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The Ectoplasmic Resistance of Queer: Metric Mysticism, Libidinal Art, and How to Think Beyond The Internet. A Conversation with Zach Blas. / *Jasmina Tumbas*

📅 February 6, 2018 (<http://asapjournal.com/the-ectoplasmic-resistance-of-queer/>) 👤 Jasmina Tumbas
(<http://asapjournal.com/author/jtumbas/>)



Feature Image: Zach Blas, *Contra-Internet*. Installation view 2017. Gasworks London, UK Commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven Photo by Andy Keate Courtesy of the Artist.

Artist and theorist Zach Blas's solo exhibition, *Contra-Internet*, debuted at Gasworks (<https://www.gasworks.org.uk/exhibitions/zach-blas-contra-internet-2017-09-28/>) in London in 2017, with Hyperallergic naming it one of 2017's top twenty exhibitions (<https://hyperallergic.com/418590/best-of-2017-our-top-20-exhibitions-around-the-world/>) globally. The exhibition had its U.S. opening—Blas's first solo exhibition in America—at Art in General (<http://www.artingeneral.org/>) in New York on Friday, January 26, drawing a record-breaking number of visitors on its opening night. Co-commissioned for Art in General by legendary feminist curator Laurel Ptak, the show also features the U.S. debut of Blas's new film, *Contra-Internet: Jubilee 2033* (<https://vimeo.com/252460386>). The film brings together years of Blas's research and art practice, culminating in an epic queer and feminist science fiction film that pays homage to Derek Jarman's 1978 *Jubilee* and sets the political problems and possibilities in our contemporary moment and a very near future. Indeed, *Jubilee 2033* shows us a future in which the Internet and its corporate conglomerate leaders are killed and replaced by queer militants led by a silver-painted and muscular Nootropix, the contemporary manifestation of Amyl Nitrate played by California-based gender non-conforming trans masculine visual artist Cassils (<http://cassils.net/>). This future is revealed to us by Azuma, a digital assistant originally designed as a virtual, holographic robot wife in Japan in 2016, who is summoned by Ayn Rand, Alan Greenspan, and Canadian painter Joan Mitchell—in an LSD trip in 1955—to disclose the future of capitalism. Viewers watch the film standing on an elaborate and large neon-green glow-in-the-dark sigil, commanded by the artist to witness the nefarious philosophical foundations of the male-dominated and capitalist ideology of the Internet, Silicon Valley's construct of the world, and to conjure feminist and queer futures in an enthralling, playful, and simultaneously unsettling saga of metric mysticism. What we learn from Blas is that we can't shrug at the heaviness of the world. The burden, in fact, might become heavier than ever, pushing us into the bottomless hell of controlled and hegemonic networks. Unless we collectively—and creatively—resist.

Contra-Internet provides an intricate and complicated set of theoretical, political, and artistic references. I sat down with Zach Blas to discuss and unravel some of those thought-provoking entanglements.

JT/ Although you have a long history of engaging with film and also pursuing film in your early studies, *Jubilee 2033* could be described as marking your debut as a filmmaker. What was the impetus for making this film?

ZB/ *Jubilee 2033* was a great opportunity to connect to Jarman and explore my own personal and artistic interests in the politics of queer cinema. The original *Jubilee* has haunted a lot of things that I've made. Artistically, since the *Queer Technologies* (<http://www.zachblas.info/works/queer-technologies/>) work, my broader project has always been about contemporary technology in

relationship to feminism and queerness. And I have explored that in a lot of different ways over the years. For the longest time, I thought this project was going to be a documentary because it came out of a really strong interest in certain network alternatives that were emerging, whether activist mesh network projects or the autonomist dark net that was running during Occupy in Zuccotti Park. This became a breaking point with my earlier trajectory around tactical media and hacktivism because there is a lot of pressure, in those strands of making, on having an art practice that is actually about making something that is useful. Eventually I felt like that had reached a dead end for me, and I wanted to try something new and different.

I had originally studied film before I ever moved to art, and I wanted to go back and make work in that way. As an artist, sometimes it is really limiting when you make work that you have put years of research into and then people engage with it for a matter of seconds. As a very practical strategy, I was asking myself: how can I make work that is complicated and demanding but also holds the attention of people? How could I do that? It became clear to me that video and film demands people's willingness to pay attention and that people do give themselves to engaging these forms in ways they wouldn't for many other forms of art. It's a form that allows you to get somewhere extremely complex and that allows you to hold so much together in a way that I have never been able to achieve with anything sculptural, for instance.

