⁹³ with the earth beneath us which has the ability to unsettle anthropocentric futures and reinstall ones where the planetary is an active agent in time and space.

184 Coles, “Landscape, Eco-Arts Practice, and Digital Technology in the Public Art Realm,” n.p.

185 Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking,” 55.

186 Claudia Costa Pederson, “Cosmic Ecologies and Futures after the End,” in *Mexican Media Art, Ecologies, the Posthuman, and Politics* (Routledge, 2025), 141.

187 Michael Haldrup, “What Futures? Our Future, the Planet, and Cohabitation,” *Transfers* 13, no. 1/2 (2023): 149, doi:10.3167/TRANS.2023.13010211.

188 Haldrup, “What Futures?,” 149.

189 Haldrup, “What Futures?,” 149.

190 Lisa E. Bloom, “ENVIRONMENT: Envisioning a More Just Future: Feminist Activist Art, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework*, ed. Jane Chin Davidson and Amelia Jones (John Wiley & Sons, 2023), 382.

191 Haldrup, “What Futures?,” 151.

192 Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking,” 55.

193 Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking.”

Tentacularity & the Chthulucene

Unlike the other futurisms presented in this publication, the eco-futurists future can be named. Much of the thinking behind the way in which I have chosen to define eco-futurism is built upon Haraway's notion of tentacularity and the Chthulucene.

The Chthulucene is positioned in direct opposition with the Anthropocene, comprising of "ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake"¹⁹⁴, so that all life forms remain responsible to one another. While the earth is autopoietic – it will continue to survive and sustain itself even after we cease to exist – the Chthulucene is sym-poietic, which forces us to recognise that if we want to have a future, we must begin to work in relation with the earth. This is a collective production of a system, one which does not have any of the arbitrary spatial or temporal boundaries of the Anthropocene,¹⁹⁵ meaning they are able to constantly evolve, shift, and surprise.

This notion of relationality as imperative and innate is contained within what Haraway called tentacularity. Despite the affinity, the Chthulucene does not derive its name from HP Lovecraft's tentacled super beast. Tentacularity is the acknowledgement that all life is a "series of interlaces trails"¹⁹⁶, forged through action and attachment which creates a bond of responsibility to one another. Once we have a feeling of coherence toward one another, plant, life, and land alike, we figure diversity into space, creating a rewilded space which extends beyond isolated areas of nature reserves, such that we feel the power of the more-than-human in our urban space as a counter-public itself.

Glacial Time

Like all other cofuturisms, eco-futurism involves a reconfiguration and reckoning with linear temporality¹⁹⁷ – especially for eco-futurism, imagining new futures necessitates acknowledging the destructive force which has been human history. In this way, eco-futurism, like those preceding, is a way of thinking for the future, by that which has been expressed in the past.¹⁹⁸

There is an inherent disjuncture between planetary time and Anthropocentric, or even just simply human time. The planetary is inherently multiple;¹⁹⁹ earth has been made and remade over and over, as biological and geophysical properties have slowly shifted – a stark contrast to the tumbling advancement of human time which seems to rumble faster and faster to no future. So too is it a reminder of our vulnerable position. As a planet whose

194 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking," 55.

195 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking," 33.

196 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking," 32.

197 Caren Irr and Anik Chartrand, "Introduction: Decolonising Environmental Futurisms," in *Environmental Futures: An International Literary Anthology*, ed. Caren Irr (Brandeis University Press, 2024), xiii.

198 Teresa Pepe, "Returning to 'Nature': Jurjy Zaydan and Sabri Musa's Imagination of Future Egypt," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, no. 17 (2024): 51, DOI:10.1163/18739865-01701006.

199 Haldrup, "What Futures?," 153.

operating system is capable of inherent malleability, we are reminded that temporal realities are not fixed for the planetary, and that despite the trauma we may cause to it, we are but one iteration in a multidimensional opening. This temporal experience of the earth is referred to by Michael Haldrup as “glacial time”²⁰⁰, which is desynchronised from the tick of the normative clock. This glacial time renders the environment as incorrectly static, such that it is beyond human comprehension as any change which occurs only occurs intergenerationally.

