

Julieta Aranda, Chus Martínez,
and Markus Reymann

Editorial

01/02

e-flux journal #112 — october 2020 Julieta Aranda, Chus Martínez, and Markus Reymann
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Hannah Arendt coined a beautiful concept that describes the current situation we dwell in: *worldlessness*. If the word “world” is used to name the space of sociopolitical life, then to lose the world would mean to lose all the gains that have been made in the sociopolitical sphere, setting off all the dangers that this loss entails. Therefore, it seems mandatory, in this lack-of-world, to attempt to maintain the bonds between people, to preserve the decades of efforts dedicated to extending the social bond to nature. It is in this lack-of-world that we must try to reinvent the most important element necessary for this bond: a public realm. Now, it appears that today’s public realm is a complex composite of all the solitary cells inhabited by individuals in isolation, with all conversations happening through privately owned tools like Zoom, Webex, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, and Instagram, all the streaming, the sprawling autonomous media, and so on.

By the nature of its inception, this apparent public realm not only runs through private channels, but is also deeply fragmented. And it invites a question about social interaction: When the social body lacks a body, is it possible to regroup the pieces into a singular something? That is: In a moment when bodies, en masse, are virally dangerous, and when governing bodies increasingly dodge democratic procedures to flaunt authoritarianisms, neocolonialisms, and corporate-state capitalisms, is it possible to regroup from our individually isolating cells (domestic, digital, molecular, political) into some other collective form of transformation? Is there another body to look to for inspiration? Take the ocean, for example: a body of water with limitless potential for reorganizing the coexistence of life and its ever-liquid spaces as we know them.

If there is a shared purpose to this fragmented human experience, beyond the repetition of limited variations of the exercise of self-confinement, it may be that in the past months we’ve become certain that it is indispensable to include nature in a new political contract to create another life for culture. Taking the ocean as a theme for this issue addresses the possibility of a new world, of a political philosophy capable of reopening a debate on justice, freedom, and public space. From concrete issues on conservation, exploitation, and infrastructures and technology, to the possibility of a new interpretation of the world-with-nature via indigenous thought and the transformation of current art and cultural systems, the texts here aim to create a sense of affirmation and a space for politics.

Perhaps when thinking about cohesion, it could help to revisit the notion of “oceanic feeling,” a psychological term conceived by Romain Rolland in the course of his correspondence with Sigmund Freud. According to Rolland’s definition, this feeling is a sensation of an indissoluble bond, as of being connected with the external world in its integral form. This feeling is an entirely subjective fact and is not an article of faith. To Freud, this feeling is a fragment of infantile consciousness from when the infant begins to differentiate himself from his human and nonhuman environment. (He goes on to criticize the oceanic feeling of limitlessness in *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*).

Issue #112 of *e-flux journal* is a special collaboration with TBA21–Academy, focused on the ocean as a living entity, an intersectional and intrinsically interconnected ecosystem of systems for coalitional imagination and collaborative inquiries. The ocean has been the subject and the theme of TBA21–Academy since 2011. By asking for new modes of engagement while insisting on the importance of keeping a multifaceted approach, the academy resonates with both life sciences as well as socio-anthropology, and with art as a crucial, bridge-building force for shaping a new oceanic literacy.

Our call in this issue of *e-flux journal* is simple. As the deck reshuffles, as our current forms of relation and isolation unravel, let’s keep this in mind: the entirety of the ocean. Not as a memory, but, like the mystic poets, let’s allow our senses to become ocean, so as to regain together a sense of all that is fundamental for our near times. It may be that oceanic feeling, and by extension the image of the ocean, are the best places to start rethinking the differentiation and order of hierarchies between human and nonhuman environments, and to elucidate to what point this differentiation is real, and to what point it is a construct. As we live through the cascading effect of a zoonotic disease, and as we see the images of the other inhabitants of our cities coming out to play now that so many are locked in, the need to answer here and now for our life on earth *with others* becomes clear.

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Julieta Aranda is an artist and an editor of *e-flux journal*.

Chus Martínez is head of the Art Institute at the FHNW Academy of Arts and Design in Basel. She is also the expedition leader of *The Current II* (2018–20), a project initiated by TBA21–Academy. Additionally, in 2021 and 2022, Martínez will hold the artistic directorship of Ocean Space, Venice, a space spearheaded by TBA21–Academy that promotes ocean literacy, research, and advocacy through the arts.

Markus Reymann is the cofounder and director of TBA21–Academy.

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