

Special Works School Transcript

Bambitchell
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A video by Bambitchell

PURPLE

Triadic Colours. Three colours spaced evenly around the color wheel, when linked by a straight line, form a triangle. The three colours used in this scheme tend to sit well together and can be quite lively and harmonious. As with the analogous colour scheme, it is recommended that one colour govern the design while using the other two colours to complement it.

CHORUS

Who is vying for power?

PURPLE

Used for a mix of aesthetic effect and practicality, this colour scheme most typically refers to colour patterns and designs as seen on military vehicles.

CHORUS

In the beginning there was camouflage, the invisible.

PURPLE

Colour is often seen as deceitful and authentic simultaneously. Who of you reading this text would even dream of painting the living room wall bright red or green, or any colour than off-white? Then, safe in your whiteness,

you can hang a wildly coloured picture on the wall, secure in its framed being.

PURPLE

Ambiguously sitting between crimson and violet.

Purple is often, if not always, associated with authority.

A mix of red and blue, often used in the judiciary.

Or adorned by Christian Magistrates and majesties.

CYAN

If you belong to a linguistic group that does not distinguish blue from green, then other distinct colours do not emerge.

Cyan. A new look for blue-ish with a sprinkle of green.

CHORUS

What started off as a multiplicity of senses, kept reducing in number until all that was left was a singular cell.

SAND

Sand. A micro-organism that continues to unravel and lessen itself. Originating in 1920 as a colour resembling the flat parts of a desert, this hue, Sand, begins as most narrators begin, when telling a story about their demise.

CYAN

Perhaps demise is not the best way to begin this text.

This is a story about sand's devolution.

Sand began omniscient.

Sand began pansophical.

Sand began preemptive.

CHORUS

Sand began.

CYAN

Diving to the depths of forty feet, sand is dredged up with metal buckets, gasping, pulled to the surface.

CHORUS

The bottom of the sea soon, will be too deep.

PURPLE

Both liquid and solid, sand possesses a softness and scalability that allows for its easy transportation across great distances. To note its malleability, however, is to make more than a literal statement about its physical composition. Sand is used in multiple applications, from the rudimentary to the digital, in the fine river sand used in concrete for the creation of a soaring skyline, bound with bitumen in the roads that line the feverish grid of city blocks, and as the base material from which silicon and rare earth elements—the key components in smart phones—are mined.

CHORUS

Anywhere there is development, there is sand.

PURPLE

Prior to the nineteenth century, vision was often attached to touch, texture, scent, taste, and sound.

The separation of sight from these other senses allows for an easier manipulation of the eye. An eye shaped by a convergence of nineteenth century luxuries such as forms of artificial lighting, new use of mirrors, glass-and-steel architecture, railroads, museums, gardens, photography, fashion, crowds.

CYAN

Sand begins with an employable amount of it all, an overwhelming of the senses, until one sense at a time succumbs to the inevitable.

PURPLE

In order to see, one must render themselves invisible.

When light falls from above on a uniformly coloured three-dimensional object such as a sphere, it makes the upper side appear lighter and the underside darker. This pattern of light and shade makes the object appear solid, and therefore easier to detect. The classical form of countershading works by counterbalancing the effects of self-shadowing, with grading from dark to light. Mimicry makes an animal appear to be some other thing, whereas this newly discovered law makes them cease to appear to exist at all. The spectator seems to see through the space occupied by an opaque animal.

CYAN

Sand cuts out a stencil of the soldier, ship, cannon, or whatever figure Sand wishes to conceal, and looks through

this stencil from the viewpoint under consideration.

SAND

If you want to see something clearly, look at it through a stencil.

CHORUS

Seeing becomes a way of remaking one's own relationship to one's environment.

CYAN

Sand is wedded to camouflage as it is the primary means through which living beings take up an embodied relation to their surroundings.

Foreground blending into background.

CHORUS

Productive mimesis.

SAND

I begin with a pansophical invisibility.

That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.

CHORUS

The eyes behind the eyes.

CYAN

Sand stands in camouflage, observing.
Absorbing.
Reflecting light.

SOUND

CHORUS

The walls have ears.
The walls have ears.
The walls have ears.

PURPLE

This dictum goes back to the sixteenth century French queen Catherine de Medici, who installed acoustical funnels into the walls of the Louvre in order to listen to the conversations of her conspirators.

CHORUS

The walls have ears.

PURPLE

The embodied psychic effects of surveillance include nervous tensions, insomnia, fatigue, accidents, lightheadedness, and less control over reflexes.

CHORUS

Watch as Sand's muscles disband.

PURPLE

Glass is brittle yet infinitely malleable; it is transparent, chemically inert, and durable. It is not coincidental that glass structures our understanding of the representational world. Whether it is the glass that makes up the screens of TVs and computers, or the mirror, a looking glass that allows us to understand how we might appear to others, this substance is endemic to our understanding of representation and to forms of mediation more generally. There are often, if not always, elements of distortion and projection when working with glass.

CHORUS

We live in a glass-soaked society.

SCENT

PURPLE

If the visual settled in with a nice sense of distance between self-enclosed subjects and other-enclosed objects, this distancing was annulled with nasal perception, such that the scents ran riotously into one another as much as into the Other, as with the dog, man's best friend, loyal to a fault, never happier than when its nose is up the Other's rear end.