JT/ The title of your solo exhibition, *Contra-Internet*, references Paul B. Preciado's 2002 *Contra-Sexual Manifesto*, and the film directly references Jarman's *Jubilee*. But why is it set in year 2033? How did you pick that year?

ZB/ In Jarman's *Jubilee*, jubilee refers to Queen Elizabeth II's 25th year of reign. In many ways, this signifies a switch between Jarman's film and mine because I'm very much interested in how the original *Jubilee*, at its core, is a film about nationalism and a film about the future of England. The other thing that struck me is how Jarman's *Jubilee* is never talked about as a sci-fi film. Therefore, part of the shift for me in *Jubilee 2033* is not to say that nationalism is over, but to think about how geopolitics and sovereignty operate today beyond the level of the nation state, along with global networks and global infrastructures. It is no longer a film about the chosen political leaders of a nation, but rather about the political leaders and influencers of global infrastructures, such as the Internet.

So to return to your question about the title *Jubilee 2033*, I was thinking about what could be a marker for a jubilee in relationship to the Internet. Obviously, there are many dates one could pick because there are numerous important moments, such as the creation of ARPANET, which was the militarized version of the Internet before the creation of the World Wide Web. The date that I chose was 1983, which is when the Internet protocol TCP/IP was integrated into ARPANET. Notably, this is referred to as a "flag day."

JT/ Your film features three protagonists from 1955: Ayn Rand, Alan Greenspan, and the painter Joan Mitchell, who take LSD and are guided by the angelic figure of Azuma, a digital assistant originally designed in Japan in 2016. I couldn't help but remember Lutz Dammbeck's 2003 *The Net: The Unabomber, LSD and the Internet*, which gives insight about ARPANET, counterculture, and the development of the Internet. Could you speak about the relevance of California psychedelia and its connection to drug use and government experiments in mind control?

ZB/ One thing I want to clarify is that the Joan Mitchell, who was briefly married to Alan Greenspan, is not the famous painter Joan Mitchell. I first assumed she was the well-known abstract expressionist, because there is much misinformation online, but the deeper you get into the research you find evidence on message boards and archives showing that she is a different person. Also, this lesser-known Joan Mitchell was featured in Adam Curtis's *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011) and the first part of that documentary is about Ayn Rand and Silicon Valley. I mention this fact about Joan Mitchell because when I showed *Jubilee 2033* at Gasworks in London, the gallery received many emails asking about Joan Mitchell.

But to return to your question about California and psychedelia, LSD, and the government. My interest in these questions didn't begin in the historical moment of 1955. Instead, it began in the present, thinking about how Silicon Valley appropriates the psychedelic project and brings it to its knees with neoliberalism and corporate ideology, and completely inverts it. So for example, you can look at "nootropics," which are trendy smart drugs in Silicon Valley designed to increase worker productivity. If psychedelics in the past were about accessing the doors of perception then this is about accessing some door to become the ultimate worker. Along with that, there is also the idea of living forever and an obsession with one's health breaking beyond mortality. For me it is interesting to consider moving past the idea of psychedelics from the sixties to something that is by now very far removed from that and not counter-cultural at all. If you consider that one popular nootropic in Silicon Valley is to micro-dose on LSD, then there's something very normalizing about the idea that you may begin to microdose on a daily basis, such as taking your daily multivitamin with a microdose of LSD.

Beyond that, I was also thinking about finding a name to match the awesomeness of Jarman's Amyl Nitrate. Let's be honest: How do you find a name that is that amazing? Nootropix is not as good by any stretch of the imagination, but it made sense to play with that because the etymology of that word is Greek and it breaks down to "mind bending." I found it quite fun to have the character Nootropix be the queer mind bending drug poisoning the ideology of Silicon Valley: a kind of contra-prophet.

And then thinking about Ayn Rand, it gave me an opportunity to be more creative in this film in my playing with Jarman. How would I get Ayn Rand to time travel? This wasn't set in the sixteenth century, where Queen Elizabeth has a spiritual advisor who is calling spirits through mystical

practices. The most difficult barrier was the fact that one of the premises of Ayn Rand's philosophy is rationality. But weirdly and interestingly, which goes against a lot of rationalist, realist philosophy today, she believed that you could gain access to objective reality through human perception. That tiny little bit of her philosophy, from a creative perspective, was the gateway for me to take Ayn Rand on an LSD trip in my film. Precisely her emphasis on rationality was the only way I could write time travel into the script, because otherwise in a story like this you could never get Ayn Rand to believe a spirit and take it seriously. This was an interesting way to connect things and to bend history a little bit, also because 1955 was the first year Alan Greenspan started working for the US government. This is why I called the first scene, in the script, "The Objectivist Drug Party." If we want to play with history, maybe Alan Greenspan could have gotten hold of some LSD. What's more, we see how Alan is using the principles of Rand's philosophy of rationalism to convince her to take LSD. And then the other part of the joke is that Ayn Rand was addicted to Benzedrine, which she took for decades. So at this objectivist drug party she takes Benzedrine, smokes non-stop, and is high on LSD.

