

# Art

MONTHLY

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Truth to Tell

Colin Perry

Artist/Worker/Misfit?

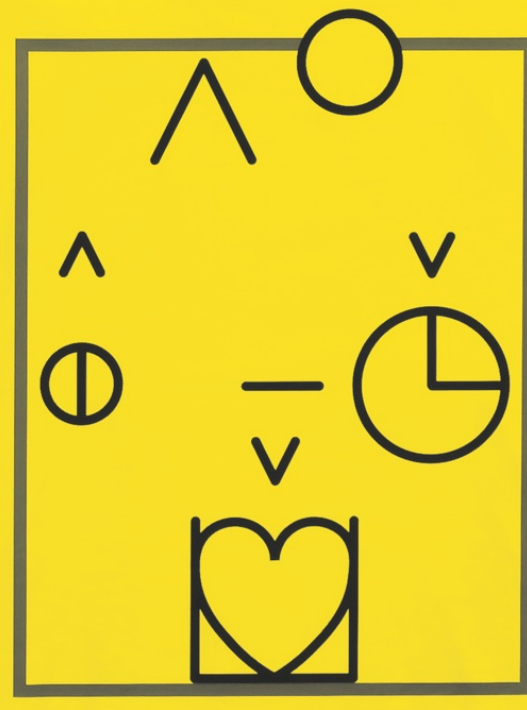
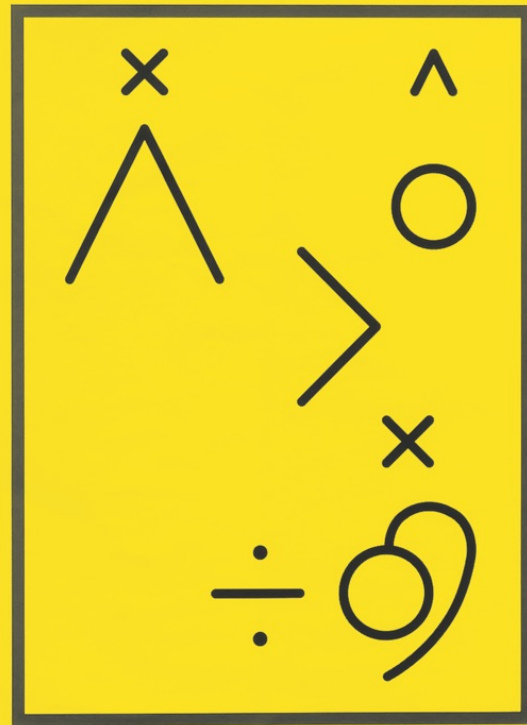
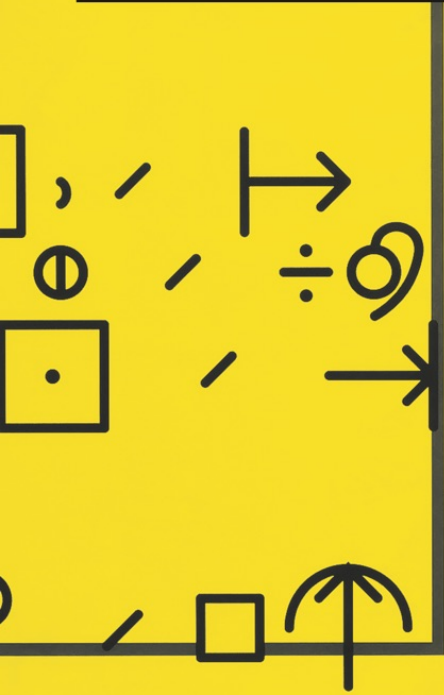
Dave Beech

Screening

Mark Prince

Documenta

Axel Lapp • Sophia Phoca



to its tale, and in doing so evokes an empathic relationship between disparate agents.

'Shift the seat of identity from brain to cell and the nature of the subject radically changes,' suggests the philosopher of cybernetics N Katherine Hayles. By rewiring her organic co-conspirators, or swallowing *Physarum* before poetry readings as a paranoid-critical agent, imagining that the mould is reprogramming her human 'code', Sutela's works rewrite the boundaries of the human by way of an imaginative interspecial programming. It is a terrifying but nonetheless fertile and prescient prospect. ■

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## Mene Mene Tekel Parsin

Wysing Arts Centre Cambridge

21 May to 9 July

'Mene Mene Tekel Parsin' installation view

**Kameelah Janan Rasheed**

*Potentially How to Suffer Politely (And Other Etiquette)* 2016

Walking into the single room of this group exhibition of emerging and long-practising artists is something like the inverse of opening up a busy social-media feed of shouting words and grabbing images. Pale grey, shimmering and mostly monochromatic, like the page of a mystic writing pad, 'Mene Mene Tekel Parsin' may be constructed around the power of the word, but its works do not brandish a message of certainty. The absence of images makes for an anti-spectacular effect, and

the words of the works don't jump out, cajole or arrest you, you have to find them.