This glaciality explains the conflation of the past, present, and future, as each change within the earth necessarily carries traces of the past within it. To the human eye, it seems that very little changes. The glacial is inherently posthuman, interrupting the “linearity of theological narratives of humanistic progress.”²⁰¹ A question we will therefore need to ask in analysis of Leah Barclay’s *WIRA* (2015), is how do we become-with glacial time to reform the possibilities of the future if our rhythm with the earth is fundamentally out of sync

200 Haldrup, “What Futures?” 153.

201 Pederson, “Cosmic Ecologies and Futures after the End,” 132.

**“We can’t possible
live otherwise until
we first imagine
otherwise.”**



Case Study: WIRA (2015), by Leah Barclay

About River Listening

“Recognising that people can speak for the river and that the river is part of them seems to be a meaningful shift and acknowledgement...It is powerful. It also shifts the idea that is evident in western cultures in particular that humans are at the apex of all species, and the masters of everything (ego-view). An alternative eco-view is that humans are just one of many animate and inanimate entities.”¹

Leah Barclay works at the intersection of science and art, exploring the way in which sound is capable of generating public engagement with the environment and its care and conservation. Compared to both Brett Leavy and Alison Bennett, Leah Barclay's work is quite a departure in the framework of her XR work. River Listening is the overarching project which houses her augmented reality installation. An interdisciplinary collaboration² with the Australian Rivers Institute, situated initially across four river systems in Queensland, River Listening is an extension of Barclays interest in the interstice between sound composition and the “creative possibilities of aquatic bioacoustics”³ as a way of creating new frameworks for river management. A core feature of this framework revolves around staging “site-specific electroacoustic music”⁴ artworks, “multi-layered”⁵ projects which are built with and for the community they respond to. Using hydrophones to capture field recording, Barclay brings attention to the river as a sentient being, one which “deserve[s] respect and conservation.”⁶ In amplifying the sound of the river, Barclay simultaneously exposes the silence of the river and amplifies the sound of “anthropogenic interference”⁷ through technology and industrialisation, as well as acknowledging the deep care of the lands ***by Indigenous communities.***

About WIRA

Leah Barclay's WIRA (2015) presents a stark contrast in its use of augmented reality to the previous examples looked at. WIRA utilises augmented

1 Wendy Steele, “Melbourne (AU), 25 August, 2020,” in *The Politics of Public Space, Volume 5: Public Lectures in Contentious Places*, ed. OFFICE (OFFICE, 2021), 454.

2 Leah Barclay, “River Listening,” Leah Barclay, accessed October 10, 2025, https://leahbarclay.com/portfolio_page/river-listening/.

3 Leah Barclay, “River Listening,” in *Environmental Sound Artists: In Their Own Words*, ed. Frederick Bianchi and V.J. Manzo (Oxford University Press, 2016), 75.

4 Leah Barclay, “Sonic Ecologies: Exploring the Agency of Soundscapes in the Ecological Crisis,” *Acoustic Ecology Review* 12, no. 1 (2013): 29, DOI:10.21810/aer.v12i1.6113.

5 Barclay, “Sonic Ecologies,” 29.

6 Barclay, “River Listening,” 71.

7 Barclay, “River Listening,” 74.

audio reality – the superimposing of real-time sound onto the physical environment – as a way of reforming our spatial relationship to the land, and the way we engage in reciprocal empathy for its ecosystems.

A piece of environmental sound art, WIRA was staged for the public during Floating Land 2015, the theme of which was Reflect and Re-imagine, inviting thought as to what the river could be through the ghostly haunt of its auditory memory, laid over real-time binarural recordings. WIRA eventually became a permanent installation in public space. As Barclay proposes, "WIRA reimagines the Noosa River in sound."⁸ The experience layers river soundscapes in the urban environment – collected and composed by Barclay through non-invasive hydrophone techniques, and community consultations – with visitors accessing the sonic art, stories, and soundscapes through their mobile phones, "sculpting their own experience by triggering geolocated soundscapes"⁹ as they walk through the site. In layering locative sounds directly onto the viewer's environment, affecting the viewer's perception of the real through the synthesis of sound, and encouraging reconnection to the landscape through the generation of aural memory. WIRA was further accompanied by performances, and community-based workshops, creating a community and culture of empathy toward the river and by extension, the natural environment itself.



