

Symposium: HARNESSING ENERGIES IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Thursday, 12 September 2019
Symposium - 1:00pm to 5:00pm

[Black Box](#) @ UNSW Art and Design
Corner of Oxford Street and Greens Road

Energies in the Arts, the new collection edited by Professor Douglas Kahn (UNSW Art & Design) and published by MIT Press, explores the pluralistic concepts of energies—scientific, cultural, spiritual, ecological – as they occur in the arts, history and theory. To celebrate the release of this book, a symposium of scholars whose research intersects with, utilizes, and explores various concepts of energy, will present and discuss their work with the public. The symposium is convened by Dr Heather Contant and moderated by Mitchell Ryan.

The symposium will be followed by a book launch by [Joyce Hinterding](#) (Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney) and performance by [Peter Blamey](#) entitled *Rare Earth Orbits*.

Symposium Program:

Panel 1 (1:00PM to 2:45PM):

Dr Heather Contant: *Transmitting the Energies of Intoxication for Revolution*

Dr Emily Morandini: *Mica, Cloud, Capacitor*

Dr Andrew Belletty: *Listening to Country: Aboriginal Multi-Sensory Attention to Sub-Audible and Vibrotactile Energies*

Panel 2 (3:15PM to 5:00PM):

Dr Su Ballard: *'And they are like wild beasts': Violent things in the Anthropocene*

Associate Professor Jennifer Biddle: *Milpirri: Activating the at-risk*

Dr Lindsay Kelley: Food Babies: *On metabolism in the arts*

Abstracts:

'And they are like wild beasts': Violent things in the Anthropocene

Dr Su Ballard

What can a chair, spoon, table, horse, sow, or wheel do when accused of murder? The Anthropocene has rearranged our material relationships: humans are a geological force ensnaring every object within reach into our diabolical plan to reconfigure the planet through increasing networks of violence. We could refuse to look, but the continual arrival of data across the networks means that the more of these violent objects that are

uncovered, the more we are asked to account for their actions. This essay is a critical melodrama set amidst the debris of history. It engages with the common law of deodand that existed in England from 1066 until 1846, placing deodand alongside the vital living objects that pervaded the writing of Anne Conway in the seventeenth century and extending its thoughts into the new world we name the Anthropocene. Perhaps in this unusual genealogy is a way of considering the vitality of objects in the Anthropocene as nature and humans, stones and chairs, bodies and objects emerge anew.

Listening to Country: Aboriginal Multi-Sensory Attention to Sub-Audible and Vibrotactile Energies

Dr Andrew Belletty

Aboriginal modalities of listening exhibit multi-sensory attention to sub-audible energies and vibrotactile phenomena and, thus, suggests a more complex and grounded notion of sound, perception and a connection to the environment. It challenges the compartmentalization of the dominant euro-centric sensorium where sound has become something that can be easily quantified, recorded, reproduced, stored and disseminated through technological means and attenuated by digital media practices. Sound and listening is instead situated energetically, perceptually, corporeally, and environmentally, enmeshed with place and culture through practices connecting human to non-human bodies and entities. Aboriginal listening practices evince a very deep connection to 'Country' developed through highly trans-sensory attention and activation of place, and iterative through time unimaginable in Western cultures, which becomes an intimate system for nourishing and healing people and country.

Milpirri: Activating the at-risk

Associate Professor Jennifer Biddle

This paper is based on my chapter in Doug Kahn's (ed) *Energies in the Arts* (MIT Press), exploring the experimental, public, Warlpiri ceremony Milpirri. Milpirri began in 2005 as the result of one of the first youth suicides in the community of Lajamanu in the Northern Territory. Directed and conceived by Wanta Steve Patrick Jampijinpa, in partnership with Tracks Dance Company, Milpirri combines Jardi-Warnpa with hip-hop, break-dance and high theatrical design. Radically embedded and embodied, Milpirri strategically mobilises what are highly subjugated, barely legible and deeply vulnerable place-based energetics that bind people to place through practice. Orchestrating perceptual experiences and qualities of attachment that are themselves under occupation, Milpirri activates ecological and physiological memories of the senses in new trajectories of tradition that do not yet exist. As Jampijinpa writes of Milpirri: It was an unseen thing and now it is a seen thing. This paper explores the vital material energetics of Milpirri as remote avant-garde in settler colonial Australia today.

Transmitting the Energies of Intoxication for Revolution

Dr Heather Contant

This presentation examines the 2015 app *Warten: Ein Audioguide in Nichtstun* (Waiting: An Audio Guide in Idleness) developed by of the radio collective LIGNA (downloadable [here](#)). The app consists of audio instructions for a regimen of exercises to do while doing nothing:

waiting in a train station, café, or waiting room. The exercises provide a training ground for experimenting with public gestures and movements evocative of the flânerie and loitering discussed by Walter Benjamin in his writings on Surrealism and profane illumination. The sound-based app also produces politically charged images in the minds of listeners that illustrate the potential for such gestures and movements to operate on a large collective scale. This includes the story of Erdem Gündüz aka “The Standing Man,” whose 2013 public performance in Istanbul's Taksim Square went viral, sparking a wave of peaceful protests across Turkey and abroad.

