

# the pluralist #1



# Letter from the Editors

Some enrolled at the RCA because they were lost in the post-fordist zoo and needed a new network of peers. But none of the students here are mingling as much as they could. That's why: light a ciggy, sit back, read The Pluralist, and connect with unexpected events and artists.

Stay alert even if you're worn from last night's clubbing. Look out for that writer who voiced concern about art funding or supported a ban against palm oil, and start a conversation. Now that our school is spreading across the city, with seas of desks in corporatish spaces, this newspaper will help readers stay in touch with London's ephemeral maze of artist-led venues and mini communities.

We editors support a plurality of minds across all spectrums of culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. If the paper doesn't do anything for your interests, please email us and we will work on your suggestions. Chances are, others too want to read about sex workers in Brazil or kitschy outfits tailored from nano fabric. It just takes some time to come together and write about it.

The Pluralist seeks to help readers enjoy their freedom, meet new people, share ideas, and create positive change. Amongst the many (and fleeting) projects aimed at interdisciplinary collaboration, this newspaper strives to be a more permanent source for communication across schools. So, please befriend our teams and join us to keep it going!

- 03 World News Column: Tolerating Intolerance
- 04 Health and Well-being: The neuroscience of sleep
- 05 Editorial cartoon: Back to School
- 06 It is a Funny Story: Greetings from CERN
- 08 Student Spotlight 1: Equal Voices In the Room
- 10 Student Spotlight 2: Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled
- 12 Public Spotlight: Interview with Jade Blackstock
- 15 Taking Control of our Future: Story on SustainLab Society
- 16 Upcoming Events

The Pluralist, Royal College of Art, October 2017

Editors: Rachel Yalisove, Anna Schlimm | Sub-Editors: Niyoshi Shah, David McAllistar | Cover Illustration: Alex Gibbs  
Writers: Thomas Ellmar, Alexandra Parry, Cicilia Ostholm, John Gallally, David McAllistar, Becky Miller, Anna Schlimm, Rachel Yalisove | Comic Artist: Rachel Sale | Photographer: Gueorgui Tcherednitchenko | Design: Angelo Stitz, Francisco Casaroti, Maria Pestana Teixeira | Typefaces by: Adrian Frutiger, Alex Turner, Audrey Ma, Chanshin Park, Charlotte Lengersdorf, Hubert Mietkiewicz, Kirstin Helgadottir, Sarah Sajid | Printing: Stroma | Sponsored by the Students Union of the Royal College of Art



# TOLERATING INTOLERANCE

THE NEW POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN GERMANY



For the past two decades, Tony Blair and many other Third Way politicians talked of compromise as the running gambit of their platform. To concede was a byword for tolerance and respect, and the arguments are not altogether lacking. For nations composed of such diverse arrays of communities and people, it is crucial not to assume others hold the views they do merely in self-interest, that they are held in good faith and should therefore be accommodated. For a time, this worldview dominated.

But the cracks of Third Way social democracy have never seemed so evident as they do now, in the face of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) becoming the first overtly German nationalist party to take seats in the Bundestag for sixty years; let alone becoming the third largest in only three years of existence.

For parties like the AfD there is nothing to be conceded. You cannot compromise with a body that is purely defined by an intolerance of the Other; one that is not founded on principal but by the extent to which they find the actions of others unacceptable. One of its new members in the Bundestag, Beatrix von Storch, wants guns used on the German borders and denies climate change is real. Another, Jens Maier, believes mixed race is “erasing national identity”; while Wilhelm von Gottberg sees the Holocaust as merely “an efficient instrument” to criminalize Germans and Germany. These attitudes are not simply wrong, or held in good faith. They are unacceptable.

In the face of such intolerance, suddenly concession comes to look less like a want of agreeable solutions and more a denial that any problems or discontent even exist. Part of this is because the social democratic, Third Way notion of compromise was never really about consensus at all, but an obfuscation that there was anything needed to be compromised on to begin with. Policies of an ideological bent were replaced by ‘values’ left abstract and open to interpretation; to argue against neoliberalism as an economic model was like trying to argue against simple common sense. Even now, the real issues that require decisive action—climate change, rising inequality—are hidden and left unresolved behind rows upon rows of nodding heads, handshakes and eloquently penned agreements.

The German federal election has proven intolerance is not exclusive to poverty or lack of education. Now we must prove that tolerance is not simply keeping quiet in fear of provoking a reaction; it is a principle to be defended. In the words of Karl Popper: “we should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant.

# The neuroscience of sleep

TO START OFF OUR HEALTH & WELLBEING COLUMN, WE INVITED JOHN GALLALLY, FROM THE STUDENT SUPPORT DEPARTMENT, TO CONTRIBUTE HIS PERSONAL INSIGHTS.

John Gallally

From time to time the staff at Student Support thinks of how we can support students in broader ways and make a difference in their wellbeing, practice, and precious time at college. We have talked about all sorts of ideas from sessions on mindfulness to welfare dogs (*but who looks after them and who cleans up?*) We have also looked at creating communication channels for the college community (like an internal social media site helping students to connect on the basis of interests, obsessions etc). But the topic that keeps coming back is sleep.

