

Carpenter Center

IN
CONVERSATION

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LIN,

C. RILEY
SNORTON,

AND HENTYLE
YAPP

for the Visual Arts

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March 25, 2021

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts,
Harvard University

This conversation took place over Zoom at 7:30 p.m. EST on Thursday, March 25, 2021. This publication is the seventh in a series of edited transcripts that record the Carpenter Center's public programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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DAN BYERS : Good evening. I'm Dan Byers, the John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Director of the Carpenter Center. I want to thank you all for joining us. The organization and presentation of our Carpenter Center Conversations series and publishing program is a true team effort. I want to thank my colleagues, Liv Porte, Curatorial and Public Programs Assistant; Laura Preston, Administrative and Outreach Coordinator; and Gabby Banks, Gallery and Bookshop Attendant, for all of their really important work on this series.

Tonight, we are pleased to welcome C. Riley Snorton and Hentyle Yapp, editors of *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value* [MIT Press/New Museum, 2020], alongside artist Candice Lin, who contributed to the book. We've been working with Candice and Walker Art Center curator Victoria Sung on *Candice Lin: Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*, an exhibition of new work that will be at the Walker [in summer-fall 2021] and then come to the Carpenter Center [in winter-spring 2022]. We hope you will be able to see the show at one of these venues.

I'm grateful to our graduate student intern Keisha Knight for recommending *Saturation* to me earlier this year. While the book contends with longstanding discourses, it also feels like a book of our moment, especially in this past year of national traumas that left some of us newly grappling with our institutions and their structural racism. *Saturation* is an expansive volume that brings together a wide array of writers, scholars, and artists. It's been an incredibly valuable book for me to keep close at hand all year.

I want to read just a few parts of Riley and Hentyle's introduction, which provides a beautiful, nuanced framing for their ambitious, edited compendium: "Rather than repeating conversations about race and art in terms of good or bad representation—a binary mode of evaluation that tends to obscure or subsume structural questions and concerns—or rehearsing the case for more institutional inclusion, *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value* examines the terms and conditions that frame how we understand race and aesthetics with a particular focus on global capital."

Riley and Hentyle go on to say, "We use the framework of 'saturation' to contend with approaches to and methods of racial representation, as well as to signal the messiness of dealing with race as a category that exceeds its saturation point. Through this lens, a different set of questions emerge: How is race constituted in relation to racial capitalism? How might representation be evaluated

outside of a liberal paradigm that presumes the eventual eradication of race through the ruse of progress and a mix of 'just enough' representation?"

They go on: "Scientific methods provide a measure by which something reaches its saturation point or becomes oversaturated. Such measures in turn offer a model for us to understand how not only institutions but also racialized subjects reach and exceed saturation points. The bodies that must represent their minority position are often tasked to navigate institutional demands. However, this book examines at what point such bodies become oversaturated by navigating and existing within the institutions we invest in and yet critique."

Those are just some opening thoughts from the book's introduction. We are thrilled to have these wonderful speakers with us tonight. I will hand it over to them.

HENTYLE YAPP : Thanks, Dan, for that kind introduction. It's good to see both of you.

C. RILEY SNORTON : It's good to see you as well. Thanks to Dan, Liv, Gabby, Laura, Keisha, and the whole team. I'm really excited for this conversation.

HY : To give the audience a sense of our plan today, we'll start by providing the larger framing of the book. It will be pretty improvisational; I think we could have a conversation just trying to remember what we did. I think it would

be fun to revisit the process of putting together the book and walk through some of its themes.

Then we'll turn towards Candice's work, particularly the work in the book in relation to the upcoming show at Harvard. After that, perhaps we can think together about some of the overlaps across our works, and then turn to the Q&A after that.

Before we get into the book, we thought it would be nice to revisit how we have gotten to know each other over the years. This might also illuminate some of the themes of the book. All of us are committed to the materialist history surrounding social difference, particularly around race, gender, sexuality, class, and also their transnational implications. Yet we also approach these questions through what many people call "subjectless critique," as in trying to think through a non-modern-humanist and non-liberalist approach to these questions. I thought it would be good to start with our web of connections, and then open up from there in terms of how these connections might infuse some of the ideas in this book.

CANDICE LIN : Hi, I feel like we all met through you.

HY : Am I really the connecting glue?

CRS : Yeah, Hentyle, you are. [*Laughing*]

HY : Oh, how funny.

CL : You invited us to a symposium at NYU titled "New World Orders: Coloniality, Racial Intimacies, and Disability."

HY : Yes, this was with Aimee Bahng, Mel Chen, Xandra Ibarra, Jasbir Puar, Iván Ramos, Mark Rifkin, and the two of you. That was really fun.

And Candice, we met when I was starting at Pomona. That was my first job before NYU. We had a shared student. I remember hearing of your work before then, and I of course was star-struck. I had no clue that you were teaching at Pomona as well. I had a student who shared that she was taking a class with you, which is how I made the connection. And then when I was planning that symposium at NYU, I thought you would be perfect to bring in.

