

SENTIENT ENCOUNTERS

A woman with brown hair is looking down in a lush green field. The image is tilted slightly to the right. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Inhale—Hold—Exhale

Sentient Encounters film
night on queerness

@ AKI Auditorium, Enschede
On: 27 September 2022
16:30-19:30

Inhale—Hold—Exhale

The title for this screening comes from 'False Wife' by Jamie Crewe, the first work in the programme's sequence. The phrase "Inhale—Hold—Exhale" is one of the pulsating video's instructions for taking poppers to experience its frenetic flashing narrative of two beings meeting mysteriously and melting into one another. The body is crucial, even when such vessels are transcended, if only fleetingly. The titular phrase also connotes "mindfulness" rhetoric, about centering oneself, being in the moment, and other clichés. It can also be framed as an assertion of control, or taking control of oneself, and perhaps paradoxically the opposite as well—relinquishing said control when it's pertinent to permeate the boundaries of the self.

A lab team in 'A Mordida, The Bite' by Pedro Neves Marques is seeking a method to wipeout mosquitos due to their participation in spreading an unspoken pathogen creating an epidemic. Utterances of martial law in the city pierce the conversation of a couple seemingly isolating themselves in the countryside. A member of the lab team reflects on the best ways to wage "war" on the mosquitos, to change the male's genes affecting its ability to mate, a genetic Trojan Horse. This has some unintended side effects, and a quiet anxiety reaches the couple, now joined by their third partner.

"How do you think I'm getting home?" The question resonates through Danielle Braithwaite-Shirley's 'Trans-Port Me'. Text over a varied style animation asks this urgently, its about safety and agency. Transportation is a desirable option. The text asserts: "And I think to myself how do I talk to you about traumas of being black and trans without recreating the trauma"? Defiant assertions and tactical opacity are strategies to reclaim control over the narrative.

Part of an ongoing project, 'After the Ice, the Deluge' by Linda Stupart was made during The Arctic Circle Residency in Svalbard. A figure performs immersed in the icy waters of the Arctic. Text on screen draws parallels between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

(PTSD) of the human body with that of the frozen landscape facing permafrost melting, soil and its microorganisms, including viruses, unprecedentedly released anew. The land is also a body with PTSD. Karaoke unsettlingly soothes with 'Seasons in the Sun' assuring us "were just seasons out of time".

The phrase 'Inhale—Hold—Exhale' also suggests carving a space out of time, a pocket of pauses built for defense, reflection, and organizing action.

Curated by Erik Martinson

Programme

False Wife,
Jamie Crewe, 2022,
15:32

A Mordida,
The Bite, Pedro Neves Marques, 2019,
25:37

Trans-Port Me,
Danielle Braithwaite-Shirley, 2019,
11:48

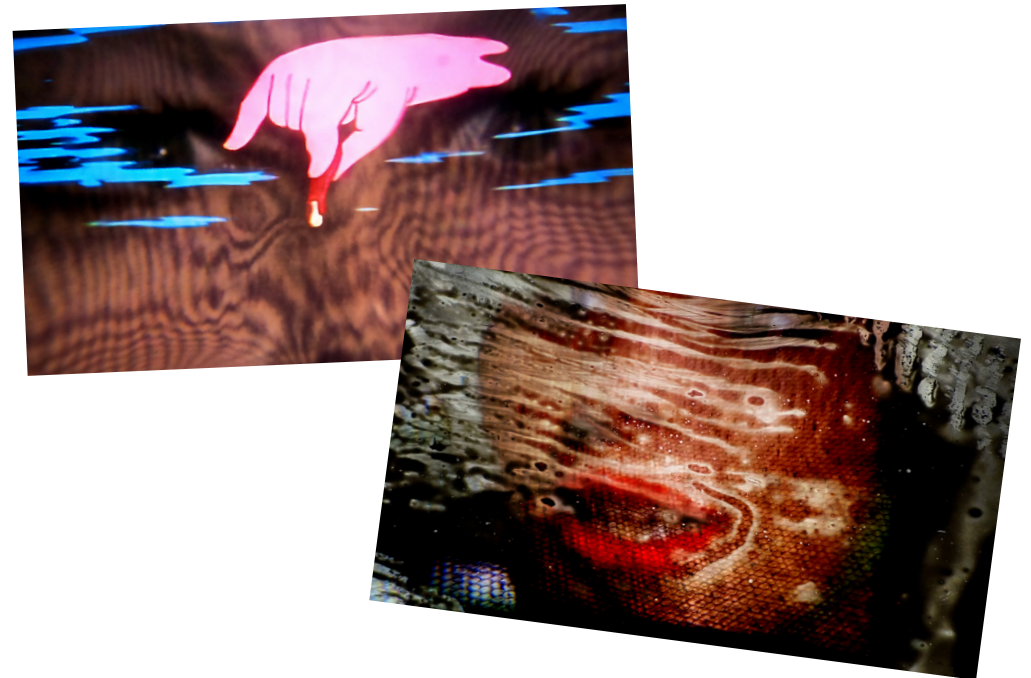
After the Ice, the Deluge,
Linda Stupart, 2020,
16:26