There are so many books, videos, hacks, and articles that it's hard to know where to start. Having consumed lots of this material, one piece that stuck a particular chord with me was by Russell Foster, a neuroscientist from Oxford. He wrote a brilliant piece in the Times Higher Education Supplement a couple of years ago. It was a response to a simple question to academics of several disciplines: *what would you do if you ran a university for a day?*

His research got everyone thinking about the importance of sleep in terms of university timetables and specialist support. Foster explained in surprising terms how a good night's rest forms the crucial platform for our cognitive capacity and our overall health and wellbeing.

From his Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute, Foster further explained that scientists are still unsure about the exact purpose of sleep but estimate that brain processing, consolidation, and restoration are key factors. It is certain that poor or inadequate sleep can affect creativity and memory; and cause impulsiveness, increased stress, weight gain, and cravings for carbs and stimulants (which, in turn, mess with your routine). He also highlighted how disruptive alcohol is to slumber. It may help us snooze but completely wrecks the NREM-REM cycles and brain activity responsible for restful repose.

It gets worse. Insufficient sleep can also lead to cancer, dementia, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and mental ill health. *Some grim data on its relationship with early death exists too.* In earlier times, poor sleep was seen as a consequence of psychological disorders; but emerging studies suggest that it could be implicated as the cause. For example, a high proportion of people being treated for depression report longstanding problems with slumber before the onset of their illness. A recent article in the Guardian by another neuroscientist, Matthew Walker, provides some unsettling information about the wider risks to health. Walker is convinced that we are collectively experiencing a sleep-loss epidemic and that the consequences are far graver than any of us could imagine. He argues that addressing sleep issues should be a major

health priority. Another problem is our attitude toward sleep deficiency. Some, in public life, almost brag about needing just four to five hours of shut-eye – which is not enough according to Foster – and how they are too busy for something so 'unproductive'. Certain professional cultures also foster the idea that it is feeble to prioritise sleep when you can easily keep caffeine coming to work into the small hours.

My personal struggles with this subject fluctuate – and sometimes leave me identifying with Al Pacino in *Insomnia*. My current favourite fixes include standard measures like white noise and slightly new-age deliberate thinking about pleasant experiences from earlier that day. It has to amount to at least ten experiences so you get past the really obvious ones and then find yourself tired of conjuring increasingly small and obscure, but nonetheless pleasurable details.

Other tactics include ones from a CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) book by Ad Kerkhof called *Stop Worrying*. It's an offbeat book for a professor of clinical psychology. When you're ruminating in vain, he has a catchphrase for self-talk: *Not now, but later*. It links with his other recommendation, which is to set aside a specific time for serious worrying. And when you're doing this, at the end of each worry, you hit an imaginary bell and say: *Next please!*

Kerkhof also offers another technique, probably stolen from Bruce Lee. When you are lying awake fretting, write down your troubles and shove them in a shoebox under the bed. And you can revisit them the next day, during your appointed worry time. (*That's safer than the Bruce Lee approach, which allegedly involved setting fire to the worries and watching them burn!*).

Back to Foster: we may not be able to rejig class calendars any time soon but it would be helpful to spotlight sleep and get a discussion going. Perhaps, students and staff could share their tricks for dosing and we could make these available to all on the Intranet or through posters.

Get in touch if you have any ideas, stories or projects you would like to discuss:  
john.gallally@rca.ac.uk

Well-being

and

Health

Back to School

Giles Drainridge arrives back at the RCA for the first time since he graduated in 1983.

It certainly does seem different, he thinks.

He's here at the beautiful White City campus to head up the exciting new pathway 'Innovation Brand Storytelling', or 'IBS'.

Hello Giles

Giles.

Ah fantastic, you've found the course handbook. Great. Obviously it's still in need of a bit of tweaking but the content is there - it's all there. I'd say it might be worth us sitting down and just kind of going through it all together and y'know, sort of spending a bit of time aligning ourselves on the key - I mean the core - I mean the outline of the course. Might need a bit of direction from you here actually Giles, just because - well, this is your speciality, your vision...

Yes, I think I might need a bit of time to just refresh my memory about all this...

Yes.

First he must meet his new team.

After an ice breaking get to know you session, the team get down to business.

zzzz

Mark?

MARK!

Fuck, this coffee is ice fucking cold

Fuck it

Global Painting student, Jenna Richards, has been secretly living at the college over the summer, desperately trying to make work.

It's a great painting baby.

You're fucking talented.

Seriously. How much do you want for it?

What?

Arn't you a student?

Didn't we have AcrossRCA together?

Yah maybe

RAMEN MONDAYS

The RCA really is a wonderful place, remembers Giles at lunch time.

Full of intriguing characters and fascinating work.

Goddammit, still no bloody profit!

Hum, not quite full really

No matter. I'll have a nice little egg at 3.

Another new tutor, Ruth Kitchens, isn't feeling as calm as she'd like.