Bringing together a decade of creative work, WIRA places the Noosa River at the centre of the community, combining sonic compositions and hydrophone recordings as well as live audio streams of the river in real time to construct a sense of place which exists around care for the river system itself, binding "geographical, social and cultural dimensions."¹⁰ As the sounds augment urban space, the viewer's perception of the world extends beyond that which is visible, engaged in an act of "becoming and bearing witness"¹¹ to the river as an active agent in spatial place-making, opening public space up to differentiation.

Each experience of WIRA is individual and unique; with no prescribed walking route, the installation is experienced freely. Path, distance and direction manipulate the sounds triggered, encouraging "deep listening."¹² Experienced in person, because of the geo-located live streamed soundscapes, the experience evolves and adapts, mimicking the process of glacial time and

⁸ Leah Barclay. "WIRA," Leah Barclay, accessed October 10, 2025, https://leahbarclay.com/portfolio_page/wira/.

⁹ Leah Barclay, "5 Questions to Leah Barclay (composer, sound activist)," interview by Zoe Madonna, I Care if You Listen (February 4, 2016), <https://icareifyoulisten.com/2016/02/5-questions-to-leah-barclay-composer-sound-activist/>.

¹⁰ Leah Barclay, "Augmenting Urban Space with Environmental Soundscapes and Mobile Technologies," *Soundscape* 16 (2017): 21, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323687884>.

¹¹ Haldrup, "What Futures?," 154.

¹² Barclay, "Augmenting Urban Space with Environmental Soundscapes and Mobile Technologies," 33.

environmental potentials.

When analysing Barclay's work, we must detach from the pre-held notion of augmentation as a site-specific virtual monument. Whilst this is certainly true in some cases, the installation of augmented reality sonic art can also be "an experience-transparent, ephemeral, and constantly evolving over time."¹⁸ This manipulation of augmented reality whereby the viewer must go to a physical space to interact with it, as in Barclay's WIRA, causes the augment to function as an apparition. Through the augment as shadow, there is a harmony created between the real and that which lurks, such that the viewer is encouraged to question the truth behind the environment they inhabit, and their own place within the destructive forces which have fundamentally altered the landscape.



The Ghostly Haunt of the Land

"For twenty-five centuries, western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible."¹⁹

The act of mourning brings forth the past to exist through grief. In many ways, the emotion experienced upon hearing the sonic art of WIRA can be likened to this, as the work reconnects listeners to the audience by merging past sounds with the current, traces which haunt to remind the viewer of that which has been fundamentally altered. The multilayering of time through sound, and the auditory oscillation between live recordings and crafted compositions ask the viewer to recall the construction of their memory, and the image of the past environment which has been denied by the Anthropocene. If morning is about dwelling with a loss,²⁰ then interpenetrating the biosphere with audio recordings of anthropocentric sound, which fade and pull into the sensorial realm depending on distance from the geo-tagged locations, asks the viewer directly to consider those voices of the environment which have been lost to the past, and how we move forward.

In this way, the impression of the work on the psyche of the viewer can be likened to Haraway's concept of "sustained remembrance."²¹ Once we experience an artwork, especially one which is auditory and requires specific cognitive processing, it becomes a part of us, such that the spectral nature of the sonic art itself, creates an emotion which reproduces an ambiguous kind of grief, allowing us to understand our "entangled shared living and dy-

18 Clarke, "Merging Spaces," 154.

19 Barclay, "Sonic Ecologies," 29.

20 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking," 38.

21 Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking," 39.

ing.”²² This relationality is enhanced by the spatiality of WIRA. For example, as one looks out towards the ocean, voices from Indigenous communities in Vanuatu are overlaid onto the sound, creating a transnational community sustained through grief.