At the threshold, a projection of a poem below eye-level traces words in light (Imran Perreta's *when i (do) fall asleep*, 2017), and on the near wall, two white rectangles appear from a distance to be blank. Approaching, letters formed diagonally in faux pearls can be glimpsed – Sarah's Boulton's *how amber will fall*, 2017. The 'b' of amber is written as a '3'; many of the words that make it into her elliptical texts were once poetically chosen passwords, secret portals into personal browsing. The pearls have already started to fall off the wall in a random pattern on the floor, which is countered by a small grid of pearls still pressed into their sheet, order before entropy. There are many secrets hidden here, and I'm not sure whether, like spoilers, I should tell them.

The exhibition's encrypted approach is foretold in its name – 'Mene Mene Tekel Parsin' are the four Aramaic words said to have been spelled out by a floating hand in the biblical parable Belshazzar's Feast, indecipherable to 'all the King's wise men'. A humble man, Daniel, eventually construes a message about the end of the Kingdom, whose rhyme and reason religious scholars have debated ever since. The visitor, then, is called to reflect on the 'writings on the wall', which employ strategies of obfuscation and resistance.

Three silver scrolls of different lengths hang to the left of the room, a banner to the right, the former catching a kaleidoscope of light. The scrolls are Evan Ifekoya's *Ebi Flo (flex)*, 2016, printed with repeated fragments of narrative in CMYK colours, telling of the closeness of disco dancefloors and existential pronouns: 'Am I / You Me / Or are we?' For with the pronouncements of language comes the policing of identity. The banner is Sulāiman Majali's *hero/antihero*, 2012, an overlay of two pairs of words in all caps that require writing out separately to decode. Once you have, the piece suggests the reductiveness of social characterisations based on readings of faith or race, especially in the current media climate.

When the works use conventions of propaganda, they subvert them: in American artist and educator Kameelah Janan Rasheed's *Potentially How to Suffer Politely (And Other Etiquette)*, 2016, green clapboards in the field outside are printed with slogans exposing the paradoxes of liberal discourse that advise the oppressed to act with restraint. Recalling Martin Luther King's criticisms of the white moderate 'who is more devoted to "order" than to justice', in this rural setting, phrases like 'Lower the Pitch of Your Suffering' read as a retort to Keep Calm and Carry On Britain in the face of everyday racism. Lines from Language poet Hannah Weiner's *Code Poems*, 1982, composed from the International Code of Signals, respond indirectly inside: 'How long have you been in such distress? / How many days? / Many / So many / Too many'.

Jesse Darling's *Bliss Symbols Protest Posters*, 2017, translate mottos concerning the tension between speaking up and keeping silent ('in silence they clamour'; 'speech is never free') into Bliss symbols, a graphic script of directional arrows, shapes and hearts which is not derived from the sounds of any spoken language. Now used primarily in special needs education, Bliss was developed with the ideal of universal communication in mind. But even though the exhibition, of which Darling is also the curator, features international artists, its shared language is that of colonising English. Threads of textual transition and (il)legibility come out of both the artist-curator's will to question the narrative structures of modernity and a personal ambivalence to being held to words.

Darling's move away from in-person performance follows





recently deceased conceptual artist Stanley Brouwn's self-concealment, and the *Bliss Symbols* posters are pasted close to a vitrine of his artist book *ell / ells - step / steps*, 1998. Recording materials in old units of measurement derived from the dimensions of a man's body – forearms and feet – Brouwn pursued a minimal precision that translated to distances, walks or himself, though as an artist he was never physically present.

The task, as told through the works on display, is to figure out how to exist and express within the systems – linguistic or otherwise – that are imposed on one's being; to try to escape the violence of categorisation while recognising that things have to be voiced somehow in order to be realised.

The three performances of the opening enact aspects of this voicing, and draw attention to the affective relation of listeners. New York-based artist Gordon Hall holds words and objects as approximate equals in an 'open-ended object sentence', *U*, 2017. The U-shaped sculpture with small handmade objects placed atop – among them a tilde, a comma and a hand – prompts short texts read in the order the items are arranged. Hall's measured mode echoes that of Brouwn, and returns to the etymology of the exhibition title, the individual words of which refer to both counting and account.