CL : Narei Choi. She wasn't actually my student, but we had some meetings and I thought she was brilliant.

HY : And then Riley and I met . . .

CRS : I think it was Berkeley.

HY : I thought it was NYU, for some reason, at the "Cripistemologies" conference.

CRS : I remember the “Cripistemologies” conference, but I have this vivid recollection of presenting an early version of what ended up being chapter 4 of *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* [University of Minnesota Press, 2017]. Hentyle, you raised a question that was really profound and ended up animating some of the revision of that chapter. That conference, as well as the following conference where I finally met Candice, allowed me to see Candice’s work before we had a chance to speak.

Our relationships spanned the several-year writing process for *Black on Both Sides*. There has been an ongoing sense of collaboration amongst us as thinking partners, and as folks in the world with a particular epistemological and political orientation and a similar interest in material histories. Our relationship has been such a rewarding site of intimacy and collaboration.

CL : The NYU conference was the first academic symposium I had been invited to. I was so nervous. I remember the podium was too tall for all of us. We had to pull the microphone down from way above. The symposium was so much fun, and I was like, “Wow, are academic symposiums always like this?”

HY : In marking where we’ve intersected, it’s interesting to think about how raciality and questions of race are so central, yet we’re also trying to think about other

intersecting points around sexuality, disability, and historicity where raciality becomes the key piece to think through these multiple issues. That parallels the structure of *Saturation*, where race becomes so central, but we’re coming at it at an oblique angle that isn’t trying to routinize and rehash the main arguments that have been constructed, particularly around race and representation.

CRS : I think it’s also important to note three figures we talk about with each other a lot: Sylvia Wynter, as well as Denise Ferreira da Silva, whose thought is present as an entry in the anthology. I think it’s also worthwhile to talk about the influence of Hortense Spillers on all of us as thinkers and cultural makers. If you’re thinking across their works on race, they all share a healthy suspicion of how race is typically framed. They also share a methodology of moving alongside rather than directly approaching the question of “what is race?” Like them, we are thinking about race in terms of its effects, its refractions, as a mode of saturation, or as a kind of valence like the ones offered in the introduction, which include the scientific, the sonic, or as a part of color theory.

HY : This may be a way to segue into details surrounding the book. I know, Candice, in a little bit you’re going to walk through some of the objects that are in the book, as well as other examples of your work. But feel free to

chime in and stay engaged in our discussion, because Riley and I were thinking a lot about your work while we were talking through the structure of this entire book. Your work has really nailed down for me how the aesthetic is as much of a theory as anything else. Your work is so vital for that reason.

It would also be great to talk through Spillers's, Wynter's, and da Silva's work. They're great citational and intellectual forces to help us ground what we're thinking about in the book.

Another thing to mention before we start is that we were invited to coedit this book by Johanna Burton at the New Museum. Candice, you're the one that introduced all of us in Chinatown, in New York. When we started the book process, we knew that we wanted the art world to be a central topic, but our key question would be about institutional life and institutionality. When we think about race and the art world, they become a microcosm for these larger questions.

CRS : Thank you for reminding me of that lovely dinner we all had together, when we were just considering taking on the book. This was in the immediate aftermath of the 2017 Whitney Biennial controversy. It precipitated some of the questions that we raised on the first page of the introduction, where we asked on what grounds was "blank" offensive, how does the artist's identity matter, and is censorship warranted here? What about the

artist's right to free speech? Why aren't there more people of color at the table to make art and make decisions about art?

We saw that these perennial controversies involving race in the art world often led to further controversies—questions would emerge and then something else would inevitably seem to happen. In some ways, we had a desire to look at those questions not at face value but as rhetorical linking points to the next event.

HY : A large part of our conversation, too, was about avoiding becoming *the* definitive voice on what was right or wrong. We weren't interested in what was good or bad representation. Rather, we were interested in identifying the terms that undergird this debate. We wanted to investigate how race is defined and understood as opposed to reifying the dominant liberal tropes around inclusion, representation, visibility, and recognition, which presume that race is knowable. Meanwhile, so much work, particularly aesthetic work and theorizations of race, is actually about race's unknowability. There's a fascinating tension in the controversies that would arise. Race becomes knowable, yet so much of the aesthetic work and theoretical work we are involved in is about race's unknowability, its excess, and its opacity.

It seemed like an important moment to take a step back and ask, number one, what definitions of race were undergirding these controversies? And number two,

how can we bring to the fore the kind of liberal, modern humanist and capitalist relationship to ideas of race's representation, inclusion, and visibility? Which I think then brings in a text like Denise Ferreira da Silva's *Towards a Global Idea of Race* [University of Minnesota Press, 2007]. Da Silva is quite clear in defining and critiquing the sociologic of exclusion, where race is primarily understood as merely the result of exclusion whereby only through inclusion is it remedied and made whole. We were also trying to work against and think through what happens beyond calls for representation. How can we work towards thinking more structurally in relation to race?