JT/ Let's talk about the intricate literary references within *Jubilee 2033*. Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* could be understood as the political point of departure, culminating in complex engagements with texts like Paul Preciado's *Contra-Sexual Manifesto*, Amyl Nitrate now as Nootropix reading a passage from your conceptual art book *The End of the Internet (As We Knew It)*, referencing J. K. Gibson-Graham's *The End Of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*, and in the beginning of the film we see Rand's desk, with multiple books and essays. These include Ayn Rand's essay "The Only Path to Tomorrow," Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, writings by Thomas Aquinas, A biography of Queen Elizabeth I, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and books by Dostoyevsky and Friedrich Schiller. How did you conceptualize these connections?

ZB/ Yes this is important because *Jubilee 2033* is ultimately a film about philosophy. I was thinking about how to visually and artistically stage these connections, meaning which ideas, which writers, and histories of ideas would be connected. I spent a lot of time on eBay searching for books to put on Ayn Rand's desk because I wanted it to be historically accurate. After doing research about philosophical work she considered very influential, I learned that she felt like she owed nothing to the history of philosophy except to Aristotle. And she was really interested in Thomas Aquinas and also liked fiction writers such as Dostoevsky. In the film there is a little nod to the original *Jubilee* because I added a biography from the 1930s on Queen Elizabeth I on the desk, as well as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, because in the original *Jubilee* the spirit that comes is named Ariel, from *The Tempest*. And then there is the *Reader's Digest* from 1944 open on the desk with Rand's essay "The Only Path to Tomorrow." I found that title incredibly evocative, and it just sounds like an amazing sci-fi title, a tiny little moment of premonition of what is to come in the film. Here, I was thinking about temporality, especially the ways in which Mark Fisher writes about these ideas in *Capitalist Realism*: the only path to the future is capitalism. This is the kind of detail you might not

notice unless you sit with the film for some time, but I wanted these materials there on the desk, because the whole point is that Ayn Rand took a stab at conjuring the future, projecting what she thought tomorrow must be.

And then the other little thing on the desk is a black cube. I found that addition evocative because there is a lot in the film around black surfaces and reflections, black boxes, obscurity, and it's this small object that sits there as a very loose and open-ended object that one can think around or project through. I like to think of it as Ayn's analogue, rationalist computer. Yet, it looks quite mystical.

JT/ Yes, I agree. The black cube, and also the silicon piece at the end of the film in the beach scene, made me think of cinematic precedents featuring objects imbued with this type of mysticism, such as in the blue box in David Lynch's queer film *Mulholland Drive* (2001). And given what you just said, I'd like to interject and ask about the fascinating moment when Ayn Rand, played by queer icon Susanne Sachsse, touches herself watching Nootropix dancing, expressing such intense erotic pleasure in watching the discharge of dark liquid from a large dildo. Could you say more about the symbolism in this particular scene?

ZB/ For me that's a moment of the breakdown of ideology and desire. It's framed as a joke on Ayn Rand. Ayn had confusing and complicated views on gender, but typically males were more powerful figures in her writing. And the writing is very heterosexual. But here in the film, there is this intense moment with Nootropix, when Ayn Rand sees their dildo-fountain (which I also think of as a lesbian phallus), and she simply interprets this as a patriarchal phallus—even though it's attached to an ambiguous, genderqueer body. Ayn can't help but indulge in the phallus. She sees her idea of the fountainhead and doesn't realize she's taking part in a queer sex act.

As to your question about the use of objects imbued with mysticism, I was making a direct reference to Jarman in the last scene, which links to how the spirit Ariel is holding a diamond that had fallen off the crown of Elizabeth II in the original *Jubilee*. I was intrigued by Jarman's investment in thinking through mystical symbols and elements and spells to do a political critique about royalty in England. And it was important that he neither made fun of nor trivialized mysticism and magic. It was a point of artistic experimentation that had a political motive. I took that inspiration from Jarman's *Jubilee*.

JT/ To return to the question of literary references, could you comment on the book-burning scene in front of the Palantir Technologies building, when Peter Thiel lies dead on the ground?