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

I'm here to remind you of your role now that you're a tutor.

Remember that these students are here to learn from YOU. This is about YOU sharing YOUR knowledge Ruth.

All this "non-hierarchical collaborative join-a-committee" talk... It's BULLSHIT.

IT'S A ONE BRAIN JOB RUTH.

Do you remember the DIPLODOCUS?

Dad, Stop.

DO. YOU. REMEMBER?

The Diplodocus...

Here

And here.

And what happened to the Diplodocus?

IT DIED.

HAD TWO BRAINS, RUTH.

Sale

R.P.B.

cartoon

Editorial

# Greetings from CERN

What if you found a portal to a parallel universe? What if you could slide into a thousand different worlds, where it's the same year and you're the same person but everything else is different and what if you can't find your way home? Such are the opening lines to the 90's TV show *Sliders*, but they may as well have been the mantra for our field trip to CERN.

## Magic Beans

My journey into the first parallel universe began when I decided to have a coffee at Gatwick airport at 6am after having abstained – for my own sanity – for approximately four years. The magic bean juice catapulted me into a state of consciousness in which my neurons were firing pretty much at the speed of light. Everything was kind of the same, but a little bit different. The only constant was that our tutor was reliably unreliable, missing his flight after being detained at the airport due to his saucy suggestion that security 'might wanna check the lining' of his bag.

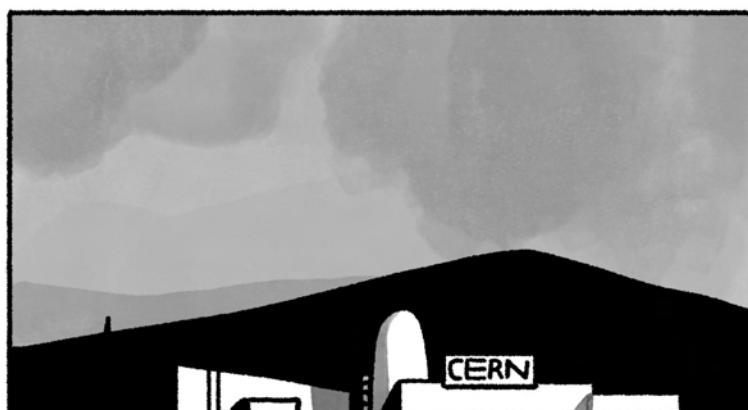


$t \rightarrow \infty$

After an insufficient night's sleep, and aforementioned complications, we were just barely holding it together. That is, until our caffeine-riddled brains were ushered into a three hour long, mind-warping lecture on understanding the ultimate structure of the universe – as far as we could discern this is CERN's main raison d'être. At times interesting, at times tedious, the talk would have been exponentially more bearable had it not been delivered by a man whose number one pleasure in life seemed to derive from making unrelenting ( $t \rightarrow \infty$ ) eye contact. You know when you hold someone's gaze and you think it **MUST** stop soon but it just won't and outwardly you're playing it cool but inwardly you're freaking out because it's creepy as hell? And then you look away for a minute and look back and they are still staring at you? Then you know what I'm talking about.

## Illogistics

We had just about survived our mind-boggling first day of information deluge, trying not to be mentally inundated by talk of quantum physics, particle collisions, accelerators and detectors, when it transpired that, to reach our accommodation, we had to cross national borders, take a total of three buses that left about once every hour and for which we needed exact change in two different currencies. Thank gawd for Uber! Turns out though, that you can only take Uber from la Suisse to la France and not the other way around, so even though we managed to get there in the evening, those of us who did not fancy an hour long walk at 8am the next morning were stranded and finally forced to take a £50 cab so as not to spend a second longer at the Hotel from Hell.



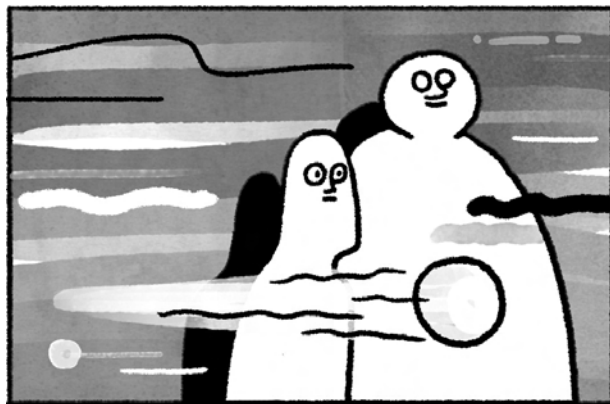
## An Arm and a Leg



Luckily we had purchased a litre of fine Scotch and a supply of Jaegermeister at the airport because, as it turns out, everything in Switzerland is damn near unaffordable. After forking out an extortionate £10 for a plate of shrivelled falafels and burnt quinoa for lunch at the CERN restaurant R1 (there are two restaurants on campus, efficiently named *Restaurant 1* & *Restaurant 2*) we were forced to take matters into our own hands. Thankfully our hotel was located across the street from an asphalt desert, featuring as its centerpiece a giant supermarket, housed in the likeness of a decaying cardboard box. The most economical investment at this point seemed to be Swiss chocolate and three Euro bottles of French wine, the latter proving doubly effective for our purposes – both cheap and potent, it allowed us to submerge both ourselves and our subprime surroundings in a boozy haze.

