

Noisy Waters

A smooth space where sailors sway in harmony with syncopated waves, contested panoramas become folded into oceans, and water canals act as method: *A constellation of conduits was channelled between us, and our distance became water* is an interdisciplinary corpus that reorganises the sonics of wet bodies.

What does it mean to fictionalise the sonorous sea? Learning from a drip means the world. Literally.

Karen Barad theorises that “we can understand diffraction patterns – as patterns of difference that make a difference – to be the fundamental constituents that make up the world” (Barad 2007, 72). Diffracted waves are a fiction of unachieved futurity. When objects collide with water surfaces, the emergent waves become visible. Thinking diffractively through aquatic sonorities is a speculative practice evolving through “specific material configurations of the world’s becoming” (ibid, 91). As sound waves infiltrate nautical barriers, various acoustic manifestations occur while the medium shifts from air to water. It diffracts, scatters, echoes, and goes through endless filtration. A submarine sensing of sorts, sonic reflections are a mark of what constitutes the ocean’s floor, what lives and what dies on it. Such aural accounts tune in both with the physical laws governing the world of airs and waters, as well as the legalities and restrictions of subjects and objects in proximity to the sea. They arise in the spatial-legal imaginaries of scales, depths, distances, and dispositions that guide the logistical flows of capital and their exchanges, but also the resulting battles and their shipwrecks.

The aquatic, tubular wind maze scores a sensory ecology. Its multi-directional vectors are reminiscent of these maritime epistemologies. And then, the promise of a collapsing verticality, as mirrored in the phantasmagorical undertones of the carton board paintings. The sea’s polymorphous narratives reverberate in the spatial and sensorial constructs that make this installation. There, an escape from the waters into the realm of the celestial intermingles with the figuration of the paintings. Their stacked, multiplied, and scratched techniques resonate with the *lawscaping* practice that is applied in the literal sense within this exhibition. The *lawscape*, as Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos terms it, is the legal-spatial complex and totality, where the law materialises within the spatial constructs (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015, 68). It is the mattering of law within spatial conditions. The symphonies of death arising from combatting in the sea or simply attempting to cross it, are moments where the *lawscape* intensifies into an all-embracing, all-appeasing, all-drowning *atmosphere*.

The symbiosis of marine bodies, machines, and aural narratives prompts a spectral alteration in interspecies communication. A wavy liminal space separates noise emissions from above and their scattered transmissions below. We all become jellyfish, surrounded by atmospheric complacency. As loud vessels dominate seas and sonic atmospheres, the submerged disturbance is a trace of a brutal history, where the *Lawscape* inscribes traumas into bodies. Enslaved bodies became transient, refugee bodies become expendable: underwater listening bears witness to a piercing violence.

Each room synthesises the omnipresent lyrical propagations and horn-like ambience along with their graphic interpretations. While every sound piece composed by Robert Cervera amplifies the text of the novel *Our Distance Became Water*, the laws of verticality rule the spatial configurations. This gradual saturation between spaces turns the *lawscape* into an atmosphere where the sensorium is overcharged. Not only through sound, vision, and kinesthesia, but through smells that leak from within the paintings themselves. Planted below layers of paint and water-drenched carton, the scents seep from the deep colonial spaces of spices and oceanic abyss. This debris of dry and wet earth escapes the framed medium. In this upper-floor multisensory capsule, aesthetics is ubiquitous, where the sonic, the olfactory and the ocular coalesce. Aesthetics as the perception of an encompassing condition unveils shapeshifting and fluid intersections, which can only be recounted through this radical interdisciplinarity.

References

Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.

Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, Andreas. 2015. *Spatial Justice: Body Lawscape Atmosphere*. Milton Park Abingdon Oxon UK: Routledge.

Mhamad Safa is a musician, architect, and researcher in sonic matters, based between London and Beirut. He graduated from the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths and is currently a Phd candidate in International Law at the University of Westminster. He is an Associate lecturer in Media Studies at the Royal College of Art.

*A constellation of conduits was
channelled between us and our
distance became water*

Robert Cervera and Andreas
Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos
24 March to 29 April 2023

DANIELLE ARNAUD
123 Kennington Road
London SE11 6SF
Tel +44 (0) 20 7735 8292
www.daniellearnaud.com