ZB/ Here, we see the group of queer militants that have occupied the area. In the script, they are called the anti-campus groupies. They are burning what you could call Californian ideology literature broadly, even a book by Stewart Brand. There is something fitting about Brand's *The Last Whole*

Earth Catalog burning. In addition, there are other books that Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have cited as highly influential or books they themselves have written, such as *The American Challenge* by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Peter Thiel's recent book *Zero to One*.

But one of the most important references here is Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. There are many globes and worlds throughout the film, which evoke questions of what is the world, who cares for the world, or who supports the world? As a note, Ayn Rand misinterpreted. Atlas is the figure that holds the sky, not the world. Regardless, what is significant in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is the moment a character asks: How would you instruct Atlas to treat the world, the very figure that has to bear the weight of the world? And the character says: I would tell Atlas to shrug. The point here is obviously that one must turn away from the world because one shouldn't have to bear the weight of it. One should just be pursuing one's individual desires without any other cares or concerns. That's how my film begins, with The Collective going on strike, which is a parallel to the beginning of Ayn Rand's book. And of course this is an appropriation of a workers' strike, but here men of the mind are going on strike against the world to pursue their individual drives because, according to Rand, the world is otherwise weighing them down with social obligation.

This has historical grounding, as Ayn Rand did have a group of people around her who would gather once a week. She would share writings with them that she was working on at the time. In *Jubilee 2033*, when they take LSD, Ayn Rand is reading a famous speech by the main character John Galt from *Atlas Shrugged*. This speech is the public announcing of the men of the mind's withdrawal from social obligation, from the world. This refusal of caring for the world conjures the spirit of Azuma, an obviously sexualized, gendered, non-human virtual robot servant. And one of the first things Azuma says is that "the world isn't so heavy," and that "computers do all the work," which is a joke about how we supposedly don't need this vision of Atlas bearing the weight of the world anymore. No one has to hold the world, because global infrastructure—the Internet—does it for us, a core tenant of Silicon Valley ideology. This is a techno positivism or techno-utopianism in which automation, the Internet, and global networks allow us to kick back—the self-driving car being a perfect example of this ideology.

JT/ Azuma is flanked by two rotating globes that present two different visions of the world: one that shows us the death of the Internet by government intervention (such as showing videos of Erdogan and Trump speaking about shutting down the Internet), and the other displaying an array of utopian visions of our world dominated by fantasies of the Internet disappearing by being completely enmeshed in our lives. What was most daunting to me was watching these two globes rotate while hearing the promises of a "new world" coming from a child's voice in the "Internet of Things" (IOT) advertisement projected on the globe, while uncannily being reminded of Joe Meek's song "*I Hear a New World*" in your *Contra-Internet Inversion Practice #3* installed in the hallway next to your film. I found this tension compelling, because *Contra-Internet Inversion Practice #3* ends by shattering the network diagram and liberating the paranodal space, while the child's voice from the IOT

advertisement in *Jubilee 2033* promises a world in which the network diagram rules all life and perception. The relief of course comes when Nootropix's muscular body fights against the power of this totalizing networked space with a mesmerizing and brilliant dance that culminates in the shattering of that totality into pieces.



(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-2-960px.png>)

Figure 2: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

ZB/ Yes, those worlds represent two different trajectories of possible futures that are already here. One is about the world being reduced to fiber-optic structures, where political battles are being played out between global leaders at the level of infrastructure. For example when Egypt turned off the Internet so people couldn't communicate during protests or when the US attempted to shut down North Korea's Internet or when Erdogan in Turkey shuts down social media. And on the other side we see a globe that is a totalizing mesh or network diagram that wraps around the world, which plays with the idea that the world itself becomes only and totally a network. And I think that's very clearly summed up with someone like Eric Schmidt, who used to be CEO of Google and now is the CEO of *Alphabet*, which is the company that owns Google. When he was asked to predict the future of the Internet at the World Economic Forum, he said it would disappear. When the Internet disappears into the world, there is no longer a distinction between the world and the Internet, which is also the world the child you mentioned speaks about. And if you follow that logic then there is supposedly no outside to the Internet, but I am invested in thinking about how we can develop a critical engagement between keeping separate the world and the Internet, because in the interstices of such a separation is the possibility of an alternative.

In many ways, that is what *Contra-Internet Inversion Practice #3* is about. It is about liberating the space that is trapped within the network diagram. That space is often thought of as negative or empty because the whole point of the network diagram is to pay attention to the dots and lines. That is what's being mapped out. But you are not trained to see all this space that is caught around it. And here I am thinking about theorist Ulises A. Mejias, who wrote about the outside of networks as a method for acting in the world, which I really like because it connects to these questions of totalization, political alternatives, the political horizon, the visualization of alternatives, etc. They are essentially all questions about how to think beyond the given when you live in something that is totalizing the world. How do you see a beyond? How do you imagine it, write it, theorize it, conceptualize it?