Claire Potter's account tumbles out of her mouth, stop and start, as fragments of typewritten text with many crossings-out are shuffled on the floor like a desperate Tarot. The scraps are left beneath the dangling microphone as documents of attempted articulation. Experimental vocalist and movement artist Elaine Mitchener has the last convulsive 'words', conveyed through changing body and facial expressions, and non-verbal sounds. In moments of pain, extreme feeling or disorientation, language lacks and is lost, while the body involuntarily fills in the gaps. 'I ... .. you', 'I ... .. you', she repeats, but the missing verb remains withheld. ■

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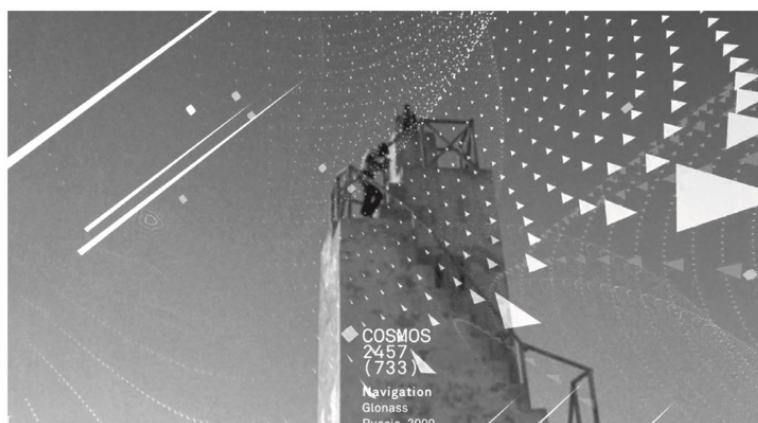
## Filipa César & Louis Henderson

**Op-Film: An Archaeology of Optics** Gasworks

London 27 April to 25 June

'We need a lighthouse philosopher,' suggests Roque Pina, the protagonist of Filipa César & Louis Henderson's captivating essay-film *Sunstone*, 2017. Though you would be forgiven for thinking that Pina already fulfils this role as he flatly, matter-of-factly addresses the origins of the lighthouse, its development and future, and reveals its inextricable relations with Enlightenment epistemologies, piracy, optics, colonialism, the military-industrial complex and workers' rights. Pina's philosophy is based in practice: he alone is keeper of Cabo da Rosa, a lighthouse situated at the westernmost reach of continental Europe on the Portuguese coast.

Beneath the lighthouse, amid the din of international tourists, the film shows the words, translated, of the 16th-century poet Luís de Camões chiselled into stone: 'Here ... / Where the Earth ends / And the sea begins.' Once considered a terrestrial limit, it situates Cabo da Rosa as a frontier of seafaring navigation and conquest of a (recently proven) spherical Earth – a primal scene of global commodity exchange. When pirates operated lighthouses they used them to wreck and rob ships. Monks used them to aid navigation.



Whatever their intentions, both aspired to illumined legibility in archaic forms of mercantile communications. Light in *Sunstone* emerges as a material substrate of various intersections of navigation and legibility in contemporary image-based communications capitalism – only a materialist analysis of light, which the film proposes and advances, could account for its actions.

Isn't a materialist analysis of immaterial light folly? As a spherical lens is held up to the light of the Atlantic for examination (a visual reference, perhaps, to Jean Epstein's *Termaji*, 1952), Pina cautions the viewer: 'Through words we can't really perceive the propagation of light.' César & Henderson, combining 16mm analogue film and CGI, remind us that cinema is uniquely placed to carry out this materialist analysis. *Sunstone* is, therefore, also a film about the cinema's apparatus. By refashioning the convex spherical lens into a series of concentric annular sections, the French physician Augustin-Jean Fresnel invented a lens that, placed in front of a light source, could refract and concentrate a beam of light more powerful than ever before. Because it required less material it was cheaper to produce and much lighter so larger lenses could be housed in the lantern. Throughout *Sunstone*, the Fresnel lenses that appear in Cabo da Rosa, in museums or as fragments held up to the light become ciphers for the architecture of the movie camera itself – the lens pointing at the lens pointing at language's limits.

Accompanied by Pina's voice-over, *Sunstone* collages César & Henderson's 16mm film with appropriated YouTube footage – amongst other things, of satellites, cartographies and a GoPro on a hammerhead shark, sections from the filmmaker Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*, 1983, archival film by the Cuban filmmaker Santiago Álvarez and data visualisations of the 'infosphere' from the 'Architecture of Radio' app designed by Richard Vijgen. Ranging from the terrestrial via the submarine to outer space, penetrated as if stratified surfaces by the camera's point-of-view, these multi-format moving images, produced by humans, animals and machines, demonstrate an omnipresent virtuosity of visibility. If César & Henderson's 16mm celluloid film bears indexical images, the digital, we are shown, is an array of codes that produces computational images of things in the world. The artists' frequent overlay of screen captures from Vijgen's infosphere app with striated CGI meshes or 16mm film, producing dense, sometimes illegible baroque imagery, shows how the invisible is central to a new regime of visibility: visualisations are translations that express things beyond the spectrum of light and human perception. Yet the network (flat, enmeshing the sphere) consists of fibre-optic cables constructed of thin glass rods. Agencies – machine, human, animal – and ownership – corporate, public,

**Filipa César & Louis Henderson**  
*Sunstone* 2017 video



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