

STATION

In the Dust of This Planet

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TV Moore | Michelle Ussher | Ronnie van Hout*

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Our 'world' is progressively becoming more and more 'unthinkable'; an 'unthinkable world'—a paradoxical thought—of planetary disasters, terrorism, pandemics, and a gradually materialising extinction. It is the unthinkable world that Eugene Thacker interprets in his 2011 book, *In the Dust of This Planet*, as 'the world-without-us' or 'Planet'; a spectre of its ontological comrades: 'World' or the 'world-for-us', and 'Earth', the 'world-in-itself'. The world-without-us is the substratum where the thought on the limit-of-thought lies, the cosmological great beyond.

Thacker argues that the genre of horror is the best format for understanding and applying the 'world-without-us', that this unthinkable world is best comprehended in the supernatural horror themes found in fiction, film, comics and music. He calls for a 'horror of philosophy', a recognition of the point at which philosophical thinking is confronted with the limits of its own being: the point at which it becomes 'unthinkable'. This concept is apropos to the state of contemporary art. Like the varying strains of horror, the themes running through contemporary art (e.g. politics; the Arab Spring; science; performance; feminism; installation; occupy; new media) reflect an attempt to deal with the unthinkable. We attempt to create dialogues through didactic and thematic presentation, we curate works into exhibitions that have an engagement with a cultural current or a reinvented avant-garde, but fundamentally we find ourselves lost in a world that no longer enjoys expedient iconographic-labels of 'posts' and 'isms', leaving us to speculate on the horror of contemporaneity.

Devoid of these 'posts' and 'isms', and as a totalitarian hegemonic condition that tends to look inward in an attempt to define its own identity, our understanding of contemporary art is that we do not understand it. We exhibit the unknown, speculate as to what 'it' is, and participate in a continuous and singular attempt to uncover its nature, its thought. Perhaps through our unceasing attempts at understanding, we will eventually come to realise that it is only with the passage of Time—reflection, that we can figure out what 'now' actually is/was. That our current position, wherever that may be, is not far enough 'in front' to comprehend what is 'behind'—that it is too close to focus, and only when we move far enough away will it become the 'world-for-us' (the world we understand and can see, engage with).

Artists confront this paradox—the unthinkable world of contemporary art—in many ways. Take the oeuvre of Ronnie van Hout: like the state of contemporary art, his practice is literally self-reflective—the par excellence of 'world-for-us'. He crafts doppelgänger-like minions and anthropomorphic objects to stand-in for him as representations of the self, mirrored objects that can situate themselves in the zone of the unthinkable, attempting to define this nothingness. Or the work of TV Moore: who takes the traditional concept of easel painting and creates a renaissance conversation with the present via technology and 'process', speculating on the future state of painting—an

unthinkable condition in itself. Needless to say, such ad rem themes are evident in the works of all artists, and every single one by necessity falls under the banner of contemporary, with no concrete sub-genres and often in a state of incongruity; working with the unthinkable attempting to think about the unthinkable. Perhaps such speculation only represents another attempt to put a label on contemporary art: the horror of contemporaneity, the speculative thought of the unthinkable.

Indeed, consider the title of Thacker's book, *In the Dust of this Planet*. The words themselves have become part of a contemporary crisis: first being appropriated (another contemporary sub-theme/genre) by Norwegian artist Gardar Eide Einarsson onto canvas, the product of which was replicated on the back of a leather jacket by New York fashion label BLK DNM, and the jacket selected by Jay Z's stylist to be worn by the rapper in a promotional tour video. Or in another instance, showing up in an American fashion magazine on a sweatshirt worn by model/actor Lily Collins. Here we see the culture industries attempt to think about the unthinkable nature of our contemporary condition; turning a little known book (that very likely neither the stylist, or Jay Z, nor Lily Collins have read) on a rather unknown train of philosophical thought into a brand of its own, 'nihilist chic'.

So why not continue this trajectory and title an exhibition after it; but rather, endeavour to take Thacker's conception and adapt it to the context of contemporary art, not simply use the title for its ability to beguile and enchant. Such a tale of comparatively meaningless appropriation seems rather poignant here—with its themes of nihilism, *In the Dust of this Planet* speaks of the lack of purpose to things, that everything is arbitrary and that nothing exists. Is not this 'the most difficult thought', the thought on the limit-of-thought, the unthinkable? If so, Jay Z's wearing of Thacker's book is a form of unconscious and soulless nihilist chic, and represents an attempt to make sense of the state of contemporaneity that is equivalent to Ronnie van Hout's use of the self and TV Moore's application of past notions to present technologies. Each is working through the unthinkable, through the dust of this planet.

— Jack Willet