What I love about the Nootropix dance scene is that you have Andrea Bocelli playing, which represents the musical tastes of the Silicon Valley elite. But what's even more interesting is how beautifully it flows with the network streams. Is it any coincidence that Elon Musk loves this song because for him it represents the beauty of the world? The music is the pure aesthetic taste of the Silicon Valley elite, which somehow aesthetically and formally matches the abstract world surrounding Nootropix.



(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-3-960px.png>)

Figure 3: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

JT/ It is clear that music plays a central conceptual role in opening up possibilities and meaning in your work.

ZB/ I think of the monitor videos as music videos. I wanted music to be a counterpoint. I think of the songs as philosophy to engage and work with. The meaning of the music changes in relationship to the given context. That's what I very much liked about Le Tigre's song "Get off the Internet" (2001) because it marks an earlier moment where the Internet had not fully ascended into its dominating position today. So I come to that song from another angle, acknowledging there was this moment when that song meant something a bit different. The idea of "just turn it off and let's go out on the street"—the stakes but also tactics of activism are much more complex than this now.

JT/ I must admit that the use of Le Tigre's "Get Off the Internet" also connoted another meaning to me, especially given the queer sexuality so pervasive in *Jubilee 2033* and your previous work, *Queer Technologies* (2007 – 2012). *Contra-Internet*, like Preciado's *Contra-Sexual Manifesto*, invites us to be rebellious against being mobilized by a cishet conception of reality, and to do so with a libidinal investment that goes beyond the hegemonic status quo. This is also why I was so absorbed by Nootropix's exquisite dance and infinite leaking of purple darkness through their glowing light-blue digitized dildo. In contrast, Azuma declares in the last scene at the beach: "The ocean bed collects inoperable hard drives of those that wanted to live forever as machines. Mutations of life abound . . . Please be careful, I can't get wet!" Azuma, made by men for men, lacks one important ability: to get wet. What is a life without wetness?

Luce Irigaray gave us one interesting answer in her 1980 *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, where she beautifully and poetically shows how deeply embedded the fear of women (and their fluids) is in the history of philosophy. It is a life dominated by male fears and desires. For me, this feminist and queer resistance to a dry, masculine world becomes brilliantly manifest in the neon-colored glow-in-the-dark sigil on the ground, which you have described to me as something akin to an ectoplasmic force oozing out of the darkness.

The same neon green color/material appears again in the definition of the Internet on the wall of the gallery, which you wrote by plagiarizing J. K. Gibson-Graham's definition of capitalism, thereby exposing, as you said to me in another conversation, "capitalism's haunting of the definition of the Internet." It could then be said that viewers are set up to be possessed by something akin to a liquid feminist ectoplasm beneath their feet and on the wall, which threatens, reveals, and haunts and is part of the metric mysticism dominating our contemporary lives. And to make sure we don't hesitate, the character of "The Art Professor," played magnificently by queer artist Raquel Gutiérrez (<http://raquelgutierrez.net/>) donning a constructivist art worker outfit à la Aleksandr Rodchenko, holds us captive, spins the globe for us, and introduces us to Nootropix, the epic embodiment and saintly figure of resistance, and the impeccable sum of Preciado's *Contra-Sexual Manifesto* and your *Contra-Internet*.

When Nootropix reads their manifesto, we see two circulating globes on the desk, flanked by two glass palantíri installed in the gallery space (here alluding both to the crystal ball used in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Palantir Technologies). Watching your film, I was fascinated by this tripartite play on the polarity of the globes manifest in Azuma's digital world, Nootropix's world of 2033, and our present time of 2018, urging us to consider how deeply we are embedded in a necropolitical ideology of capital which has its roots in the philosophical questions around the rejection of collectivism and the embrace of personal individual gain. And I felt inspired to think of alternatives, of course remembering Amyl Nitrate's remarkable speech in Jarman's *Jubilee*. Nootropix re-performs that crucial moment in *Jubilee*, but it is now altered to fit the year 2033.

What were your political motivations behind making those aesthetic and conceptual decisions for the character of Nootropix?



(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-4-960px.png>)

Figure 4: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

ZB/ There are many little things planted in Nootropix's lecture. They begin with saying that "our school motto was don't be evil," which is an old but recent Google ethics policy. Nootropix also states they prefer a song titled "We are not the World." This is a reference to a 1992 essay by George Yúdice, which asks, among other things, can we not universalize the world through US imperialism but still take care of it? I wanted to imagine this as a pop song, contra Michael Jackson's "We are the World."