False Wife, Jamie Crewe, 2022, 15:32

“False Wife’ (local website, HD video, 2022) is a work that leads its visitors through an ordeal of transformation.

A poppers training video is typically a user-made compilation of pornographic clips, uploaded to adult video hosting sites. These clips are paired with text, hypnotic music, voiceovers, and instructions for action. Viewers are told to masturbate and sniff poppers, to let imagery and sensation meld, and reach a gooning ecstatic fervour.

‘False Wife’ is a poppers training video, but its material is obscure. Its narrative is drawn from a variety of folk tales in which transformation occurs, and relationships happen. Its footage is scavenged from sources that reflect these themes, reduced to slivers of significant imagery, rubbed together. These originating sources are warped or inflamed to say ambiguous things: to discuss desire, shame, transgression, and the longing for change, and the various ways we want — and don’t want — to face them.”
(JC)



A Mordida, The Bite,
Pedro Neves Marques, 2019, 25:37

“In Pedro Neves Marques's atmospheric, sci-fi-tinged fiction set against the backdrop of a crisis-stricken São Paulo, a team of biologists attempt to thwart a viral outbreak through the use of genetically modified mosquitoes, while, in a parallel story, three lovers living in rural seclusion resist the reactionary politics of a newly appointed conservative government. Marques imagines an anxious present in which the promise of a better tomorrow relies on new conceptions of intimacy, identity, and reproduction.” (Projections, New York Film Festival, 2019)



Trans-Port Me,
Danielle Braithwaite-Shirley, 2019, 11:48

“Trans-port Me

Karioki Video

sing along if you know the words

(I need to be transported
I cant trust transport to get me somewhere safe
Trans-Port me
Support me)

‘Trans-Port me’ is a film about Travelling/not-travelling while Trans. How other bodies stop us moving forwards. How moving forwards while your body Changes challenges a normal everyday commute.

Walking

moving

While visibly being Trans” (DB-S)



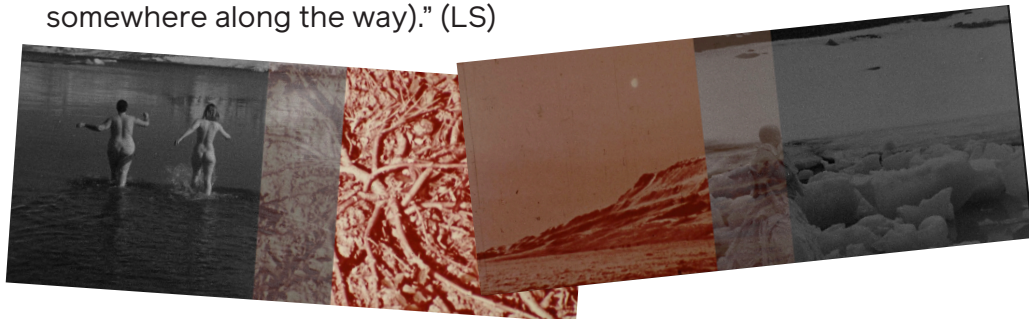
***After the Ice, the Deluge*, Linda Stupart, 2020, 16:26**

“‘After the Ice, the Deluge’ figures relationships between the melting polar ice caps and other traumatised, abject, alien, and outsider bodies – queering the question of survival towards less bounded ways of being in crisis.