## The Antimatter Experiment

The next day, we got to visit the Antimatter experiment. In my mind, antimatter would take up hardly any space, if any at all. I suppose my lethargic brain had settled on a rather half-baked concept, subconsciously and vaguely equating antimatter with ‘anti-space’; Maybe something to do with Dark Matter or Black Holes...?! Instead, we arrived at a giant, purposebuilt container, labelled *Antimatter Factory*. Factory! F-A-C-T-O-R-Y! Turns out, they need a complex of industrial proportions to generate a billionth of a billionth of a gram of antihydrogen a year. To put this into context, according to our antimatter physicist guide, this is just about enough antihydrogen to heat a cup of tea. I guess the Brits could brew a billion billion cups of tea a year if they got their hands on one gram of antihydrogen – or alternately, as we were told, build a preposterously potent nuclear weapon.



## Lessons on Collisions

Physicists here at CERN accelerate particles at unfathomable speed in the hope that they will, upon collision, morph into previously undetected particles and answer some of life’s most metaphysical questions by helping us understand the very stuff our universe is made of. As one physicist pointed out, the similarity between these particle experiments and the randomized love-lottery we play on Tinder is uncanny. Swipe, swipe, swipe, hope your finger will land on someone worth colliding with, someone who might be the answer to all your physical and metaphysical yearnings and questions. BOOM! Could this be a Higgs Boson, or are you stuck with a boring old Photon? (In which case, discard that data and dive straight back in for a new collision!). Either way, in a town that’s all about accelerated collisions there seems to be an acute shortage of Higgses and a profusion of Photons. Even though we adhered to meticulous and obsessive swiping methods, our efforts only culminated in one conversation with a man whose main interest in life was hummus.

## Annihilation

Here I wave goodbye to you, dear readers, if not from the future, then from the parallel universe Geneva has proven to be. All that’s left for me here is to go out for some overpriced fondue, even though, helllooooo I’m vegan. TTYS.

Xoxo  
van Kitti

# EQUAL VOICES IN THE ROOM

ABOUT THE ONGOING EQUAL  
VOICES WORKSHOP SERIES

What if in 5 years the white, western, middle class, native tongue speaking male is not our image of the academic, and he is not overrepresented amongst invited speakers, lecturers, and reading lists? What if the student body is formed by even measures of white, black, brown, and othered bodies?

Which practices make this a far-fetched scenario and how do existing practices within the college exclude the Other and promote the One?

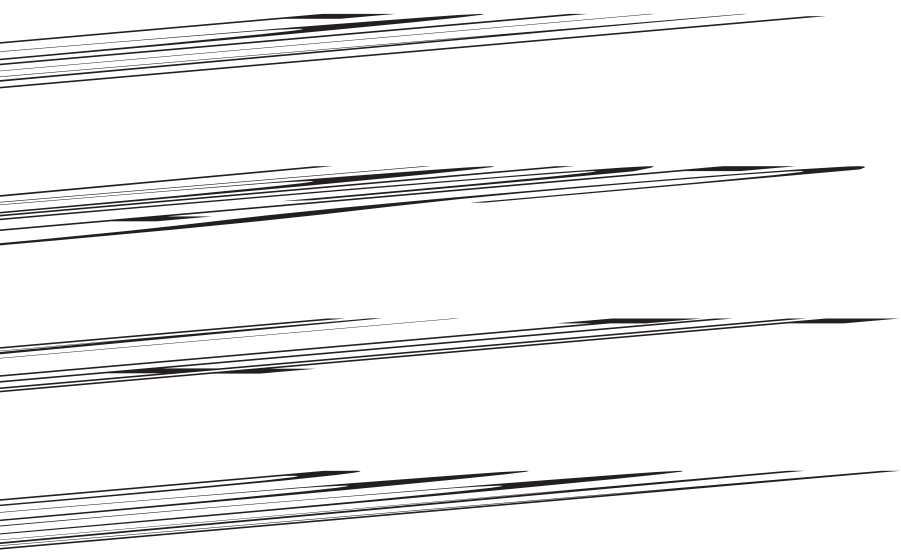
During the past year we found ourselves in rooms where two or three people out of a group dominated or outmanoeuvred the rest of the assembly, regardless of its size. This happened in lectures, crits, seminars, group decisions, and casual social spaces. Usually, these people would share traits. White. Western. Middle class. Native English-speaking.

Though RCA's student body is diverse, this was not always reflected in the sharing of space, soundscapes, and discourse. This recurring experience seems to follow certain patterns. Students, teachers, and heads of programmes seem to promote those who are quickest to respond – the ones with rhetorical advantages or simply, native English speakers. Conversely we also had positive experiences of discussions and crits when they were facilitated by someone with awareness of the dynamics in the group and able to encourage or make space for those people who may not be the first to speak.