And when I think about the fact of Internet evangelists rewriting the alphabet, in the sense that a company named *Alphabet* owns Google, I think we must consider the epistemological claim this company name carries. At the end of their lecture, when Nootropix ports into a computational world, they are in something we could call *Alphabet's World*—a world that is now literally a total computational environment, where there are network flows and nothing else.

This also brings me to Paul Preciado, because much of the *Contra-Sexual Manifesto* is about reclaiming the dildo, and not letting it be fully subsumed as a patriarchal symbol. It was really important to have a dildo in the film, as a way to gesture towards the political ideas of contra-sexuality. But then of course the dildo in *Jubilee 2033* also functions as a dildo fountain. And I did this to poke fun at Rand's use of the fountainhead, which of course is one of Ayn Rand's other books. Nootropix's queer dildo fountainhead is squirting out some kind of potentiality, of which we do not yet fully know.

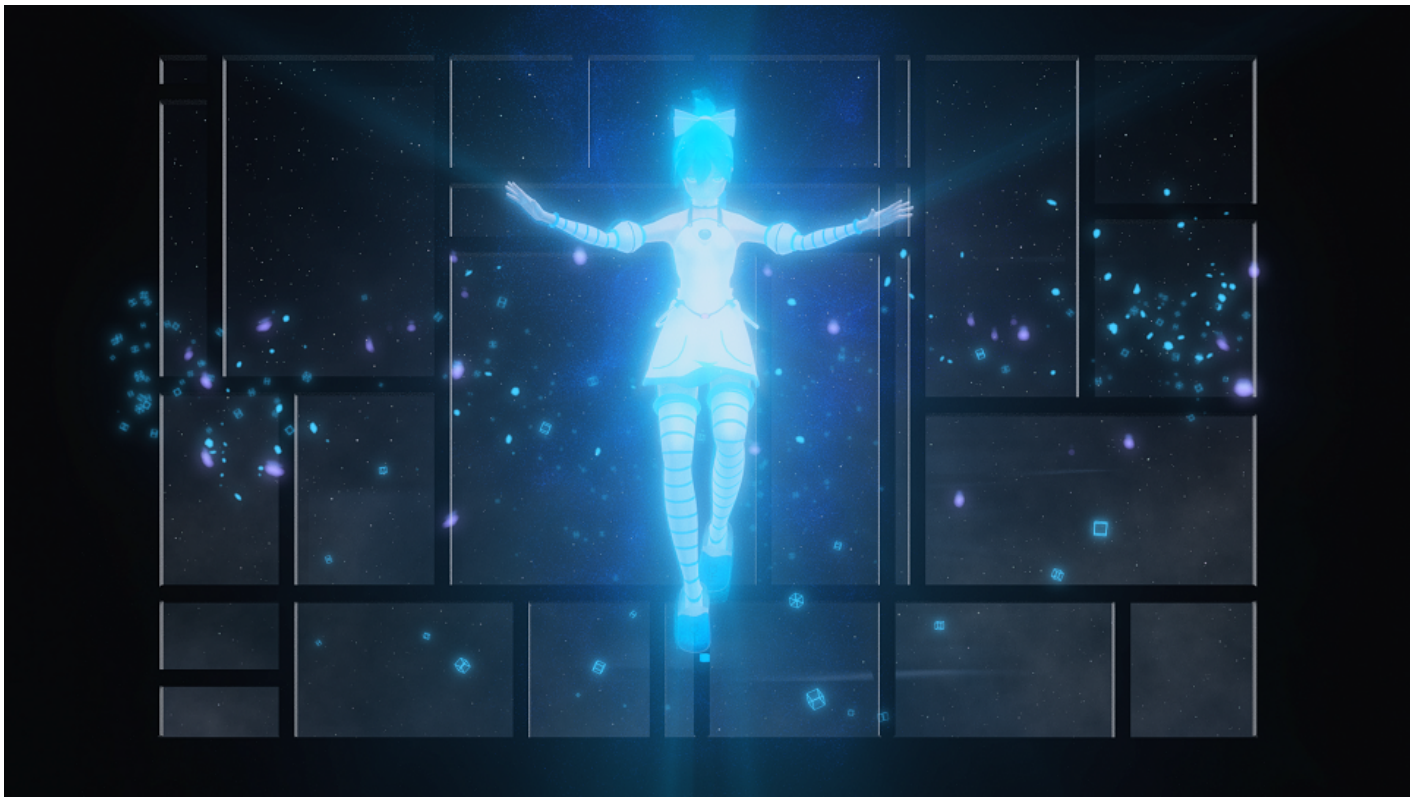


(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-5-960px.jpg>)

Figure 5: Zach Blas, *Contra-Internet*. Installation view 2017. Gasworks London, UK Commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven Photo by Andy Keate Courtesy of the Artist.