The film is constituted of Super 8; VHS, iPhone and 16mm film footage and performance documentation shot in the Arctic Circle on a 2019 research trip; as well as archival 16mm ‘nature’ documentaries.” (LS)

“This project began with twin investigations of Morgellons (a syndrome, commonly diagnosed as a kind of contemporary hysteria, whereby the sufferer finds fibres, crystals, and other alien objects under its skin); and melting icebergs. The project considers the disappearance and reappearance of crystals (both water crystals and those found by Morgellons sufferers) as simultaneous and related embodied crises, as crises of boundary integrity.

The work has developed to investigate melting polar ice caps both as traumatised bodies, and as a crisis that can only be rectified by traumatised bodies, since via Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), we already function as time machines (PTSD is always in the present that’s why you can’t hide from it. As if there is a hole between timelines, or, a glitch. Your body in the present disappears, or, is overlaid by your body of the past, the no-longer-yourbody of the event. We are told that the most dangerous part of time travel is the possibility of meeting a version of yourself somewhere along the way).” (LS)



Categorical Complexities/ Complications/Collapse: Some References on Queerness and Sentient Encounters

By Erik Martison

As Gay Plants writes in 'FUCKING PANSIES (a tribute)': "flowers, rooted as they are in sexual selection and interspecies encounters, are helplessly queer, accruing a whole range of negative associations in the paranoid environment of straightness - associations that they share promiscuously with human queers" (Gay Plants, p.26). Gay Plants is writing about Caspar Heinemann's essay 'FUCKING PANSIES: Queer Poetics, Plant Reproduction, Plant Poetics, Queer Reproduction'. Heinemann breaks down the etymology of the word "pansy" being implemented as a derogatory term against queerness. In doing so, Heinemann can begin the work of making useful bridges and allegiances between queer humans and plants, a solidarity that can be mutually beneficial. Heinemann's work can also be meaningful in thinking through many forms of 'non-human' or 'more-than-human' encounters, the agency of the beings involved in these encounters, and the development of care-fully invested and respectful approaches.

"As much as the queer is being called a flower, the flower is being called a queer. As much as the pansy lends its prettiness to the queer subject, the queer subject lends their effeminacy to the pansy. Although this could be read as a reductive anthropomorphising, there is also the potential for something else if the relationship is not read as one-way mapping of human characteristics onto flowers, but also flower characteristics onto humans, with implications for the agency of both" (Heinemann, p.4).

Heinemann continues:

"Given the prevalence of anthropocentrism, the reading of gender in plants inevitably reverberates and affects human understanding

of human gender, and the reverse. As well as not wanting to make an anthropocentric imposition onto plants, I also want to avoid essentialising queerness in humans. To borrow from Nicole Seymour, I do not want to 'claim that queer individuals necessarily have a particular kind of relationship to the non-human; [but focus] primarily on the queer relationships that humans might develop with the non-human, and how environmental ethics might emerge from queer practices and perspectives' (2013, p29). I would add to this an investment in thinking through how queer ethics might emerge from environmental practices and perspectives. The queer anarchist collective Baedan define queer as 'the inherent decomposition which afflicts gender [...]; not this or that historically constituted subject category, but all the divergent bodily and spiritual expressions which escape their roles' (2014). Rather than a positive, universalising usage of queer, queer is a contingency. I hope the clumsiness of attempting to talk about how plants fuck spills over, somehow, into somewhere productive (or unproductive) (Heinemann, p.5).