SAND

My ears were the first of my unravels.
The next was the moment I couldn't detect the scent of my enemy.

As my nostrils began to stick into my nasal cavity, that moment of detection is lost.

CHORUS

He has a fondness for odours.

PURPLE

The East German State Security Service (aka Stasi) would bring in a “suspect” for questioning and the vinyl seat they had sat on would be wiped afterward with a cloth. The pieces of stolen clothing, or the cloth, would then be placed in a sealed jar resembling jam-bottling jars.

A label might read as the following:

Name: Herr Rott. Time: 21:00 hours. Object: Worker’s Underpants.

Name: Frau Franzen. Time: 01:00 hours. Object: Worker’s socks.

SAND

I have already spoken of my fondness for odours, the strong odours of the earth, of latrines, of loins.

CYAN

Blending into the foreground and background, unable to detect the odours Sand so relishes.

TASTE

PURPLE

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

CYAN

Unsurprising to us, the next of Sand's senses to disappear is that of taste. No longer tasting the compacted rations that lined that military pack and pockets, Sand used this lack as an advantage to keep up a steady stream of energy while being unable to enact gag reflexes.

SAND

The taste of my saliva in my mouth is just one layer of bland atop the next.

CHORUS

It all becomes texture.

The textured self in the textured skin.

Fingers touching and rubbing up against each other.

TOUCH

PURPLE

The loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision meant the unloosening of the eye from the network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space. An industrial remapping of the body.

SAND

The elimination of my shadow is the essence of my invisibility. Skin and film function as interfaces and border zones between organisms and their environments.

I stretch my skin, wrapping it around the periscope and my eye.

CYAN

Soon that will also fail Sand.

PURPLE

During the experimentation period for camouflage technologies, birds had to be skinned immediately after collection. The assistants were instructed in the delicate art of enlarging a bird's rectum sufficiently to roll its skin tenderly back from its carcass. The assistant then cut the carcass away from the skull and wings, put on rubber gloves, rubbed the hide with powdered arsenic, rolled the skin back in place and stuffed the body with cotton.

CHORUS

While Sand tries not to be seen, a spectacle is created.

SIGHT

PURPLE

Whiteness must be broken up, creating shadows to mask the brightness. Central dark shadows might be obscured by applying reflecting materials on all sides.

It is thus inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society's generalized abstraction.

SAND

The doctor thought he could detect lesions in my retina—the pupils dilated with belladonna—the torch shone into them with a terrible blinding light.

PURPLE

Once vision became located in the empirical immediacy of the observer's body, it belonged to time, to flux, to death.

CYAN

It's at this very particular moment that Sand's eyes are giving way. It often begins with a spot here, a spot there.

SAND (speaking frantically)

Look left

Look down

Look up

Look right

The camera flash

Atomic bright

Photos

The CMV

A green moon, then the world turns magenta

My retina is a distant planet

A red Mars from a boy's own comic

With yellow infection bubbling at the corner

I said, "this looks like a planet"

The doctor says, "Oh, I think it looks like a pizza..."

PURPLE

Does the blindness held in the aversion of the eye create an insight that is manifest as a kind of magnification or intensification of the object—as if memory as affect, and the affect that forges distorted or intensified memory, cascade off one another, each multiplying the other's forces? I think this kind of blindness makes music.

SAND

It all started to unfold. My senses, once pristine and belonging to omniscience, give way to the psychosis of watching. Of obliterating and concealing. Of blending so well into my surroundings that making sense of what I am watching begins to blur with who I am.

CHORUS

The psychosis of seeing oneself outside of oneself is referred to as camouflage consciousness.

CYAN

As a way to self-console, Sand tries to conceive a kind of happiness, in which nothing would be winsome. A pure, deserted, desolate field, a field of azure or sand, a dumb, dry, magnetic field, where nothing sweet, no colour or sound, would remain. ■

CREDITS

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With text by:

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

Anirban Gupta-Nigam, "Black Infrastructure: Media and the Trap of Visibility," in *Media Fields Journal* no. 11 (2016)

Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015)

Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Downlow* (2014)

Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003)

Hanna Rose Shell, *Hide and Seek: Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance* (2012)

Michael Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred* (2009)

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and*

Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (1990)

Jean Genet, *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943)

Len Lye, *Kill or Be Killed* (1942, film)

Laura Levin, *Performing Ground: Space, Camouflage, and the Art of Blending in* (2014)

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way* (1922)

Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (2003)

Charmaine Chua, "Sunny Island set in the Sea: Singapore's Land Reclamation as Colonial Project," in *Infrastructures of Citizenship: Digital Life in the Global City* (forthcoming)

Derek Jarman, *Blue* (1993, film)

Bambitchell is the artistic collaboration between Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Mitchell. Working together since 2009, their projects have been exhibited at festivals and galleries such as Article (Montreal), The Images Festival (Toronto), and The Art Gallery of Windsor and included in such publications as *C Magazine*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and the forthcoming Routledge publication *Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture*. The duo recently completed a residency at Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany (2015–17), and have an upcoming fellowship at The MacDowell Colony. “Special Works School” will make its European premiere as part of Forum Expanded, Berlinale 2018. bambitchell.com

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