CRS : One of the things that's so generative for me about thinking alongside da Silva is to think about how calls for inclusion are actually still part of the machinery of race and how race is made to structure, frame, or attend to things like capital, liberalism, and the human. This is related to *Saturation's* interest in tending to race in relation to racial capitalism. I'm thinking here about both Sarah Haley and Kandice Chuh's contributions to the anthology as ways to think on the side of opacity, to think in the space of the excess, to dwell in what's unknowable about race, and to see that approach as a more accurate way of thinking rather than the scholarly impulse to pin it down. We wanted to leave a lot of things upended in our pursuit of the questions at hand, and that formed the subtitle around race, art, and value.

HY : And then when you take a step back from the art world and think about the university contexts that we work in, as well as different institutional realms, the message and remedy are always presumed to be found in calls for more inclusion and representation. Whereas I think of Rod Ferguson, Sara Ahmed, and Elizabeth Povinelli, who identify terms like "new liberalism" and "late liberalism," to help historicize this moment and show that inclusion and representation are not providing any kind of restructuring or change surrounding the conditions of the present. There's no change in protocols; you just have slightly higher numbers of representation. The structural issues still continue, and even if people make it in, they have to be the right fit. And if they themselves are oversaturated by these demands to fit it, they either leave or they learn to stay and take it.

That was why we were focused on using the art world as the context for this book, but also thinking through the limited place in which we exist. This is why we were calling this contemporary moment "representation without Marxism." What is it to deal with race in a project of restructuration as opposed to dealing with it solely as a project of inclusion and representation? This is not to untie the two but rather to think with them together.

CRS : Certainly the book is informed by—and hopefully seen as—part of a conversation that might contribute to something like critical university studies as well. We're

thinking about the points of convergence around something like the art world and higher education. I wonder, though, if it makes sense to look at one of the areas of apparent disconnect, which is the fact that this is also a book that's deeply interested in thinking with aesthetic objects and materials. I'd love to invite Candice to share a little bit about the kind of materials that she was so generous to share with us in the book.

CL : Thanks. When you guys were just talking now, I was thinking about how this year I've been giving an excess of Zoom talks about my work. I was running up against this feeling that I was overexplaining the work, or explaining the work in terms that don't speak to the sensuous qualities you talked about in your introduction to *Saturation*. A lot of times when I hear you two brilliant minds explaining or synthesizing and analyzing how you see these structures, it articulates things I don't feel I'm able to articulate verbally myself. But I do think I'm doing it through visuals and materials. I don't know why I'm giving a big, long disclaimer. Sometimes it's hard because the power of the work isn't located in a one-to-one relationship with a history that I'm explaining to you. There's actually an embodied experience of the work that has an impact on your sensations, your sense of smell, the humidity in the room, on the feeling of it. A lot of it is also intuitive. So sometimes it's hard for me to synthesize it into a verbal statement. But it's a big honor to be here with you guys and to be in the book.

HY : That's also part of the saturation frame for us, right? Denise Ferreira da Silva articulates this, too. There's this liberal demand for overexplanation to a point where we have to make ourselves transparent, whereby there lacks sensuousness in the work. And it's not mystery, it's not allure. There's just a dimension to the work that can't be fully captured by language—like, "Let me explain the history of racial capital and race to you." It's exhausting. That exhaustion is what we want to write with and through. It's also why we subtitled part of the introduction with a phrase from José Esteban Muñoz, "sensuous contemplation," which he used to describe Richard Fung's work, calling "sensuous contemplation" a kind of Marxist project. So what you're describing right now is completely understandable, and it's exactly what we were trying to work through with the book.

CL : My disclaimer is over, so I'm going to share images on my screen.

One quotation that stood out to me when I was reading the introduction of *Saturation* is in the part about Isaac Newton and color theory, where you write: "It is through the scientific that one comes to test and verify the notion of visual saturation. In other words, the institutional and structural shape is sensorial." That stood out to me because so much of my work—like this image of my work *A Hard White Body, A Soft White Worm*, which uses a distillation system—is thinking about the relationship

of histories of science, histories of industrial production, and relations with the institution that is showing the artwork I produced for them.

I have made works like this one, which is part of the *Hard White Body* series and is made out of a thousand kilograms of unfired porcelain. I began this work at Bétonsalon [Paris]. I have made works that require the institution to take on the work of caretaking by giving them work that's unstable or fragile. This work cracked and yellowed and got stained and stinky and grew mold and mushrooms over time.

I wrote about this work in *Saturation*. I wrote about my interest in histories of materials like porcelain. Porcelain is a really good example of a sensuous material that was produced at first only in Asia and then sought after by Europeans for its purity, whiteness, hardness and its "superior white body." A lot of my interests in materials are ones where there's a latent racialization of value that comes to the surface when talking about objects, how they circulate, and how they are traded and valued.