THOUGH RCA'S  
STUDENT BODY  
IS DIVERSE,  
THIS WAS  
NOT ALWAYS  
REFLECTED IN  
THE SHARING  
OF SPACE,  
SOUNDSCAPES,  
AND DISCOURSE.

This situation is not particular to RCA; it is one we have encountered in other schools, universities, workplaces, and social situations. We observe that dynamics are talked about, but often, away from the group, after teaching sessions/lectures. We began to ask whether we could bring these reflections back to the classrooms for scrutiny and discussion. As places of learning and experimentation, they allow for exploration of some of the fundamental ways in which we relate to each other.

Equal Voices in the Room was a result of this contemplation. Last year, together with fifteen students and staff members, we used different methods to explore this alienation, looking at what was happening and why. We borrowed processes used in activist movements such as Occupy, and took guidance from the Seeds of Change handbooks<sup>[1]</sup> our own experiences working as part of co-operative organisations, experiences in body centred practices, as well as Jo Freeman's article The Tyranny of Structurelessness. In particular, Freeman's emphasis on articulating group power dynamics was particularly helpful. Freeman writes, 'For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit'<sup>[2]</sup>. Using different tasks, we sought practical means that facilitate collective learning. We offered an open invitation to students and staff



members to attend, with the explicit aim of addressing this as a group regardless of individual position or paid responsibility.

We carry these workshops into this academic year. Our goal is for one of these workshops to take place on every course in the school. We are also training those interested in facilitating their own workshops later this year.

**Our next workshop  
will take place on  
Wednesday, 8th  
of November from  
5.30pm – 8pm**

It is free to attend and it includes dinner. We welcome students and staff members. To book contact [alexandra.parry@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.parry@network.rca.ac.uk)

## AS STUDENTS, WE HAVE THE POWER TO SHIFT THE CULTURE OF LEARNING THROUGH CHALLENGING AND ENACTING NEW PRACTICES.

As students, we have the power to shift the culture of learning through challenging and enacting new practices. Whilst we are not able to dismantle all types of privileges, we can question the processes that reinforce inequality. In doing so, we hope that academia and social practices will look different in the near future. A more inclusive and empowering environment that will allow for rich and diverse discussions.

[1] <https://seedsforchange.org.uk/resources>

[2] <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.html> The Tyranny of Structurelessness Jo Freeman

# Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled

The latest exhibition by two students from RCA's Curating Contemporary Art Course, DRIVE-THRU is a curatorial collective founded by Olivia Aherne & Helen Barr.

Ellmar

Thomas

The exhibition curated by DRIVE-THRU presents new and pre-existing works by three artists; Lisa Carletta, Suzannah Pettigrew, Tabita Rezaire and an artist collective, Keiken. The exhibition spans moving image, virtual reality, animation and video installation to understand how the body is being experienced in new ways digitally and virtually.

How was DRIVE-THRU formed?

DRIVE-THRU started after a series of conversations between the two of us, we met on the RCA *Curating Contemporary Art* course and realised that we share very similar ideas in relation to art, technology and curatorial practice. Practising without a permanent physical space, we function both on and offline with a focus on innovative and experimental modes of exhibition. With reference to the fast, 24-hour access and open-to-all model of the 'drive-thru', our curatorial practice focuses on collaboration, democratic exhibition making and open access to knowledge.

This is DRIVE-THRU's first exhibition in London, prior to this you worked with the online platform 'isthisit?' to create *out\_of\_body*. How did your first project help to inform the structure of *Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled*?

*out\_of\_body* and *Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled* developed out of a research piece that one of us was writing that looked at the way artists were responding to the body online and in virtual spaces. Whilst we become increasingly fascinated by the post human and digital bodies, it is important to assess whether these new technologies and online spaces are helpful for our understanding of gender, or whether they just mirror more traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity, subject and object. We need to recognise where these digital bodies are being employed and how these online spaces change our perception of the body, its substance and borders and our attitudes towards it.

For *out\_of\_body*, the online exhibition that we curated on [isthisitthisit.com](http://isthisitthisit.com), we posted an open call online in an attempt to extend beyond our own networks and reach artists in other spaces around the world. Whilst we didn't hold an open call for *Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled*, it was really important to us to present a group of artists from different backgrounds with diverse perspectives. Both exhibitions act as sites of knowledge production, opening up spaces where we can question social constructs such as gender, race and sexuality through a digital lens. In terms of the structuring and curatorial thinking for *Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled*, we focussed on creating new dialogues between previously unconnected works, for example digital healing in Tabita Rezaire's work is echoed in Lisa Carletta's utopian exploration of restoring the self through the digital. We have put together a programme of discussions and workshops, which more specifically open up questions provoked by the exhibition. The different crossovers in the work and the programme create spaces for reflection and consideration, the exhibition space becomes a productive place where knowledge is negotiated and produced and attempts to resist reduction to image.

