

Bahar Noorizadeh is an artist, writer and filmmaker. Her work has appeared in the Tate Modern Artists' Cinema Program, London (2018); Berlinale Forum Expanded, Berlin (2018); Biennale of Moving Images, Geneva (2016); Nanjing International Art Festival (2016); Beirut Art Center (2016); National Gallery of Art, Washington (2016); and Toronto International Film Festival (2015), among others. Noorizadeh's current research examines the intersections of finance, Contemporary Art and emerging technology via shared imperatives of systemic regulation. She is pursuing this work as a PhD candidate in Art Practice at Goldsmiths University of London.

Mahan Moalemi is a curator, writer and co-editor of "Ethnofuturismen," published by Merve Verlag, Berlin. He received his Master of Research in Curatorial/Knowledge from Goldsmiths, University of London (2017), receiving the MOP Scholarship (2016). Recent exhibitions include co-curating *The Fisher-Function* at Goldsmiths (2017). He is a former co-organizer at *kaf*, an independent artist-run initiative in Tehran (2010-15). His writings have appeared in *Cabinet*, *Domus*, *Spike Art Magazine*, and a number of art and literary publications in Iran.

Joi T. Arcand is an artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with Great Distinction from the University of Saskatchewan (2005). Recent solo exhibitions have been presented at Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff (2017); ODD Gallery, Dawson City (2016); Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon (2014); Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon (2014); Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (2013); and Gallery 101, Ottawa (2012). She was founder and editor of the Indigenous art magazine, *kimiwan* (2012-14), and recently curated *Language of Puncture* at Gallery 101.

Felicia Gay, of Swampy Cree and Scottish descent, is curator of the galleries at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon, the only gallery in the region that exclusively features Indigenous contemporary art. She previously co-founded Red Shift Gallery, with Joi T. Arcand, an art space that created a presence for Indigenous artists and addressed issues around colonial histories. Gay has been featured in keynote presentations at the Canadian Arts Summit and in publications including *Canadian Art Magazine*. She has been a sessional lecturer in the College of Arts and Science's Department of Art and Art History since 2008.



Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art
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Gallery Hours: Tuesday 11AM – 8PM
Wednesday – Saturday, 11AM – 6PM
Tours every Saturday at 2PM – Free, all welcome

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Cover image: Bahar Noorizadeh, video still *Ultima Ratio Δ Mountain of the Sun*, 2017. Digital video. Courtesy the artist.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

AGGREGATE PROGRAM: Sepake Angiama

Tuesday 20 November 2018, 7PM

Mercer Union's Aggregate Program seeks to invite cultural producers to Toronto, who are researching and developing methodologies that speak to the value of working small-scale.

Sepake Angiama is a curator and educator currently based in Europe. Her work focuses on the social framework and discursive practices. This has inspired her to collaborate with artists, architects and designers who disrupt or provoke aspects of the social sphere through action, design, dance and architecture. Angiama recently served as Head of Education for Documenta 14 where she initiated *Under the Mango Tree: Sites of Learning* in cooperation with ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), a project that gathers artist-led social spaces, libraries and schools interested in unfolding discourses around decolonizing education practices. Previously, she was Head of Education for Manifesta 10 hosted by the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg. Angiama is currently a Fellow at BAK, Utrecht (basis voor actuele kunst) and is undertaking research on science fiction, modernist architecture and intersectional feminism. Angiama holds an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art, London.

The **Aggregate Program** is generously supported by The British Council



SESSION: María Alejandrina Coates

Sunday 2 December 2018, 12-3PM

Understanding Systems with governance machines and the future of futures

SESSION is a project modelling itself after an incubator that invites cultural practitioners to engage with questions that emerge out of a given exhibition.

Presented in collaboration with SAVAC, curator María Coates will lead this third iteration of SESSION to flesh out the meanings embedded in Bahar Noorizadeh's work and discuss how they play out in daily life. Noorizadeh's *After Scarcity* draws on the theories of cybernetics, particularly those proposed by Soviet cyber-economists between the 1950s-1980s, as platforms for building new coalitions and social relationships in a contemporary environment. However, an engagement with the philosophy of technology requires us to first clarify the language being used. This workshop will invite members of the public to unpack and discuss concepts explored in Noorizadeh's video, tracing the ways in which technological interfaces structure economic and political systems.