I was also interested in porcelain's history and its relationship to the field of virology. It was used as a bacterial filter in the nineteenth century by Louis Pasteur. Only through a failed attempt to filter bacteria through porcelain were scientists able to understand that there was another class of beings called "viruses." That was the birth of virology, which came out of racialized viruses, like the Tobacco mosaic virus (TMV), that were studied



Installation view, Candice Lin, *A Hard White Body / un corps blanc exquis*, Bétonsalon, Paris, 2017. Courtesy of Bétonsalon, Center for Art and Research, Paris. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

with new material technologies like racialized porcelain filters and, later, the electron microscope.

In the three different iterations of *A Hard White Body*, the distillation system was used in different ways. In the first iteration at Bétonsalon, it was used to distill the piss from the visitors, myself, and the people that worked in the gallery, and this liquid was dispersed through a misting system hanging above the unfired sculpture to keep it wet and attempt to prevent cracking. If you've worked with porcelain, you know this is a futile attempt, because it's one of the most fragile materials and always wants to crack, especially when it's unfired. In the image from Portikus I showed earlier, the distillation system was used to transform the urine into a hot herbal drink based on a health recipe connected to one of the histories I was researching. This iteration was shown during the winter months in Frankfurt, Germany, so visitors were welcomed with this drink.

In the last iteration at the Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, it was used to slowly raise the horizon line of a pool of water, distilled piss, and porcelain slip, so that the research materials and porcelain fragments, which by this point were fired and floating alongside jars of herbs, photos, drawings, and books, would slowly get waterlogged and destroyed. Here, you can see in the beginning of the installation lots of things were above the waterline. By the end, everything came back to me in a moldy box.



Installation view, Candice Lin, *A Hard White Body, A Porous Slip*, Logan Center for the Arts, The University of Chicago, 2018. Courtesy of the Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago. Photo: Robert Chase Heishman.

In *Saturation*, I wrote about my engagement with cochineal, plants, and bone charcoal. Like porcelain, these all have different visual, tactile, and sensual properties, which is why we value them in human economies and why they were part of histories of colonial trade and violence, histories of being fought over and labored over.

System for a Stain was originally made in 2016 at Gasworks in London. Then it was remade in 2019 at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Canada. This work has a mixture of cochineal, opium poppy, tea, and sugar that is fermenting and then distilled. The heat from the distillation is then used to create a dye bath of the cochineal. Cochineal is an insect that was harvested in what was called New Spain to create red dye. In *Saturation*, I write about why that color was valued in different cultures.

So I was interested in using industrial processes and technologies like fermentation and distillation, which in colonial trade were used as ways to take raw materials and transform them into precious goods. I wanted to use them in a way that produced an unproductiveness or a futility. For example, using porcelain to create a broken bedroom that is stained and yellowed, or using cochineal to create a slowly accumulating blood stain in another part of the gallery, is a way for me to physicalize and make visible a residue of the historical violence that these colonial traded goods were part of, the over-looked violence of their acquisition and production.

Similarly, I got interested in bone black pigment. In this blue room in the installation at the Banff Centre, I recreated an installation that was first made at the Logan Center in 2018. Bone black charcoal was something that I had read about in the 1874 report from the Chinese Commission to Cuba, which was an account recorded by Chinese government officials who were sent to interview the indentured Chinese workers in Cuba and reported that a lot of them committed suicide to escape these debt peonage work conditions they were laboring under. They reported that the laborers' bodies were not buried when they killed themselves but were desecrated to discourage other workers from killing themselves. Their bodies were heaped with the bodies of livestock and their bones were used to create bone charcoal, which was then used to refine sugar and make it more white. In *Saturation*, I wrote about how this material has been used for a black pigment in art production and I used it to create mural paintings, such as the installation at the Times Museum in Guangzhou, China [*Candice Lin: Pigs and Poison*, March 19–May 15, 2021]. In this version, we added an image from a historical engraving of Chinese workers on Millaudon Plantation in Louisiana. In the background, the sugar cane field is burning. The other image on the back wall is of bone charcoal being used in a process similar to distillation or fermentation, a kind of refining process that adds value and purifies the colonial product. The image is a still from a weird 1930s video from Tate &

Lyle, the British sugar company, which I screenshot and drew as a simplified black and white diagram. On the wall with the indentured laborers in the sugarcane field hang small, framed drawings that I create after dosing myself with a plant tincture I steep over six weeks. In the center of the installation, people are allowed to sample these tinctures.

These plant drawings I made were part of a process I also write about in *Saturation*. I was trying to think about how to come up with an image that speaks to something that's lost to the archive or to history. I wanted to expand the idea of research to include images I couldn't find in my research by putting a tincture of the plant in my body, ingesting it, and then seeing what image came out when my body was under the influence of that plant. I write in *Saturation* about falling in love with this black cat named Maklakla, and taking a lot of plant tinctures that put me in a hallucinatory state as I was writing this love story to him.

This leads me into what I'm working on for the show at the Carpenter Center and the Walker Art Center. This is an older piece I made out of boiling and beating opium poppy stems, indigo leaves, sugarcane stems, cotton pulp, yucca fibers, and tobacco leaves into this fragile plant paper that gets its color from the indigo.

