

Gallery 2: Geometric Asylum

Lachlan Anthony

November 2 – December 2 // Opening Night October 19, 6–8pm

PUBLIC PROGRAMS NOVEMBER AT VERGE ::

- + Artist and curator introduction, November 2, 5:30pm–6pm
 - + Open mic night :: To the inclusion of all others, November 15, 5:30pm–7:30pm
 - + Community care picnic and Double Vision, November 25, 11am–3pm
 - + Discussion :: Geometric Asylum, December 2, 1pm–3pm
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Human geographer Simon Springer compares the character of neoliberalism to an abuser, “which actively facilitates the abandonment of “others” who fall outside of “neoliberal normativity.”¹

The structural violence of neoliberalism is underpinned by a strong sense of social Darwinism that conceives of the innate differences in human talent as being a formative basis for allowing certain individuals the freedom to exploit asymmetries in class power to siphon away collective wealth. The neoliberal tendency is to define humans according to their economic value. This is expressed through rhetoric that positions those that do not conform economically as intentionally useless and dispensable. Language such as “povo”, “welfare scroungers,”² “dole bludgers,” and “lifters not leaners,”³ places a moral blame on the marginalised for their position of disadvantage.⁴ This constructs a justification for the spatial vilification of certain people, on the basis of their very *being* in society. People such as the homeless are cast as less than human, nuisances that can be dealt with by the same means as controlling a common pest.

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Colin Jerolmack’s *How Pigeons Became Rats: The Cultural-Spatial Logic of Problem Animals* (2008), draws on Bruno Latour’s idea of the *modernist constitution*, to show how the problematisation of pest animals in cities, namely pigeons, can reflect and inform processes which construct categories of human otherness. Jerolmack draws attention to Latour’s framing of the *modernist constitution*, as pertaining to occidental processes of purification and ontological division between human and non-human. Within the schematic delineation between nature and culture any incidence in which the non-human transgresses into zones defined as exclusively human is understood as a threat to the maintenance of social order and human control of the cityscape. Pigeons are stigmatised as “rats of the sky” and vast resources are spent to defend architecture from their habitation.⁵

¹ Simon Springer, “Neoliberalising Violence: Of the Exceptional and the Exemplary in Coalescing Moments,” *Area* 44, no. 2 (2012): 137.

² Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin, “After Neoliberalism Analysing the Present: The Founding Editors of Soundings Set out the Framing Analysis for Our Online Manifesto,” *Soundings*, no. 53 (2013): 15.

³ Former Australian treasurer Joe Hockey quoted in: Bill Garner, “Lifters and Leaners: Why the Idea of Equality of Opportunity Is a Big Con,” *The Age*, June 18, 2014.

⁴ Hall, Massey, and Rustin, “After Neoliberalism Analysing the Present: The Founding Editors of Soundings Set out the Framing Analysis for Our Online Manifesto,” 15.

⁵ Colin Jerolmack, “How Pigeons Became Rats: The Cultural-Spatial Logic of Problem Animals,” *Social Problems* 55, no. 1 (2008): 72–94.

Neoliberalism expands Latour's ontological divisions by transposing a definition of pestilence onto certain groups within our society, reinforcing the binary of belonging and not belonging.

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Neoliberalisation spread efficiently through developing economies in part by policies dictated by the IMF and the World Bank. This included government debt alleviation and loan extensions in return for nation-state commitments to wholesale privatisation, one example being government housing. Termed "micro-entrepreneurial solutions to urban poverty," the logic developed in the late 1970s was for the World Bank to fund short-term loans to poor residents to enable self-help and incremental upgrades to slum housing.⁶ The implications of this market-based approach, pushed by the World Bank, manifested catastrophically in the Philippines beginning under the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship of 1979-81. Manila's poor were generally unable to meet the 'affordable' obligations of these short-term loans. As a consequence, affluent members of the middle class poached the loans for real estate investment and transformed slum zones into housing that the poor could not afford to rent. These original occupants were forced to resettle in semi-rural areas on the urban fringe, which made access to jobs and services virtually impossible.⁷ As a violent aside, Filipino landlords used arson to accelerate slum clearances and circumvent the lengthy judicial processes through which a slum demolition could be legally completed. This act became known as "hot demolition" and involved chasing a "kerosene-drenched burning live rat or cat (dogs die too fast) into an annoying settlement . . . a fire started this way is hard to fight as the unlucky animal can set plenty of shanties aflame before it dies"⁸

Artworks listed clockwise from entry of gallery 2:

Edge Condition #2, Installation, Dimensions Variable, Aluminium, enamel.. 2016-17

Vast Impenetrability, Installation, 780 x 270 x 14 cm. Acrylic, enamel.. 2015-17

Circulation (Documentation), HD Video 8:40 min, Rotating display motor, steel, aluminium, pvc conduit, electrical cable. 600 x 150cm. 2015

Thresha, Kinetic Sculpture, 200 x 155 x 40 cm, Stainless Steel anti-pigeon spikes, bbq spit motor with skewer, mounting brackets steel, aluminium, enamel, electrical cable, shot bags.. 2015-16

⁶ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London;New York: Verso, 2006), 71.

⁷ Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 70-74.

⁸ Erhard Berner, *Defending a Place in the City: Localities and the Struggle for Urban Land in Metro Manila* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997), 144.