Food Babies: On metabolism in the arts

Dr Lindsay Kelley

Food babies are never born. Food babies are the indeterminate bloat that signals both the digestive and reproductive capacities of bodies. By way of Hannah Landecker's framing of the embodied shift from caloric engine to metabolic environment, Larissa Lai's novel *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), and Ai Hasegawa's speculative design projects *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin* (2013) and *I Wanna Deliver a Shark* (2012), this paper explores the collapse between metabolism and reproduction as discrete categories in biology. Landecker observes a struggle to story the undoing of reproduction and metabolism as discrete categories, citing a lack of theoretical models to contain disparate experimental outcomes. I suggest that the arts of metabolism manifest an abundance of theory. Reframing and reconsidering food babies contributes to ongoing feminist efforts to trouble essentialist approaches to biological reproduction.

Mica, Cloud, Capacitor

Dr Emily Morandini:

In *An Individual Note of Music, Sound and Electronics* (1972), pioneering electronic music composer and inventor Daphne Oram asks the reader to consider the characteristics that composers and capacitors (a common electronic component used to store energy) have in common. For Oram, electronic components – and their energetic interactions – are replete with metaphor, analogous to all manner of human interactions and experiences. Her writing merges detailed technical explanations of circuit schematics with a personal philosophy, weaving together applied and abstract notions of energy. Informed by Oram's technical poetics, this presentation expands on the capacitor as a means of exploring cycles of energy well beyond the electronic circuit. From the ancient folklore surrounding the minerals found within capacitors, to the electrostatic charge percolating in the bellies of storm clouds, I propose a deeper reading of circuit schematics in order to reference the histories, materials, and environmental forces fundamental to the existence of electrical technology.

Bios:

Dr Susan Ballard is an art historian specialising in the ways in which art intersects with big ideas about the environment, technology, and cultural politics. She writes on contemporary art and media with a particular concern for the diverse ways that artists negotiate the

ecological and social transformations of the twenty-first century. Recent publications have focused on artistic and other cultural manifestations of species extinctions, energy, natural disaster, geology and landscape in the Anthropocene, as realised at the intersection of the environmental humanities and cultural practices.

Dr Andrew Belletty is an Indian-born Australian sound artist whose research experiments with the vibro-tactile materiality of acoustic energies. He creates intimate, multi-sensory listening experiences by redesigning audio-visual material into flexible, multilayered forms, which explore Indigenous concepts of healing through listening. A founding member of acclaimed Australian band Yothu Yindi, Andrew also works internationally as a cinematic sound designer with hundreds of screen credits to his name. Andrew holds a PhD in Visual Anthropology, Art, Design & Media from the National Institute for Experimental Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

Jennifer L. Biddle is Director of Visual Anthropology & Visual Culture, Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute for Experimental Arts (NIEA), UNSW Art & Design. She has worked with northern Warlpiri for over two decades, and more recently, artists and art centres across the Central and Western Desert of Australia. Her interdisciplinary research spans language and vernacular literacies; translation; theories of embodiment; sensory formations and radical cultural aesthetics; trauma, memory and predicaments of occupation and experimental ethnography. Her *Remote Avant-garde: Aboriginal Art under Occupation* (Duke UP 2016) models new and emergent desert aesthetics as arts of survival.

Participating in and researching the history of communities that come together to explore the possibilities of electromagnetic media drives Dr Heather Contant's scholarly and artistic research practices. She lectures in media art and audio production at the University of New South Wales | Art & Design in Sydney, Australia, and her writings appear in publications, such as Leonardo Music Journal, the Journal of Sonic Studies, and the book, *Transnationalizing Radio Research: New Approaches to an Old Medium*. Her doctoral thesis entitled, *Electromagnetic Constellations: Walter Benjamin and the Collectivist Tendencies in Radio* won the 2018 Dean's award for Excellence in Higher Degree Research.

Working in the kitchen, Dr Lindsay Kelley's art practice and scholarship explore how the experience of eating changes when technologies are being eaten. Her published work can be found in journals including *parallax*, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *Angelaki*, and *Environmental Humanities*. Her first book is *Bioart Kitchen: Art, Feminism and Technoscience* (London: IB Tauris, 2016). Kelley is Senior Lecturer at UNSW Sydney in the faculty of Art & Design as well as Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, the School of Philosophical and Historical Enquiry, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, in association with Sydney Environment Institute, the University of Sydney. She is the recipient of an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award.

Dr Emily Morandini is a Sydney based artist, researcher, and educator. Her art practice encompasses methods such as embroidery, sound-making, crystal-cooking, rock-fossicking, and coil-winding to explore the intersection of materials and electrical energy. She has recently completed a PhD at UNSW Art & Design.