This is a kiddie pool filled with indigo that I'm using to dye the large fabric panels that will hook together to form an indigo temple. Victoria Sung called it my "feline religion." I've been using this [dye-resist] process called



Candice Lin hand-dyeing textiles in a natural indigo vat for her exhibition *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping* at Walker Art Center and Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.



Indigo-dyed *katazome* fabric samples from Candice Lin, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (*Cat Demon Diary*), 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Candice Lin's cat, Roger.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

katazome, where you use a rice starch that you steam and then you can squirt it out of this thing that's like a special pastry bag, or you can stencil it on. I was interested in how a lot of these indigo traditions from China, Korea, Japan, Portugal, Nigeria, India, and Great Britain use resists from different starches. The Nigerian ones are done with cassava resist, and the Asian ones are often done with a rice paste resist. On the day I was dyeing these indigo tests, it was raining ash because of the Mount Wilson fire. What a year this has been.

My love of cats, which was in my contribution to *Saturation*, is something that continues in my practice as I lean into it this year. Here are some of the ceramic figures for the temple, which have hybrid human and cat and other animal imagery, and here are some of the other cat works that I've been working on recently.

I'll end with a picture of my cat, Roger. He's the best.

HY : We should end this whole thing and just show pictures of our cats. But we will hold our professionalism together for a few more minutes.

Your work was quite helpful for us to think through the two parts of *Saturation*—thinking about race in relationship to global capital, and considering the methods and approaches to thinking about race and the transnational. In your work, race does not become a sort of model of *habeas corpus*, of showing the body. Instead, it is about material histories in a way that does not elide colonial



Installation view of *Candice Lin: Sleeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping* at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2021. Center: *Sleeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*, 2021. Hand-printed (*katazome*) and hand-drawn (*tsutsugaki*) indigo-dyed panels, steel

bar, dyed rugs, glazed ceramics, epoxy resin, feathers, block-printed and digitally printed fabric (masks), bells, tassels, miscellaneous small objects, and video (color, sound; 4:45 min.). Courtesy of Walker Art Center. Photo: Awa Mally.



Installation view of Candice Lin: *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping* at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2021. Left: *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*, 2021. Right: *Millifree Work Weary™ Free Video (Qi Gong)*, 2021. Courtesy of Walker Art Center. Photo: Awa Mally.

violence but puts it askew, outside the tropes of showing and reshowing the trauma. It fits in with so many other thinkers, like Sarah Haley, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and Lisa Lowe. Over the course of editing *Saturation*, your work served as a reminder of how we can continue to think through race and the transnational. This continues to be a preoccupying question for my own writing as well.

I have so many other reactions to your work, especially to liquids and ferality.

CL : I forgot to say also that the patterns I'm using with the indigo resists speak to what you're talking about with the transnational. I've picked a lot of patterns that happen at the moments of colonialism and global trade. These were moments in history where, for example, Nigerian textiles started being printed with stencils made from imported British tea tins incorporating images from British iconography, like images of the king and the queen, the crown, or the Union Jack. Then, after Nigerian independence, there's also a moment where the imagery of the king and the crown gets incorporated for their own significance in Nigerian culture but are altered with traditional Nigerian symbols and garb. There are also moments where the pomegranate, which is important in a lot of Indian textiles and early *tree of life* imagery, starts to look like the opium poppy in the versions for British export. I got really interested in these mistranslations and retranslations of patterns and textiles. What is

the visual language as it's changing during a moment of transnational trade?

CRS : First of all, I'm such a fan, and I learn so much from your work every time I'm able to see it. I was thinking about how, for me, a scholarly process is more about questions than it is about answers. I was sitting with the image you shared of the Chinese workers in Louisiana and thinking more about the "how" rather than the "why." Maybe the "how" also helps to think about—as Lisa Lowe has elegantly laid out—the kinds of intimacies and entanglements around race on a global scale. It also helps me to hear some of the history you were sharing about the retranslation of textiles in Nigeria in terms of thinking about retranslation as a mode or approach.

I want to underscore that one impact of dwelling with the aesthetic is that it reorients me to different questions. This has absolutely informed the structure of the book in terms of having scholarly approaches interspersed with your work and with other artists who we were incredibly moved and shaped by. These artists are thinking about race as process and not as something that you know is possessed by a particular person or group.

HY : Especially for curators and academics, how one frames and talks about the objects in themselves is just as much of a task, and a question about the ethics of research. How one thinks through protocols and

methodologies can greatly shape the work. I'm actually really curious, Candice, what your research process is for tracing through this archival work?

CL : It's funny, I get asked a lot about my research process. But every time I've had to do a research fellowship, I've felt like I'm an imposter faking it. I'm just looking stuff up on the internet and going down wormholes. I don't spend much time in archives, although sometimes there might be images in a certain archive that I'll pursue learning more about, usually through reading. A lot of my ideas also come from the materials and reading about their histories. But I don't feel like I have very good research practices. I'm not an academic. I don't know how to do it, really.