María Coates is currently researcher-in-residence at SAVAC, working at building critical digital literacy systems with racialized artists.

Space is limited. Please RSVP to office@mercerunion.org or 416.536.1519



SESSION is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group

FORUM: Marc Couroux

Wednesday 16 January 2019, 7PM

Marc Couroux is Associate Professor of Visual Art in the School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design at York University. He is a founding member of The Occulture, a Toronto collective investigating the esoteric imbrications of sound, affect and hyperstition. Recent talks have been held at MaerzMusik, Berlin; New York University; Parsons School of Design, New York; Kingston University, London; Goldsmiths, University of London; the Aesthetics After Finitude Conference, Sydney; and London Media Arts Association. His recent publications include *Ludic Dreaming: How to Listen Away from Contemporary Technoculture* (Bloomsbury), and a *Preemptive Glossary for a Techno-Sonic Control Society* in the *Volumes* catalogue (Blackwood Gallery), among others.

FORUM is an ongoing series of talks, lectures, interviews, screenings and performances at Mercer Union. Please check the Mercer Union website for details about our upcoming FORUM events.

Admission to our public programming is free and all are welcome.

MEMBER PROGRAMS

In Studio: Faraz Anoushahpour, Parastoo Anoushahpour and Ryan Ferko

Wednesday 28 November 2018 6PM - 7:30PM

Free for Sustaining Members and above; open to other members and select non-members for \$15. Refreshments will be served. Meeting location will be announced to confirmed attendees closer to the date of the studio visit.

RSVP to York Lethbridge at york@mercerunion.org or by calling 416.536.1519

Parastoo Anoushahpour, **Faraz Anoushahpour**, and **Ryan Ferko** have worked in collaboration since 2013. Using various performative structures to work in relation to specific sites, their projects explore collaboration as a way to upset the authority of a singular narrator or position. Currently based in Toronto, their work has been shown at Viennale (2018); Projections, New York Film Festival (2018); Taipei Artist Village (2017); Trinity Square Video, Toronto (2017); Wavelengths, Toronto International Film Festival (2016); SPACES Art Centre, Cleveland (2016); Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Toronto (2016); Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (2016); Portland International Film Festival (2016); International Film Festival Rotterdam (2016); Media City Festival, Windsor/Detroit (2015); Experimenta India, Bangalore (2015); Crossroads Festival, San Francisco (2015); and ZK/U Centre for Art & Urbanistics, Berlin (2014).

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Bahar Noorizadeh:
governance machines and
the future of futures

17 November 2018 – 19 January 2019
Opening Reception Friday 16 November, 7PM

Peer Pressuring the Past, Future-Fictioning the Present

Central to Bahar Noorizadeh’s practice is the idea that what was once planned for the future is often proven inadequate for registering the perilous realities of our present. Multi-scalar schemes of development and progress have led to global warfare, environmental disasters and rampant financialization. This, Noorizadeh suggests, calls for the collective reorientation of historicity and historical time per se. Her hypothesis is that certain temporal templates not only define how a chain of events is put into a narrative, but also influence the nature of events that might or might not take place. This approach treats history as a technology that requires recalibration, or an infrastructure that needs to be redesigned and rewired.

Noorizadeh’s aesthetic practice should be considered in light of her role as a platform developer and cultural strategist. Along with seven other colleagues, she is a founding member of BLOCC (Building Leverage over Creative Capitalism), a research and education platform that seeks to investigate, unravel, and alter how contemporary art, as a sprawling professional field, feeds into and benefits from mechanisms of gentrification.¹ She is also part of the collaborative project The Art Protocol, which was co-founded with Ghalya Saadawi in Beirut, and functions as a think tank, a website, and a support structure for negotiating the informal economy of contemporary art.

In her films, Noorizadeh reflects on contemporary art itself as a global infrastructure characterized by deregulation, unwritten rules and shady protocols. Of course, this poses a dilemma for the artist of how to inhabit the art world in an alternative way. For Noorizadeh, part of the response is to question situations where, for example, a work of art can project and propose improved living and working conditions while circulating under objectionable material circumstances. Her films are therefore part of a larger investigation into how policymaking would not only precede aesthetic practice but also follow it.