Working against essentialising tendencies of categorisation is difficult and necessary work. Heinemann is writing about slippages and useful allegiances, a back and forth that resists anthropomorphic simplicity/exploitation. Part of this work can be a resistance of transparency, or making room for unknown agencies. Opacity becomes a crucial tactic of survival as well as a place of respect for mutual agency. As Gay Plants notes:

"Working against this attenuation, we see in the creative encounters between queers and plants the adoption of a strategic opacity that is also a flaunting of excess, frivolity, artifice: 'speaking through flowers' acknowledges 'the impossibility and possible undesirability of an entirely transparent existence' choosing instead, as 'resistance to and avoidance of biopolitical control, a tactic of conscious illegibility and subterfuge'" (Gay Plants, p.26).

In an act of resistance that has some parallels to Zach Blas' 'Facial Weaponization Suite' (<https://zachblas.info/works/facial-weaponization-suite/>), Heinemann writes about a gesture/performance by poet CAConrad:

“CA Conrad is a queer poet who for several years has been working with what he refers to as ‘soma(tic) rituals’, ritualised bodily practices which he completes and then writes from his experiences of. One of these is called ‘Security Cameras and Flowers Dreaming the Elevation Allegiance (For Susie Timmons)’. CA describes his frustration at the prevalence of security cameras in his home city of Philadelphia (‘FUCK YOU WATCHING US ALWAYS!!’). The ritual resistance he describes involves taking a basket of edible lowers to the scene (‘I eat pansies, I LOVE pansies, they’re delicious buttery purple lettuce!’). He then looks directly into the camera and proceeds to place his tongue in the lower ‘in and out, licking, licking, suckling blossoms.’ When confronted by a security guard he responds ‘I’M A POLLINATOR, I’M A POLLINATOR!!’ As soon as it is declared, it becomes obvious that of course he is, undeniably, a pollinator. Despite not being able to facilitate the actual reproduction of the plants, due to species constraints, the small act of resistance towards the security cameras becomes an act of potential pollination, a pollination of politics and ideas and poetry and joy, both a self-pollination and a cross-pollination (Heinemann footnotes to Deleuze and Guattari). The security cameras that CA is resisting are a part of an ecosystem, and he uses his agency as a being within that ecosystem to make a somatic and semiotic intervention against a mode of biopolitical control” (Heinemann, p.6-7).

‘FUCKING PANSIES (a tribute)’, Gay Plants, in ‘Gay Plants Issue One: Monsters’, <https://gayplants.noblogs.org/>.

‘FUCKING PANSIES: Queer Poetics, Plant Reproduction, Plant Poetics, Queer Reproduction’, Caspar Heinemann, <https://blog.ecocore.co/post/161819858724/fucking-pansies>.

About the film series Sentient Encounters

The word sentient denotes a conscious feeling and an awareness of one’s carnal experience as well as one’s existence. For this reason, the word sentient was equated to intelligence and awareness, and was deemed to be characteristic of only select bodies–human bodies. The word became a means to order matters of the world and enforce (existing) taxonomies and hierarchies between species and their differences. As such a regulator of order between bodies, the word sentient became to enforce anthropocentric worldview – the belief that the human is the measure of all knowledge about the world.

In this series of film screenings and discussions, we propose to reimagine and reclaim sentience to describe relations with bodies that are still excluded from meaning-making practices. We will encounter bodies that are ignored and not recognized as existing because of these taxonomies, and because of power structures and hierarchies that define what a body can be.

Rather than rejecting the word sentient, we propose to contaminate it with multiple relations, which are present in more than visual encounters. Importantly, we aim not to expand the definition of sentience while keeping the division between sentient and non sentient intact. Rather, by multiplying it, we want to shake and reimagine different understanding of bodies and our practices as ‘liminal’ – as already in a state of in-betweenness of fixed categorizations and identifications. By naming encounters rather than bodies as sentient, we pay attention to modes of practices and relations that generate and mutate these bodies. The way we practice bodies, the way we relate, does matter. All relations are sentient, and all relations are risky, as they may lead to creation or may cause harm, as they may make bodies flourish or perish. By recognizing encounters as sentient, we aim to reimagine and bring together differing stories of how to live and practice multispecies bodies and our becoming.