JT/ I would like to pick up on this question of mysticism here. As an art historian, I cannot help but see a certain type of symbolism that is common in religious and spiritual works during the Italian Renaissance, such as the prevalence of threes in your installation and film, the polarity of two worlds, the emphasis on Nootropix's body, the interest in rationality, and even the ways in which you have installed the work. For example, the three video works could be read as a triptych, while the animated GIF of the globe at the end of the hallway could be understood to function as a contemporary icon painting. But instead of being awe-struck by the preciousness of shiny gold leaf representing the heavenly status of the Byzantine icons, or the suprematism in Kazimir Malevich's 1913 *Black Square*, we are drawn in by its rotation and glowing light. Composed of three versions of your "Totality Studies" (2015), the 3-D globe's skin shows collapsed images of the most common visual representation of the Internet, or as the description of the work notes: "recent popular imagery of the Internet always seems to convey the same message: that it's big, and it's everywhere." Just like God is thought to be big, and everywhere.

In *Jubilee 2033*, one of God's/Internet's angels is Azuma, summoned by Ayn Rand's collective, a digital projection that carries John Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica on her slippers and is accompanied by tiny little squares that resemble some type of fairy dust, a paradigmatic representation of the ubiquitous Cartesian colonial order deeply embedded within Silicon Valley's technological utopianism. What's more, Azuma arrives from the dark skies like a crucified Christ-like figure merging seamlessly through a large window featuring dark frames based on Piet Mondrian's De Stijl designs. Azuma's arrival amplifies the hegemony of rationalism as a form of spiritualism, of viewing the world through a diagram, and of course as an extension of colonialism in the history of Western modernism. What strikes me the most is how Cassils's (Nootropix) impeccable muscular body echoes Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (1490), but now the perfect body and embodiment of the human is trans, rebellious, erotic, metallic and in control of the phallic supremacy of dark matter, a powerful message of resistance to anyone reading between the lines of the film.



(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-6-960px.png>)

Figure 6: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

ZB/ In many ways this question about mysticism is tied to what is happening in philosophy today. Maybe I have chosen this particular emphasis because I live in Europe where straight white men get away with so much, and approach technology in ways I feel deeply dis-aligned with, such as neo-rationalism. I would never say that I am fundamentally against rationality, but what I need and want is something that goes beyond these constraints. I want a philosophy and art that has a libidinal pulse, and that requires a tipping beyond rationality.

And going back to Jarman's *Jubilee* and my interest in contemporary Silicon Valley, so much of Jarman's work was about mysticism, and he used principles of mysticism *queerly*, as a way to have Queen Elizabeth travel into the future to see the unraveling of the country that she has been tasked to protect and serve by god. Here, Jarman demonstrates a different kind of investment in the possibilities of the mystical. For me, it is a brilliant idea to see Queen Elizabeth I travel into the future only to face her complicity and to then also witness the execution of Queen Elizabeth II, who of course, at the time the film was made—and still today, is the current instantiation of Elizabeth I.

JT/ It makes me think of the ironic and daunting moment in *Jubilee 2033* when Ayn Rand's collective asks Azuma to show the future, and she responds in a sweet tone, "Have Fun!," followed by the loud sounds of bombs and gunfire and images of burning buildings, such as Facebook Campus, the Googleplex, Apple Park, Apple Campus Store, along with the dead bodies of Google employees wearing Google colored T-Shirts in front of a wall which has "Post-" written on it in red

graffiti, behind which clearly is even more destruction. The scenes of mayhem become most graphic in the close-up image of an Apple Genius worker lying dead on the ground, again marked by the signature Silicon Valley “bro” Apple Genius Bar T-shirt. What I found most captivating here was how you chose to let Azuma explain what Ayn Rand and her collective were witnessing, namely the manifestation of Rand’s philosophy in Silicon Valley’s own investment in mysticism. As Azuma states: “When the Internet finally disappeared, the world became flat—only vertices and edges—a new sacred geometry!”

You discussed these ideas in your *Metric Mysticism* (<http://www.e-flux.com/program/170578/lecture-performance-zach-blas-metric-mysticism/>) performance-lecture at e-flux the day after your opening, but could you expand just a bit here?