HY : I feel that way, too. [*Laughing*]

There are threads that you become interested in, right? And as you weave in and out of those threads, you find people who are thinking through similar archives, or similar analytics and frameworks, which helps you unpack and untangle the archives you're interested in. Part of the joy of having this conversation with you all today, and also the joy of the friendships we all share and these constellations of scholars we are in conversation with, is the ability to connect and think together in that kind of way. The thinking isn't necessarily to find answers but rather to ask these really difficult questions.

The research is unwieldy for all of us, and some people are a lot more methodological than others, but I find that really exciting.

CL : Can I ask you guys a question? In your introduction, you talk about color theory, and you talk about sound. I was wondering, if this book were an audio book in which you could have included a sound artist or a sound contribution, who or what would you have included?

HY : My quick and easy answer is a Hong Kong-based artist named Samson Young. He's in the afterword of my book. I like a lot of what he does with silence. He plays with silence. He's a composer by training, and brilliant.

CRS : I love that question. Every book that I've written has a title that references an album or a song. I'm trying to think about that in concert with the themes and the questions of *Saturation*. It's hard for me to narrow it down. I keep turning my head to the left because I'm looking at my vinyl collection to see if anything pops.

Building on the conversation we were having about transnational flow, I wonder if it would be interesting to go with a selection from the Red Hot + Riot's reworking of Fela Kuti's work. It takes Kuti's music through many artists across various continents and reimagines its sound.

The invitation to think sonically is also the invitation to think about what it means to be part of the choir. I would

love to have a soundtrack to accompany the book as well. What kinds of artists, sounds, or movements might be useful for listening to alongside some of the conversations? Hentyle, I'd be curious to score, for example, that conversation with Tourmaline, Richard Fung, and Xandra Ibarra. What kind of sound would accompany that?

HY : And Ibarra's work on laughter is part of that sonic landscape. I'm also thinking of Dylan Robinson, who's in the book as part of that visual studies round table. He does a lot of work in indigenous studies and sound studies. His book *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* is coming out soon. Also, Jasmine Johnson's work on hush and sway, and her focus on Solange Knowles in the Guggenheim. That particular essay also touches on the sonic a bit.

One of the things we were also writing about in the introduction was audio saturation as a concept. The concept is about oversaturating to the point of cooing and holding a listener to a point of comfort. So in thinking about saturation that way, we thought about how overrepresentation or the oversaturation of race could actually lead to this idea of audio saturation in terms of rendering the institution and its audiences quite comfortable. That was an idea we were playing with in terms of the sonic. That field is growing so quickly and in amazing and fun ways. It is interesting to think about different sonic objects that could be embedded in the book.

I think it's a good moment to jump into some questions from the audience.

CRS : This first question is from an anonymous attendee: "Can you all recommend tactics to open space for the opacity and unknowability of race in discussions with institutions founded on Western Enlightenment ideals of knowledge and encompassment? I'm thinking of a member of museum leadership asking me to define what 'invisibility' and 'visibility' meant to me today in a discussion of what the museum 'should do' in the wake of the recent killings."

Thanks for that question.

HY : We were thinking through this question a little bit with the book. In the introduction, we wrote that we weren't necessarily thinking of saturation as a policy prescription. I have a law degree, so I'm trained to think about policy often, but we wanted to leave space for the aesthetic to resonate on its own terms.

This is a question that we all struggle with, especially in university contexts. It's not just the art world and museums but institutions themselves that are grappling with this question. Tactics-wise, it's not so much about showing the individual's pained experience, and revealing the realities of X person or Y person, but thinking about and changing the structures that we're in. What histories have led to the production of mass incarceration? What

histories have led to anti-Asian violence? There are different structures that force us to articulate a different kind of project beyond remedying individual wrongs, which also means institutions need to hold themselves accountable. Where are they putting their funding, and what histories are they working with in terms of their own archives and the objects they house? How did they come to accumulate such objects? These are the kinds of questions that come when you shift towards structural analysis.

But we were also talking earlier about how art trickles into how things are curated, researched, and discussed. Are we trying to make things completely transparent and legible in terms of the real experiences of X, Y, and Z populations? Or rather, how can we let the aesthetic be sensuous, difficult, bizarre, and unruly? This is building off of Gayatri Gopinath's work, which is also in the book.

CRS : Hentyle, what you offered is really expansive. I'm thinking explicitly how much "how" came up in your response. I was thinking about what it would mean to reframe the question. The question is about being asked to define, so I might respond with the question of *how* is it that we come to think about structures of visibility as a way of unsettling the initial supposition that there's something to be defined.

I've also been toying around with the idea that we need to have a common understanding of a political and epistemological stance. This is sensitized by a moment

when someone asked me what the next step was towards more livable trans lives. This person was like, "I think it's acceptance. We need to figure out acceptance and tolerance." Then I was like, "Well, I'm kind of curious about what would happen if we all stood in an embrace of uncertainty." In reproducing the idea of the trans person as somebody to be known, and then to be embraced . . . I was like, "Well, let's imagine that we're actually all in a state of not possessing a gender or a set of identitarian markers, but that we are marked and shaped by them and that we continue to move through them." What might uncertainty bring to that conversation?