The exhibition has a focus on how feminism and the female body exist on digital and virtual platforms; however, the work of Tabita Rezaire also questions ideas of race and discrimination. With this in mind, how does the work on show produce a wider dialogue interested in the possibilities of the body and its relationship to digital data and virtualisation?

We don't want to simplify the works by categorising them into one wider dialogue, all of the works on show are exploring the digital body and technology's relationship to the body but they are also very diverse in their specificity. Feminist perspectives, racial politics, sexuality and representation are all referenced in the show. Rezaire's work 'Sugarwalls Teardom' commemo-

Spotlight

Student

rates 'herstory' by exploring the contributions of black women's wombs to the advancement of modern medical science and technology. The video work celebrates womb technology through an account of coercive anatomic politics. Rezaire asks, whose body is exploitable? By who? For who? Suzannah Pettigrew's work also looks back in time at the female body, specifically female icons and powerful women. Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra and imagery of Elizabeth I feature in a narrative about the fragility of social currency and how our conditioning about hierarchy starts at the early stages of education. She explores how this impacts and continues to seep into contemporary culture alongside the agency of the female image in our current digital condition. Keiken's VR, video and sound installation traces the birth of the digital, a giant networked space fused with human interaction and technology, it looks at animism and the attribution of human qualities to non-living objects and explores a world of fusions between human and machine. Finally, Carletta's work presents the human as machine, the avatar herself. By 3D scanning her own body the artist explores her true digital self and traces the psychological journey from the physical to the digital.

Keeping in mind these ideas of a new perspective of the physical body, what are the issues with the portrayal of the female body and how it is and discriminated against in a digital/virtual environment?

Whilst the digital creates networked and online spaces where digital selves can be, individually and collectively, sometimes unbound by IRL gender binaries and pressures to conform or identify, they also replicate social constructs, gender difference and objectify bodies, even as digitized vessels. Whilst it can be viewed as a space of possibility and one that can heal digitally, it also has the potential to homogenise and create oppressive hierarchies perpetuated by the internet.

Regarding future projects and collaborators, what kinds of ideas and contexts are you looking to work with?

We're interested in exploring different sites for exhibition making including apps, hackpad spaces or live feeds. We will be continuing our *interviews.doc* series, which takes place on Google docs, and then is saved as a space for learning and future knowledge production. We're also hoping to hold some one off events in the new year, details will be on our website soon.

DRIVETHRU.ORG.UK  
@\_DRIVETHRU

Installation view: *Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled*, group exhibition, Lewisham Arthouse, London (2017). Curated by DRIVE-THRU.



# Interview with Jade Blackstock

CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE ALUM, 2017  
29 SEPTEMBER 2017  
FINK'S CAFE, LONDON

Last spring, we were struck by one particular performance piece at the RCA Degree Show. During *Black River*, the artist lay motionless as molasses seeped slowly from her mouth. Though such a minimal act, it aroused deep melancholic feelings, a visceral response to the intimate links between race, violence, and colonialism. Many others, as it turns out, felt admiration.

Three months later, the artist, Jade Blackstock, is moving into her new studio, provided through the prestigious Studiomakers Prize funded by Tiffany & Co and Outset. She is not quite settled, having not yet acquired a desk nor a chair. Instead, we caught her for a chat in Fink's Cafe to hear about how she has become a sharp and daring artist.

## What brought you to the RCA?

The first thing was my tutor from my BA course who suggested I apply because he used to study on the painting course. I would never have applied.

## What did you do for BA?

I did Fine Art Practice with Psychology. I could not decide between the two.

## Where?

It was at Worcester. The middle of England.

## That sounds really interesting.

The Psychology bit, no. It was so boring. A lot of time I used to skip my Psychology class having gone to the studio, and just spend all day there. If I did another course, it would have to be art.

## How did you get into performance?

During my BA I kind of realized that performance was the most appropriate form for my work and what I wanted to express because in my opinion, the rawness of the form really appeals to me. I think the themes I really look at, myself, I really didn't want to pretty them up, feelings of racism or identity or ideas of the female body and what is imposed on the female. It was the best way of expressing those ideas and it kind of took off.

## Were you doing performance in your BA?

Yeah, during the end. I started off with painting and drawing and then it kind of moved on to sculpture. By the final year, it was just performance. The first performance I did, I painted my whole body white and had this awkward swimming cap and leotard thing and I walked through the town, waiting for the bus. And I kind of extended that my buying a foam machine and plugging it in

and standing and getting blasted by the foam. I kind of didn't really realize the health and safety issues of being blasted by foam but it made a good image [laughs].

## What do you think about the RCA as this established institution... I feel like performance is one of the more radical art forms, so how do you think the RCA influenced your art?