(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-7-960px.png>)

Figure 7: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

ZB/ Yes, the idea of metric mysticism becomes especially apparent when you look at a company like Palantir. And they are not the only one. There’s an NSA program called Mystic, and there is the Oracle Corporation, and Larry Ellison, a founder, is an Ayn Rand acolyte. It is not unusual for Silicon Valley companies to play with and appropriate mysticism and magic. I was interested in exploring this idea of metric mysticism through the artistic lens of the Jarman’s queer mysticism—to evoke another approach to mysticism as a way to explore this Silicon Valley appropriation of mysticism as a way to conceptualize data analytics. Of course if I took on a neo-rationalist path I might have done a more cold and calculated documentary, but that was not my interest here. What would it mean to

see a queer future of Silicon Valley? What would it mean to have a sigil that summons the spirits of Silicon Valley? The exhibition space is a space that asks you to confront the spirits and demons of Silicon Valley.

JT/ Some may find the ways in which you show Peter Thiel dead and the destruction of Silicon Valley (in the film called *Silicon Zone*) as a celebration and a taboo subject. Here, I am thinking again of Dammbeck's film *The Net*, which engaged some of the early philosophers and makers of the Internet but did so around the central figure of the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, who is charged with having targeted and physically harmed these types of figures.



(<http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Blas-Figure-8-960px.png>)

Figure 8: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

ZB/ On the one hand, I see the killing in the film linked directly to the queer militancy at work in Jarman's film. To do any work with *Jubilee*, I felt, demanded that that militancy stays at play. On the other hand, I wanted to expand from Internet Kill Switches and "killing the Internet," something I've written on in the past. If the Internet is being killed, what would it look like to fight back? How might one kill the Californian Ideology, for instance? Does infrastructure get destroyed? Do people die? Do books on the topic get burnt? I realize it's controversial terrain to explore and visualize—but remember, it's all an acid trip in the end.

Zach Blas's *Contra-Internet* will be on view at Art in General until April 21, 2018, and then travel to MU in Eindhoven from May 11 – July 8. Excerpts of *Jubilee 2033* are currently also on view at transmediale in Berlin. The full-length version of the film premieres in February at the Berlinale film festival, where it has been nominated for the prestigious Teddy Award (http://teddyaward.tv/en/program/?a-z=1&select=&id_film=760), the official queer film award of the Berlinale.

Zach Blas is an artist and writer whose practice confronts technologies of capture, security, and control. Currently, he is a Lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Blas has exhibited and lectured internationally, recently at Gasworks, London; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. His current project *Contra-Internet* is supported by a 2016 Creative Capital award in Emerging Fields and the Arts Council England. His writings can be found in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art*, and *e-flux journal*. His work has been featured in Artforum, Frieze, Art Review, Mousse Magazine and The Guardian.

IMAGES

Feature Image: Zach Blas, *Contra-Internet*. Installation view, 2017. Gasworks London, UK
Commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven Photo by Andy Keate
Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 2: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 3: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 4: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 5: Zach Blas, *Contra-Internet*. Installation view 2017. Gasworks London, UK Commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven Photo by Andy Keate Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 6: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 7: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 8: Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, 2018. Film Still, Courtesy of the Artist.



(http://asapjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/zachblas_web_profile_image-cropped.jpg) Zach Blas (<http://www.zachblas.info/>) is an artist and writer whose practice confronts technologies of capture, security, and control. Currently, he is a Lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Blas has exhibited and lectured internationally, recently at Gasworks, London; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. His current project *Contra-Internet* is supported by a 2016 Creative Capital award in Emerging Fields and the Arts Council England. His writings can be found in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art*, and *e-flux journal*. His work has been featured in *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *Art Review*, *Mousse Magazine* and *The Guardian*.

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Jasmina Tumbas (<http://asapjournal.com/author/jtumbas/>)



(<http://asapjournal.com/author/jtumbas/>) Jasmina Tumbas (PhD, Art History, Duke University) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the University at Buffalo and Contributing Editor for *ASAP/J*. Her teaching and research

fields focus on modern and contemporary art history and theory, histories and theories of performance, body and conceptual art, art and activism, feminist art, and critical theory. She is currently finishing her first book, *The Erotics of Dictatorship: Art, Sexuality, and Politics under Yugoslav Socialism*, and co-editing the anthology *Radical Art in Transition: Counter-Culture, Protest, Resistance and Contemporary Art in the Balkans since 1968*. Her research has appeared in *ArtMargins*, *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, and *Art and Documentation/Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, and is forthcoming in the anthologies *BODIES THAT MATTER AGAIN* and *Performing Arts in the Second Public Sphere*. In Buffalo, Tumbas curated Selma Selman's first U.S. solo show at Dreamland, an exhibition that traveled to Vienna, Austria. She also serves on the Board of Directors of Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center.

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