I hope that's a useful additional riff on what you shared. It's just a thought experiment that's both about orientation to the scholarship but also an orientation to politics.

CL : I was remembering, Riley, early in our knowing each other, you asked me something, I can't remember what. I thought for a while, and then I was like, "I reject that!" You were like, "What? You reject my question?" I think tactics-wise, when navigating institutions, a lot of it is about finding ways to reject the question that's asked and to put your own question, the one you want to be answering, in its place.

CRS : I absolutely affirm the rejection of a one-to-one indexicality. I'm also thinking about the other aspects of this book, like exhaustion and extraction. There's

something else in the question that I'm sitting with, too, which is the false binary of good or bad. There's also a false binary of invisible and visible. What might be invisible to some is purposeful for others.

I'm also thinking about the silence that's there as well. I see this as something in conversation with what you're saying, Hentyle, about the excesses or hyper-production, as well as the refusal to produce that's at the center of disrupting the notion of calling on an individual to solve a representational crisis in an institution.

LIV PORTE : Here's another question from the audience: "In continuing the metaphor of saturation and color, I'm thinking about the different roles artists may play in turning up the saturation from a question that may have been whitewashed, or pops of intense saturation versus the all-encompassing swarming of seeped color. I wonder if you all could speak to these different approaches to race and to asking questions through art."

This audience member also comments that they're looking forward to reading the book.

CRS : I'm tempted to answer this question in conversation with what we were just riffing on. I hope I'm not misreading the question, but the notion of a pop of color, or swarming color, echoes what we talked about with regard to theories of representation. I wonder if there is more to say about whitewashing.

HY : The idea of saturation allows us to discuss that point when color drips and drips until it brims over, and that becomes its saturation point. Such an overflow and oversaturation might spatially dot the institution, and color it a bit. But even if the excess keeps flowing and flowing, the institution's fabric is still the same. That's kind of a visual metaphor for thinking through late liberalism. The fabric is the same, though you can saturate it differently and have splotches of color or not.

LP : An audience member asks, "I love the way Candice's work offers a reading of race and colonialism but without going through the human. Her work joins mushrooms and tinctures and creatures fantastical as well as wild, but only rarely does the human body make an appearance. Can you all please discuss the question of the human as it is addressed in the book or absent in Candice's work?"

CRS : One way to respond to this question is to remember the moment when we all met at a conference that was organized around thinking about all the tentacles of Wynter's work in queer and of-color performance art and art practice. I know we've talked about Wynter and Spillers, and I want to be very clear that there's no neat compatibility across those different frames. But the question of the human, for me, is deeply informed by Sylvia Wynter's work.

HY : Riley, I think this is why we're simpatico. Wynter's work was the first thing that came to my mind, in particular, Alexander Weheliye's helpful summation of her work in terms of genres of the human.

The human, for me, is less about its presence or its lack of presence but the human as a kind of technology, as a way of governance. My understanding of Wynter's work and the idea of genres of the human is that it came out of the context of Jamaica and the relationship of the transnational to questions of race. This context is important particularly due to questions surrounding nation-building, particularly within a Marxist frame. This relates so much to what we're thinking through. When I read Wynter's work, what I understand from it is that what is missing in Marxist thought isn't that we need to think about race and class together. It's that Marxism misses the whole history of the production of genres of the human, which is contingent on racialization. These genres of the human were meant to produce different subclasses of the inhuman to reinforce the ideas of logic, of man, of reason, and this continues to define the various liberal Western epistemologies that institutions uphold as the most valid. So Marxism and the production of the world are contingent upon the history of race. It's ontological as opposed to an epistemological lack.

Wynter offered a helpful way for me to think about the human in *Saturation*. There are obviously clear histories of dehumanization that are inflected throughout this

entire book, but a large part of the book is also about understanding how the history of race is so central to thinking about the production of our world and the very terms that we have to discuss it.

CL : I think the human is present in the negative space of my work. A lot of my work is about decentering the human, and also about how things circulate, but the circulation is around the human. Wynter is not a big nodal point for me because I don't feel smart enough to understand her writing. I might bring in somebody like Viveiros de Castro and think about personhood, not as a construction or something relating to humans or social structures but as a category of relation. So personhood could be applied to jaguars, plants, or other beings in their relational contexts, which are always changing. When I'm thinking about materials, I might come to a certain material because it was important in human trade, but then I want to think about its life in relation to other things that may be outside of that human framework.

LP : Picking up on that note of pan-species relationships, Candice, why cats? How has living with a cat informed your practice? Hentyle and Riley, if you have a cat or a pet and want to speak to that question, too, feel free.

CL : I love cats. I have loved cats since I was a child. I once made a time capsule that had a fake tombstone in it that

said, "I've never met a cat I didn't love." I live with my cat, Roger. In this pandemic year, I've been seeing people now and then, but my daily life is with Roger. Our bond has gotten even deeper. I'm really aware of all the caretaking work he has done for me during this year.