Sentient Encounters is a collaboration between Sjoerd van Oevelen (Department head of Moving Image, AKI Enschede), Agnieszka Wolodzko (initiator and lecturer AKI BIO MATTERS), and supported by ArteZ studium generale.

Biographies



Agnieszka Anna Wołodźko received her PhD at Leiden University in 2018. She is a lecturer and researcher teaching contemporary philosophy and art-science at AKI Academy of Art and Design ArtEZ since 2017. At AKI she has initiated a biolab space where she runs a BIOMATTERs, an artistic research programme that explores how to work with living matters. Her research focuses on post-humanism, ecocriticism, affect theory and new materialism at the intersection of art, ethics and biotechnology. She is also a

curator and writer. Selected recent publications include: “Ars Demones*2022*Manifesto,” in *Footprint. Delft Architecture Theory Journal*; “Demonological re-enchantments – or how to contaminate through intimate stories of commons without consensus,” in *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*; ‘Living Within Affect As Contamination: Breathing In Between Numbers’ in *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*; ‘Materiality of Affect: How Art Can Reveal the More Subtle Realities of an Encounter’, in *This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn. Currently finalizing her book *Affect as Contamination. Embodiment in Bioart and Biotechnology*, published by Bloomsbury in 2023.



Erik Martinson (Canada/Latvia) is an independent curator and writer. Current research threads include: Speculative fiction(ing), genre conventions (and their subversion) as productive restraints (with focus on Science-Fiction, New Weird, Horror, and Folk-Horror), example: screening ‘Not really now not any more’, Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo, 2019; plant sentience, empathy, interspecies relations, examples: ‘All Flesh is Grass’ exhibition project/

online LARP-RPG with public programme, Kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, 2020, online/mail art project ‘Suggested for You’ with Sandra Kosorotova, part of History of Joy, Part 4, 2021; Stone Tape Theory – ghosts as recordings/traces in physical objects, forensic as well as supernatural approaches, examples: screening

‘Like slow breathing, it seemed to emanate from inside the walls’ at LUX, London, 2016, ‘Stone Tapes’ exhibition/publication project in development; Remote Viewing/Astral Projection as metaphor for exploring diasporic experiences, examples: screening ‘Tell me about the ones who sleep through storms: Films and Videos from the Baltics’ at Toronto International Film Festival’s Wavelengths Series, 2017, exhibition ‘The Surface of the Sun’ at Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM), Tallinn, 2018, screening/live-reading ‘There was a Forest in the Ceiling’ at Rupert, Vilnius, 2019; and Language-as-a-virus, examples: screening series ‘Its origins are indeterminate’ at Whitechapel Gallery/Close-Up, London, 2018, screening/performance/live-reading ‘Self Does Not Understand’ at Cubitt, London, 2019.

www.erik-martinson.com



Sjoerd van Oevelen (1974) is a visual artist and researcher based in Amsterdam. He studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and the Architectural Association in London. Since 2001 he has been collaborating with artist Elodie Hiryczuk under the name Hiryczuk/ Van Oevelen.

Their photographs explore the workings of perception and systems of perspective, as well as humankind’s relationship to nature and the landscape. The differences and similarities between Western and Eastern traditions of painting and photographing nature deeply shape their work and thinking. Hiryczuk/ Van Oevelen regularly publish essays on their blog *The Detached Gaze* and in magazines such as *Philosophy of Photography* and *EXTRA – Photography in Context*.

In addition to making art he co-founded the practice and research-based art platform Radical Reversibility co-curating international art exhibitions *Seeing Without A Seer* (2018) and *From Seeing To Acting* (2021). He is head of the Moving Image BA at ArtEZ AKI Academy of Art and Design and currently pursues a PhD research entitled *Towards A Gaze Multiple* at LUCAS Center for the Arts in Society at Leiden University.

www.hiryczukvanoevelen.com / www.radicalreversibility.org

