

LETTER FROM BARCELONA

Dark Ecology

The sound of helicopters droning above is often a symbol of disrupted social order and was a continuous sound in Barcelona during the tense days leading up to the declaration of independence, the subsequent takeover by Madrid and the flight and jailing of the independence movement's leaders. It is a sound I remembered from visits to Northern Ireland in the 1980s and during London riots, and suggests a deliberate winding-up of social tensions rather than any utilitarian notion of surveillance in the age of the police drone. Bani Brussardin, along with Eva & Franco Mattes, organisers of The Influencers, the annual radical media conference, said that, since September, airspace above the city had been closed by the government to all but Spanish police helicopters and that not even the Catalan police or emergency services were allowed to fly there.

I was in the city for the inauguration of 'After The End of The World', the latest 'post-Anthropocene' exhibition aimed at the 'citizens of 2100', presided over by the 'Minister of The Future' and father of 'Dark Ecology', Timothy Morton, at the CCCB. As Catalan and Spanish politicians assembled nervously in front of the exhibition title set out in large letters, there were many comments about its appositeness. Curator of the exhibition, José Luis De Vicente, said: 'I promise you when we thought about this title one and a half years ago we would have never imagined finding ourselves in this position. How are we going to think about 2100 when we don't know what is going to happen next Wednesday? ... It's a train crash that has been forecast for about 7 years - we are really now in the centre of the hurricane and it's very weird.'

The exhibition attempts to look at the world in 2100, in De Vicente's words, 'in an emotional, not technical approach to the effects of climate change'. Mackenzie Wark, in his catalogue essay, likens our civilisation to being trapped in drunken self-driving cars 'networked in swarms, learning and refining their own algorithms. I have a recurring dream about this, in which those cars have had enough of us. They've locked us inside their plush cabins. They're heading for the coast. They're plunging off the dock, ploughing down the beach.' He concluded that: 'In sum, there's nothing for it but to reach under the dashboard, pull out the wires, and figure out together how to pilot this



crazy juggernaut for ourselves.' This is what many of the artists in 'After The End of The World' seem to be doing.

Anab Jain and John Arden of Superflux have converted their part of the gallery into a crowded apartment/farm in the work 'Mitigation of Shock'. It is 2100 and food security is so fragile that people are going to ridiculous lengths to grow food indoors, with vats of hydroponic produce bubbling away and cookbooks for 'Fox Creole' and 'Mealworms' adorning shelves, complete with a trap for urban foxes. As sci-fi writer Kim Stanley Robinson says in the introductory video, 'we are the primitives of an unknown civilisation'.

The artist/sailor Charles Lim Yi Yong uses his native Singapore as an artwork in itself. The artist, who was also a member of Singapore's Olympic sailing crew, has produced a number of major works about Singapore's relationship with the sea - 'Sea State' at the Venice Biennale, for example - and appropriated

sailing technology in 'Stealing The Trapeze' at EVA International in Limerick in 2016 (Reviews AM398). In 'Sea State 9: Proclamation' he focused on the massive purchase and movements of sand in Singapore's land reclamation projects. Singapore is the world's largest purchaser of sand and pays the highest prices for it, to the extent that some countries now ban the sale of sand to the country. Lim finds it ironic that, as this futuristic nation state expands in a battle for more space to build, sea levels are rising to again reclaim the land in the next 50 years. Accompanying legal documents about the ownership of reclaimed land (the government owns it all) is breathtaking drone video footage of large sea vessels discharging

Charles Lim
Sea State 9: Proclamation 2015
video

Natalie Jeremijenko at work for
CCCB Beta Station, 2017