How has it informed my practice? My assistant was laughing at me because I was trying to communicate something to him and I went [*tilts head back, raises eyebrows, and sniffs the air*]. He was like, "Did you just sniff me?" And I was like, "Oh, I was giving you the face that Roger does when he's asking you a question internally." When you live with another species, you do a lot of projection, but I think there's also a real connection there that's different from a human-to-human relationship. Maybe it's like exercising the muscle of thinking inter-species-ly.

HY : I'm also thinking about Mel Chen's work and the feral as an approach, a concept, and a way of being in the world.

Candice, I feel like most of our text messages are usually about our cats. We send photos, and it's nice not to talk about work. And it's not just a break. Especially in this moment, the rhythms you produce with another are really important.

Riley, I hope you're going to jump on the cat train soon.

CRS : Soon.

HY : I'll read the last question. This is a question around ecologies of care, which I think will resonate with everyone: "I'm really curious about the intersection of these notions of saturation with ecologies of care. How might we understand care as gathering, welcoming, embracing excess, holding the overflow, instead of building barriers around care to contain the spilling?"

CL : I feel like the piece I'm making for the Carpenter Center and the Walker is maybe about that, even though I still don't know what it's about. I envisioned it as this enclosed, soft, fabric space where people would lie together on rugs with objects they could touch in common.

This year illuminated a lot of the things that weren't right, that can't go on, that need a different kind of care. I don't know where I'm going with this answer, but maybe this work for the Carpenter Center and the Walker is trying to create some hint of what that space might feel like.

CRS : Candice, your response is making me think about what this question tells us about a kind of praxis of abolition. I love the idea of an ecology of care that is about holding and embracing the excess; an ecology of care that's not oriented to be a container but that is supple enough to deal with all kinds of spillage, messiness, and the various ongoing practices in the world that may not, in fact, always be compatible.

One of my preoccupations this year has been becoming a better student of abolition. I identify as an abolitionist, but part of the work has been about becoming a better student. There's something about ecologies of care that is not only about what it means to respond to something without carcerality but with attention, and that attention is not always about seeking to know but can also be about being with a retranslation or misrecognition of a moment. That's something very exciting to me about this kind of question and your initial response, Candice.

HY : Riley, you're making me think about how becoming more of a student of abolition is also about asking the question of what happens after abolition. The *after* isn't clear. To think about an ecology of care in that moment is so critical. We call for these things, but the structural reformulations and demands we are asking for are quite difficult. What different political genealogies do we have at hand that can provide some of those maps? The aftermath of abolition is important to think through.

I'll plug Aimi Hamraie's work, which is in *Saturation* as well. Hamraie writes on disability. Care is a huge part of the discourse around disability, feminist, and crip theory, but a part of Hamraie's work is also to understand the fractures across disability and race, the difficult tensions that exist around how we produce solidarities, and the invocation of disability as the next civil rights issue, and that kind of rhetoric. Their work takes that to heart

in a beautiful and smart way. I'm really glad that we could have that piece in the book because I think it really complicates care outside of a utopian desire and considers the difficulties and fractures of relationality, which is built off of someone like Jasbir Puar and others.

DB : I have nothing else to say except thank you so much. Our next program is April 15 with Wanda Liebermann and David Serlin, who will be thinking about disability and modernist architecture. Hentyle, Riley, and Candice, thank you so much. And thanks, everyone, for joining us.

CANDICE LIN

Candice Lin is an interdisciplinary artist who works with installation, drawing, video, and living materials and processes, such as mold, mushrooms, bacteria, fermentation, and stains. She addresses themes of race, gender, and sexuality in relationship to material histories of colonialism, slavery, and diaspora. Lin has had recent solo exhibitions at the Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, CA; Walter Phillips Gallery at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Alberta, Canada; Ludlow 38, New York; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, The University of Chicago; Portikus, Frankfurt; Bétonsalon, Paris; and Gasworks, London; as well as group exhibitions and biennials at Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2019); Para Site, Hong Kong (2019); Beirut Art Center (2019); Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2018); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2017); New Museum, New York (2017); and SculptureCenter, New York (2017). She is the recipient of several residencies, grants, and fellowships, including a Painters & Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (2019), Davidoff Art Residency (2018), Louis Comfort Tiffany Award (2017), Delfina Foundation residency (2014), Fine Arts Work Center residency (2012), and a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2009). She is Assistant Professor of Art at UCLA and lives and works in Los Angeles.

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COLOPHON

In Conversation:

Candice Lin, C. Riley Snorton,
and Hentyle Yapp

Published by the Carpenter
Center for the Visual Arts,
Harvard University

Editor: Laura Preston
Copy Editor: John Ewing
Publication and Program
Coordinator: Liv Porte
Designer: Chad Kloepper

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Generous support for Carpenter
Center programming is provided
by The Andy Warhol Foundation
for the Visual Arts.



Carpenter Center for the
Visual Arts, Harvard University
24 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
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Installation view of *Candice Lin*:
Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping
at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis,
2021. Courtesy of Walker Art Center.
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