The expansion of the auditory realm is phantom, as if speaking to us from beyond the grave. Barclay’s work is not solely about mourning, however. In blending the past through composition with the now, it becomes difficult for the viewer to discern between the two temporalities. It is just as easy for the present sound to be past, as it is for the past to be present, so that the viewer must question their construction of memory as inherently malleable through creating future memories. To entangle this temporal auditory experience with specific site locations, glacial time and futures become entangled with the embodied experience.²³ When we see images of the environment, they are often divided into a ‘before’ and an ‘after’; WIRA denies the ability of this, such that all versions of the river systems itself, healthy and unhealthy, become possible. This notion of remembrance, which necessitates bringing the past into the present, is WIRA’s way of dissecting the linear, problematising the notion of the now as the cardinal point in thinking about the future,²⁴ and encouraging new environmental imaginaries which resurrect and resuscitate ecocentric fabulations.

Deep Listening as Creating Space

“We need a future where we design spaces that don’t alienate people or natural systems”²⁵

“Listening and walking are both temporal activities that have the capacity to connect us to the physical landscape.”²⁶ Some attention has already been given to the place-making ability of WIRA and digital sonic art. However, it is important that if we are to understand how Leah Barclay promotes the calling forth of alternative futurisms, we must attend to the interplay she crafts with ‘deep listening’.

Our previous explorations of augmented and virtual reality throughout this book have primarily been concerned with the visual experience. For many of us, the concept of renegotiating our relationship to space through the audible may seem anathema to our traditional ways of being. However, in revealing the biophonic, technophonic, and anthrophonic sounds which lay beneath the surface of the Noosa river, the changes



22 Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking,” 39.

23 Haldrup, “What Futures?,” 156.

24 Boyden, “Heterotemporality and Posthumanism in Alternative Futurisms,” 70.

25 Rees, “Melbourne (AU), 28 September, 2020,” 258.

26 Barclay, “Augmenting Urban Space with Environmental Soundscapes and Mobile Technologies,” 21.

invisible to the human eye, Barclay “[gives] voice to the soil”²⁷ and skin to the earth. Through deep listening, the viewer realises we can speak to and for the river,²⁸ and that is our responsibility to acknowledge the place of the river as the “lifeblood”²⁹ of the community, such that space becomes organised around the river itself. When we hear the low hum of a boat travelling through the river, against the symphony of snapping shrimps, for example, we hear the heartbeat of the river, becoming animate. WIRA, then creates space by giving body to the river, installing it as a feature of urban public space, as well as the life force which sustains public space, that we are positioned to have empathy for.

Rather than looking upon the river, WIRA encourages us to feel it, to feel the vibrations of the sounds and to reimagine the landscape. This auditory sensorial experience becomes an embodied engagement³⁰ with place itself, as the augmented audio reality experience creates a new spatial site in itself, connecting us to an environment which is both fundamentally different, albeit not visually, to that which we previously inhabited. Experienced in situ, the augmented reality experience and this digital artwork itself become a conduit³¹ through which the viewer reimagines their role in relation to space, and conceives of new possibilities for that relationship in the future.

As an artwork which installs itself at multiple points, and as Barclay positions different compositions throughout the environment traversable freely for each listener, the non-linearity of the work mirrors the process of specialisation itself.³² In connecting to place, and new ways of envisioning the way space is inhabited by our own body, as well as non-human or seemingly inanimate bodies, we begin to understand space not necessarily as “legible, but audible”³³, making public space essentially porous and capable of being changed through our own visions of entanglement with it.

27 Cameron Cartiere and Jennifer Wingate, “Collaborating with Nature: Public Art and the Environment,” *Public Art Dialogue* 9, no. 2 (2019): 132, DOI: 10.1080/21502552.2019.1644105.

28 Steele, “Melbourne (AU), 25 August, 2020,” 454.

29 Barclay, “Augmenting Urban Space with Environmental Soundscapes and Mobile Technologies,” 25.

30 Leah Barclay, “Acoustic Ecology and Ecological Sound Art: Listening to Changing Ecosystems,” in *Sound, Media, Ecology*, ed. Milena Droumeva and Randolph Jordan (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2019), 154.