On a personal teacher level, we were always encouraged. We always had that support with exploring ideas that were not pretty all the time. But it felt like a struggle with the institution. There were a couple of times where I felt like it really affected my confidence and my role and my belief in what I was trying to convey. Things like nudity or possible health and safety issues kind of inhibited me from really getting to the bottom of what I was trying to say. There was an incident when I performed partially nude and there was a complaint which kind of extended to numerous people being upset. After everything blowing up and having to do apologies, it made me question what was acceptable in terms of my body in performance and I really started to wonder what [it means] to be a woman and a black woman in performance in the nude, I wondered if those issues were being explored not just through the work.

**Do you feel like the RCA inhibited you?**

Yeah I do. Because of the person who complained from the public, they had to act upon it. Blinds were put down. I honestly thought I would be kicked off the course because of it apparently reaching the MP.

**Do you want to tell us what your performance was?**

Basically I had a jar of jam and I beat the jam out of the jar and pulled down my trousers with my face to the floor and kind of just dragged the jam into the floor with my face and with my bare ass within view of the window and this woman walked past and then it was just chaos. It was interesting to test that because I kind of had done similar performances on the street and nobody questioned it.

**Because we saw one of your performances on a flat screen TV, I was interested to know what you think about media and the Internet and how it can be used to create a larger audience for your work. Do you think that is a good thing or a bad thing?**

I think both. There are so many things that can't be picked up though. The presence alone is quite... it's something. And then a

lot of the materials I use have quite strong smells like if I have a dead pheasant, then no one's going to smell it in the video. So a lot of the time it's live... But I thought that video was really effective because it was only two minutes so kind of a quick bite and when that's disseminated you kind of get the message very quickly rather than having to invest in making sure you're at the



right place at the right time. A lot of time it's really hard to be there at the specific time and place especially because sometimes I don't know where I'm going to perform, so how are people able to watch it? I think having footage of it, people who didn't see it can still actually get something from it so I do think it works in that way.

**Can you tell us about the Black River?**

Molasses... is a beautiful material. My background is Jamaican. The North Caribbean Islands were effectively just sugar making... So approaching that through the use of molasses and using the mouth and gagging is to do with conflict with a history that I kind of don't know, I was born in the UK. But it's clear that I'm female. It's clear that I'm black. There are conventions that sometimes play into it...

**What themes do you work on and why do you choose to work on them?**

I would say the biggest ones are identity and race. There have been many moments in my life when race has really dominated my thoughts. I feel like in the UK sometimes it is perpetuated even more. Even being at the school, I would say I met three or four black people in my whole Fine Arts school. It was like wow, I'm kind of not making it up. Representation is a big deal. It took up a lot of my work.

**The clothes you wear during your performance are traditional.**

**Does that play into it?**

I really didn't want to fetishize the idea of exploring my race and culture. Wearing something that's really plain doesn't really give much indication... They tend to have been clothes that I used to wear.

## Are there people you can talk to about your practice both inside and outside of the RCA?

Yeah especially in the RCA. We all have this understanding of dealing with certain heavy issues... Ideas of sexuality and identity, gender things like this...

You mentioned this new studio you are going to work in which is quite amazing. Have you achieved a satisfying balance between living in London and earning a living wage and also having time to make work?

Not yet. I work full time. During my MA I was working four days a week. I have not found a balance at all... I need to find the time to actually work there. There are a lot of sculptural elements that I really want to develop.

Do you think the other people in the studio will change your work in any way?

I was speaking to one of the guys who is a sculptor and his works are really minimal and clean cut and he

was actually going, "Oh we should collaborate on something!" And that's really cool because we're from completely different backgrounds.

I think it's a mixture. It's kind of like discovering myself but also raising awareness of certain issues certain people don't like to talk about....

So it is like a form of communication.

Yeah.

What are your favourite venues in London?

There is the place in Brixton called Cultural Black Archives which I had never heard of in my life until a few months ago and I went there. It has archives and then they have an exhibition... It's kind of like the Tate... Soul of a Nation [exhibit]... On my way, I found a market that sells sugar cane and I bought like three five-foot-long sticks of sugarcane and I walked through Brixton and all these Jamaican men were like "Oh my god you've got cane, you've got cane!" They were mystified by the fact that I was walking around with three giant sugar canes.

Did you get them for an art piece?

Yeah. I used to eat them at my grandma's house in Jamaica.



What do you think is the essence of your work?

Is it about raising awareness or is it about self expression?

Is there anything you want to say to the current students of RCA, any words of advice?

I was often told "It's better to apologize after than to ask for permission!"

# Taking Control of our Future

STORY ON SUSTAINLAB SOCIETY

The opening project of the MA Service Design programme last year, for which I had just enrolled, was the rather pompous brief to design 'The Future of Service Design'. I didn't choose this project, opting for the more applied public policy project with Lambeth Council, but was somewhat envious listening to the speculative outcomes from the other half of the course six weeks later at the final project reviews. The most enlightened takeaway was that despite the common perception of 'future' as a distant, predetermined state that we are heading towards, we could also consider that our every action in each moment is constantly producing the future. Contrasted against the more static views shared by certain fields that higher powers are in control, the notion of continuous production of the future right here, right now, is pretty powerful in art and design education, and begs the question: what are we waiting for?