The speculative capacities of Noorizadeh’s practice gesture toward a certain philosophy of planning, a suggestive design ontology. She is concerned with design as a matter of conditional confabulation; that is, how the fictional quality of a design process is constantly poised against the techniques of realization, primarily intended for viable functionality. In other words, her work maintains that navigating fictions and functions, particularly by negotiating the modes of causality that could relate them to each other, is fundamental to design on an ontological register.

The complications of empiricism in the digital age, following a space-oriented phenomenological crisis in the fabric of lived experience after globalization, require paying more attention to the myriad temporal orders and time patterns that underlie design practice. In the words of Fredric Jameson, this is an investigation into “what a time subordinated to space might look like, and what a spatial temporality might entail.”² Far from the abolition of time altogether, this is about a shrinkage or reduction to the present, a time folded and pressed onto itself.

Jameson’s dramatic thesis of the “end of temporality” positions time as focalized on singular events against the backdrop of a diminishing sense of historicity and futurity.³ How could design, beyond proposing and proclaiming the new, help retrieve and reclaim that which is being lost? This necessitates dissociating from presumed notions of temporal continuity, which remain modeled after phenomenological perceptions of continuous experience across space. Engineering and navigating temporal abstractions can augment the existing geometries of unrepresentable territorialization within the restitched order of globalization.⁴ This would be to problematize and intervene in the orders of spatiotemporal causality that currently reign over frameworks of individual and collective experience.

“An ontology of the present,” according to Jameson, “is a science-fictional operation.”⁵ Comparably, the aesthetic engineering of a digital audiovisual practice can employ both retrospective and prospective tropes to dramatize and sensationalize the present effects of a conflicted and eclipsing phenomenology. In *Ultima Ratio Δ Mountain of the Sun* (2017) we see a dense mix of digital effects and documentary footage shot in eastern Lebanon. Here the past is narrated from the embedded viewpoint of a sentient machine from the future. In this purported biopic, human figures phase in and out of slow motion, appearing from beneath and within layers of digital


 Bahar Noorizadeh, video still *Ultima Ratio Δ Mountain of the Sun*, 2017. Digital video. Courtesy the artist.

debris. The camera itself occasionally serves as the actual human-machine membrane, mediating a bionic vision, suggesting an itinerary of the artist’s life journey as that of the machine’s and, maybe more importantly, vice versa.

As a result, the film is a complex, multi-layered work that explores the intersection of technology, nature, and human experience. It is a powerful statement on the impact of globalization and the loss of identity in a world of constant change.

This touches on a phantasmic future where humans live an immortal life and resurrection might be just one upgrade away. Parts of *Ultima Ratio* were shot at the temple complex in Baalbek, also known as Heliopolis, or Sun City. The well-preserved Roman edifice in Beqaa Valley, the site of rituals for members of a solar cult, has long raised questions about who could have conceived such an enormous project. Among the legends that sprang up around the ruins were fringe theories about how the site was used for landing by divine space travelers. Without directly commenting on any of the existing narratives about Baalbek, the film asks whether and how the past could be repurposed to bring about future projects of unprecedented scales. Ultimately, notions of (social) change and (historical) contingency, implied by the triangular uppercase letter “delta” in the title, are suspended between the transformative capacities of technology and the psychological effects of hashish, which is itself cast as an evolving historical character in the film.

Such an approach resonates with what Simon O’Sullivan calls ‘mythotechnesis’, the practice of getting “involved in a speculative ‘future-fictioning’ of the real.”⁶ Future-fictioning is a means of engaging with and conceivably regulating the frequent rewriting of the codes of causality on a flattened field of temporalities, where “fiction (or, more specifically, the fictioning of future scenarios) operates as a kind of temporal feedback loop (from these futures back to the present).”⁷ This rests on the realization that a fictional entity can bring and hold predictions of the future together, weigh them against each other and, before those futures actually arrive, act on reality as is and, consequently, change the future without ever leaving the cyclone of history. A technoscience of self-fulfilling prophecies, such and similar operations have been crucial to modes of chronopolitical governance since at least the advent of cybernetics.⁸ Mythotechnesis, then, works towards the remodelling of such political order.