31 Coles, “Landscape, Eco-Arts Practice, and Digital Technology in the Public Art Realm,” n.p.

32 Barclay, “Acoustic Ecology and Ecological Sound Art,” 167.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of our journey together, what I hope has become clear through Portals of the Otherworld is the way in which public art – and specifically digital public art – can recover futures through reimagining our current relationship to time and space. All of the artworks place us within a community or body which we may or may not inhabit, introducing us to difference through the embodied experience of extended reality artworks.

In reality, all the cofuturisms presented are interconnected and share affinities to one another. Eco-futurism is not possible without looking to the traditional knowledge of Indigenous owners and communities who have spoken with the land for decades; the ways in which Indigenous futurism expand the terrain of the possibilities we inherent prime it for an affinity with Queer futurism, in that to interrogate colonial racial erasure is to also interrogate the colonial gender binaries which make extinct queer futurity; and Queer futurism gives value to the act of utopianism in creating heterotopic space within society, which is a valuation shared by all co-futurisms.

What is thus realised through brining this publication into existence, and giving materiality to the futures within, is that we are no longer able to move beyond this moment with ignorance. In making what was once thought to be 'impossible' possible through the analysis of public art forms, one can no longer move about the world divorced from the manipulative construction of our temporal and spatial realities. The recovery of those excluded from public space becomes our new baseline, the rudimentary level from which we must imagine what is yet to come, and how best to make the world habitable for all bodies present in space; it is our responsibility and imperative to conjure "a shared speculative space of intertwined and reciprocal exis-

tence...by narrating futures intimately connected to the past."³⁴

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Appendix 1: Relevant exhibitions/ interventions for further reading

AR.TRAIL. Melbourne Arts Precinct: NGV International, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Fed Square, Koorie Heritage Trust and ACMI, 22 August - 1 October 2022.

Gadigal Dreaming: The Sacred Country of the Gadigal People. Sydney: ICC Sydney, 1 September - 30 October 2022.

Futures & Other Fictions. Melbourne: ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), 28 November 2024 - 27 April 2025.

Terminus (touring exhibition by Jess Johnson & Simon Ward). Melbourne: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2 November 2019 - 1 March 2020. This exhibition has also been toured nationally and internationally.

17th Venice Architecture Biennale. Italy: Venice, 22 May 2021 - 21 November, 2021.

Galup VR Experience. Western Australia: WA Museum Boola Bardip, 3 July - 17 July 2023. This VR experience has also toured nationally.

Living Rocks: A fragment of the universe. Italy: Venice, 8 May - 24 November 2019. This is a collateral event presented at the 2019 Venice Art Biennale, in collaboration with the Art Gallery of South Australia

Herding Caterpillars. South Australia: Adelaide, 7 August - 11 August 2021. This is an Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality experience which has toured, and has varying dates.

Terra inFirma. New South Wales: The Leo Kelly Blacktown Arts Centre, 5 March 2020 - 10 July 2020.

Art in XR: Creating Immersive Worlds (Seminars). Perth: PICA, 23 July 2022. This is a seminar series hosted by PICA in the lead up to XR Hackathon, and XR:WA Festival.

Experimenta Emergence. This is a travelling exhibition, currently touring nationally until 2027, in its 9th iteration. The travelling exhibition showcases 13 artworks by leading Australian and International artists, all experimenting with digital and new medias.

Who's Afraid of Public Space? Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), 2021-22. A multifaceted project of exhibitions and programs, exploring the role, composition, and nature of public space.

Ultra Unreal. New South Wales: Museum of Contemporary Art, 22 July - 2 October 2022.

XR:WA. Western Australia: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 3 December - 6 December 2020. Mixture of conference and public expo, this festival interrogated and celebrated mediums of alternative reality.

Virtual Realms. Western Australia: WA Museum Boola Bardip, 26 March - 22 May 2022.

Frontier Imaginaries: No Longer at Ease & Life of Lines. Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 14 May - 9 July 2016. These were roaming art platforms, held across various locations in Brisbane.

Unsettled Exhibition. New South Wales: Australian Museum, 22 May - 10 October 2021.