This first lesson of my first term prompted me to set up a new student society over the summer break, serving in part as a litmus test on the student body. On a side note, the Student Union is an amazing platform to test out an idea for establishing a community at RCA. They offer practical tools, easy access to the captive student audience – now split across three campuses – and permission to go do things in an increasingly bureaucratic institution. The newspaper you are now reading is also a product of this framework.

My second year at RCA now dawns, and with it the beginning of *SustainLab RCA* – the seed that has been germinated by an unrelenting compulsion to explore what sustainability means for artists and designers today, and my frustrations with the corresponding recent neglect of this field by the mother institution. Given the quick two-year student turnover at RCA, it's a little known fact that the RCA funded a department called SustainRCA for six years (2011–17), sup-

porting and championing the work of students and staff in the field of sustainability. Since its silent effacing from college life last year, a small group of us decided we would open up a new student-led platform with the mission of leading sustainability learning and collaboration at RCA. So here we are, taking control of our future in 2017! It's now four weeks into the new term and over 130 students have signed up to SustainLab. We've met many of you already at our Pot Launch party at Kensington, where we gathered your thoughts and ideas for the year ahead including our next events, potential speakers and ideas for external visits. It was also interesting to hear your ideas for change at the RCA. Digging deeper into the sustainability track record of the college we've discovered an opportunity for making significant changes, not only for our learning around sustainability but also to the operation of our world-class university, which shockingly sits just off the bottom of the UK University's Environmental & Ethical league table produced by People & Planet (<https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league-2016-tables>), accounting for a range of factors from waste management to the financial investments of the college.

We'd like to be clear that we are taking a very open approach to the meaning and application of sustainability, an often overused and misunderstood word. We are essentially questioning what kind of future we want to make both at the RCA and as graduate artists and designers heading out into the world, and we believe in the power of now.

Our next event is a collaboration with the Royal Amateur Expedition Society – a **Foraging Expedition to East London at the end of October** for 24 students – If you fancy coming along, check out the events section of our website at [sustainlabrca.org](http://sustainlabrca.org) for more info! There you'll also find our mailing list, or alternatively you can search for us on all the usual social media places: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Hope to see you soon!

Becky Miller

Co-Founder, SustainLab RCA  
& MA Service Design, Year 2

# What should white culture do?

## SAT OCT 28

London Anarchist Bookfair 2017

10–8PM, Park View School, West Green, N15 3RB

## SAT–SUN OCT 28–29

A Foraging Expedition to East London, Royal College of Art

A collaboration between the SustainLab Society and Royal Amateur Expedition Society. For 24 students. Go to [sustainlabrca.org/events](http://sustainlabrca.org/events) if you want to come along!

## THU NOV 2

The Museum of Witchcraft & Magic In London Opening

6–10PM, The Last Tuesday Society & The Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, 11 Mare Street, E84RP

## UNTIL SUN NOV 5

Disturbed, Hacked, Reassembled

WED–SUN 12–6PM  
Lewisham Arthouse, 140 Lewisham Way, SE14 6PD

with works by Lisa Carletta Keiken, Suzannah Pettigrew, and Tabita Rezaire

## WED NOV 8

The Politics of Mental Health

6:30–8PM, Sheikh Zayed Theatre, WC2A 2AE

## SAT NOV 11

What Should White Culture Do?

11–7:30PM, Royal College of Art, Gorvy Lecture Theatre

What Should White Culture Do? brings together a number of artists, writers and scholars to discuss the workings of race and white privilege. This day long symposium will explore its theme in relation to a variety of subject areas, including contemporary art, politics, sociology and philosophy, and takes its title from the 1998 essay by Linda Martín Alcoff, What Should White People Do? For the full schedule and speaker bios, please visit the Art on the Underground website.

## THURS NOV 16

Equal Voices Workshop

5AM–8PM  
Royal College of Art

Equal Voices Workshop is free to attend, and includes dinner. We welcome both students and staff members. To book, contact us at: [alexandra.parry@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.parry@network.rca.ac.uk)

## UNTIL SUN NOV 26

Natural Selection

WED–SAT 11–7PM (last admission 6:45), SUN 11–5PM  
Former Newington Library, 155 Walworth Road, SE17 1RS

## UNTIL SUN DEC 10

Everything At Once

TUE–SAT 12–7PM  
SUN 12–6PM  
180 The Strand  
WC2R 1EA

With Works By Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, Allora & Calzadilla, Art & Language, Cory Arcangel, Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ceal Floyer, Ryan Gander, Dan Graham, Rodney Graham, Susan Hiller, Shirazeh Houshiary, Anish Kapoor, Lee Ufan, Richard Long, Haroon Mirza, Tatsuo Miyajima, Julian Opie, Laure Prouvost, Wael Shawky, Lawrence Weiner, And Stanley Whitney

If you'd like to advertise in The Pluralist, submit events you'd like to see featured, or contribute to an upcoming issue in any way, please get in touch at: [thepluralist.rca@gmail.com](mailto:thepluralist.rca@gmail.com)

We can't wait to hear from you!