Today, technological fictioning is common for financial instruments and derivative products, including forwards, futures, options and swaps, each of which is a functional fiction of one sort or another. “The past teaches, but we do not know what it teaches,”⁹ as Elena Esposito explains how finance capitalism feeds on indeterminacy. The future of futures, then, points to not only what might become of the rise of unknown unknowns in a market-driven global economy, but also to the challenges of imagination itself. As a cultural practitioner, Noorizadeh tries to address this by highlighting the power of surrogate models to register and grapple with indeterminacy across the fields of computation, finance, politics, and art. In a forthcoming conversation with Tirdad Zolghadr, she hopes for a regulated art field to “actually generate more deregulated thought and action. A formalized field can equip artists to respond to the only indeterminacy that matters, the future itself.”¹⁰

In *After Scarcity* (2018), the difficulty of imagination beyond capitalism is addressed by revisiting the socialist premises of early experiments in big data and networked architectures. For this, the film recounts the endeavors of Soviet cyberneticians to design a fully automated self-regulatory national economy. The problem is again framed as one of time and temporal agency: the stagnating inefficiency of bureaucratic time vis-à-vis the condensed time of high frequency trading. Urging us to reconsider regulation (as opposed to control) after decentralization, the film evokes the unrealized potentials that underlie the reality of capitalism. “How could a socialist state be governed as efficiently as Walmart?” In this sense, the film lays the foundations for an emerging field of comparative futurism by prototyping a genre of economic science-fiction, oscillating between speculative finance and speculative fiction.

Among the many on-screen texts in *After Scarcity*, we read, “Is it possible to map the Utopia without the anthropomorphic burdens of experience?” Also, “Utopia is not a representation, but an operation calculated to disclose the limits of our own imagination of the future.”¹¹ While presenting a devotion to improving human experience, this simultaneously challenges the terms with which human experience has been defined, including the anthropic principle that shapes perceptions of all that is non or inhuman. This line of inquiry is reflected in Noorizadeh’s use of LiDAR technology, a real-time 3D laser scanning system, to produce much of the raw material for the film.

Rumour has it that the music video for Radiohead’s *House of Cards* (2008) was the first time that LiDAR was used in mass entertainment. “Forget about your house of cards. And I’ll do mine. Fall off the table. Get swept under. Denial, denial. The infrastructure will collapse. Voltage spikes. Throw your keys in the bowl. Kiss your husband goodnight.” In contrast to Thom Yorke’s lethargic fatalism, Noorizadeh’s work is attuned to what Mark Fisher describes as “a new use of digital machinery, a new kind of digital desire: a digital psychedelia,” one which “dilates time [and] induces us to linger and drift” as it “rediscovers the dream time that capitalist realism has eclipsed.”¹²

— Mahan Moalemi

^[1] Aoife Rosenmeyer, “Adaptable Platforms: Sommerakademie Paul Klee,” *Art & Education*, October 2018, https://www.artandeducation.net/schoolwatch/222115/adaptable-platforms-sommerakademie-paul-klee]

^[2] Fredric Jameson, “The Aesthetics of Singularity,” *New Left Review*, No. 92 (March–April 2015), 105, 120.

^[3] Fredric Jameson, “The End of Temporality,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Summer 2003), 695–718.

^[4] Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 347–360.

^[5] Jameson, “The Aesthetics of Singularity,” 101.

^[6] Simon O’Sullivan, “From Financial Futures to Mythotechnesis,” in *Futures and Fictions*, ed. Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed, and Simon O’Sullivan, (London: Repeater, 2017), 318.

^[7] *Ibid.*, 320.

^[8] A similar formulation is fundamental to the concept of hyperstition proposed by the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit in the mid 1990s. This neologism combines the hype of contemporary technocultures and the prognosticatory capacities of superstition to account for the often hallucinogenic effects of late capitalist operations.

^[9] Elena Esposito, *The Future of Futures: The Time of Money in Financing and Society* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 151.

^[10] See the catalogue of the Biennale de l’Image en Mouvement, Geneva, November 2018.

^[11] Fredric Jameson, “Utopia as Replication,” in *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 413.

^[12] Mark Fisher, “Digital Psychedelia: The Otolith Group’s *Anathema*,” in *Death and Life of Fiction: Modern Monsters*, ed. Anselm Franke and Brian Kuan Wood, (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014), 166.

SPACE: Joi T. Arcand, a commissioned work for the billboard space on the side of Mercer Union

It would be good if they were able to speak, were the words spoken in Plains Cree by Augustine Arcand, Joi T. Arcand’s grandmother. The concern is emotionally present within the connotation of her words. Augustine Arcand sees the need for the young to know their language, to inhabit their words, to feel the community those words provide. The photograph is of Juliette Primeau, who was Arcand’s great-grandmother. Primeau did not live to see her son grow up; Arcand’s grandfather was raised by Primeau’s sister.

The collective philosophy and worldview of Indigenous nations are carried within the language. Leroy Little Bear asserts that we carry within us, as Indigenous people, fragmented worldviews and we carry in each of us... a “precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again”¹. A precolonized consciousness is inherent. Although language is but one way to transmit Indigenous ways of knowing, it provides a lens through which to peer, an avenue through which to relate to an animate world. Disconnect in totality does not exist in Indigenous worldview and ways of knowing for Indigenous people who do not speak or understand their first languages. But, *it would be good if they were able to speak*.

The photograph of Primeau shows a young woman with humour in her eyes, a beautiful face. Her words express a concern for younger generations losing their first language, speaking only the language of the oppressor – a language that could never relate or translate to her own. The colonial project to assimilate the Indian was an attempted cultural genocide, from which Indigenous people are only now beginning to recover. Not a project in the distant past but one that continues into the present. The last residential school closed its doors in Canada in 1996. Children were forcefully assimilated and reassigned a new identity, a new nationality, a new language. To remove any remnant of who they were as a people before colonization, they were forcefully separated from their communities, their parents.² Today the new colonial project is the Child Welfare system.

Jane Philpott, the current Canadian Minister for Indigenous Services, has said that the disproportionate number of Indigenous children caught in Canada’s Child Welfare system is a “humanitarian crisis” that echoes the horrors of a residential school system, which saw 150,000 Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their homes.³

Arcand’s placement of her grandmother’s words in Cree syllabics atop the image of Primeau, legitimizes the Plains Cree language at the forefront. The words are *her* call, a lament, an encouragement that *it would be good if they were able to speak*. Primeau was a Plains Cree speaker and her great granddaughter is on a journey to speak and understand the language. Arcand imagines that if she had the opportunity to talk to Primeau, it would have to be in Plains Cree. It is a re-imagining, a reconciling of what should have been for Arcand, to know and speak to Primeau in a way that was meant for them, language being a sort of inheritance from Creator as it ensures modes of survival, ways of knowing and animates our comprehension of the world we live. Indigenous languages were formulated over thousands of years to ensure that their philosophies and ways of knowing are intrinsic to a relationship with creation and its animate nature. In French or English words are understood as feminine and masculine. In Cree, language is understood as animate and inanimate. Indigenous philosophy coalesces to the animate world stanchioning the lens that allows Indigenous people to see the interconnections and relationship to creation as their relatives. The rock is my grandfather, the buffalo is my brother. The relationship to language is important and it would be good if we spoke our first languages, but total disconnect from Indigenous worldview will not happen anytime soon. It did not happen with the colonial project and attempted genocide of Indigenous people in North America. Although the trope of the *vanishing Indian* is now translated as the trope of the *vanishing culture or language*, it is another colonial construct that continues to decenter Indigenous worldview and ways of knowing within us. Second and third generation learners of their Indigenous language carry within them a precolonized consciousness, through them is thousands of years of knowing. Language was and is one vehicle Little Bear calls a *precolonized consciousness* and it would be good if Indigenous languages were spoken, as it is a powerful transfer of decolonized ways of knowing, it is a way of knowing that predates contact. Powerfully and incredibly even so, however fragmented our worldview and ways of knowing, they have been translated generation after generation. Indigenous epistemologies and concept of time is not linear in the Eurocentric sense but cyclical and the circle is unbroken, there is no end or demise of anything – this is the belief.

— Felicia Gay

^[1] Leroy Little Bear, "Fragmented Worldviews Colliding," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Battiste Marie (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 85.

^[2] Taylor MacLean, "Lost in Translations: How Language Can Contain a Worldview," *University of Toronto Centre For Indigenous Studies*, (accessed October 11, 2018), http://indigenousstudies.utoronto.ca/news/lost-in-translation-language-and-worldview/

^[3] Ashifa Kassam, "Ratio of indigenous children in Canada welfare system is 'humanitarian crisis,'" *The Guardian*, November 4, 2017, (accessed October 12, 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/04/indigenous-children-canada-welfare-system-humanitarian-crisis