RESEARCH NICHE: VISUAL NARRATIVES AND CREATIVE OUTPUTS

CLOUD MATTERS

A GROUP EXHIBITION ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERENCE: DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN PRECARIOUS TIMES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

2-4 November 2022
Vanderbijlpark
Riverside Sun Hotel

Mixed Signals, Colette Lotz, 2022.

Curated by Nokukhanya S Khumalo, Liam Rothballer and Annemi Conradie-Chetty

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Cloud computing and servers have revolutionised digital technology, providing remotely accessible processing power and storage on-demand. While the cloud may seem immaterial and distant, it demands huge energy resources that are generated by extracting and consuming fossil fuels, metals, and water. The environmental impact of the cloud and information technology is further caused by the production, distribution and discarding of technological devices. The cloud is therefore 'matter', and it also matters greatly when considering its environmental impact and by extension, its impact on humans.

Over 40 artists and poets from South Africa and abroad responded to our call for artworks and poems that reflect on the environmental impact of cloud computing and information technological industries. The artists' submissions were printed and installed in glass bottles on the banks of the Vaal River, in the garden of the Riverside Sun Hotel, the venue of the Digital Humanities conference. Here they become messages in bottles or time capsules, prompting conference viewers to consider the technological tools of their trade in a larger context.

Acknowledgements:

The curators would like to thank the Deputy Dean: Research and Innovation, Prof Mirna Nel, for supporting this exhibition. We are also indebted to Anzel van Rensburg and Simone Roos for providing administrative assistance, as well as Tarryn and Pierre of 3D Virtual Tours for creating the virtual gallery of the show. Our gratitude further extends to Riverside Sun for accommodating our exhibition in their garden.

To each artist who submitted their artwork and poems: thank you! Without your participation and creative responses, this exhibition would not have been possible.

CATALOGUE OF WORKS

ALISON KEARNEY

@the_museum_under_erasure

Toxic Cumulation includes a piece of printed Ghanaian fabric placed inside a bottle with polluted water. When the work is placed in the sun, evaporation and deposition occur, symbolically creating a toxic cloud. As the temperature cools, condensation occurs. This contained toxic water cycle speaks against the pollution that is caused by e-waste dumping in West Africa.

ALISON KEARNEY, 2022

Toxic Cumulation

Glass jars, printed Ghanaian fabric, contaminated water

ANNE-MARIE TULLY

https://www.instagram.com/annsgracesstudio/?hl=en

http://ann-marietully.blogspot.com/?m=1

https://www.annsgracesstudio.co.za/

Cloud Babel: A Shape Poem takes the form of a cumulus cloud formation, while speaking to the 'mega-matter' that is the global server infrastructure - the vehicle for a folly of biblical proportions. The cloud shape is a signifier for the natural resources that we, and all other species rely upon. While the poem speaks to the reified mode of desire that drives human consumption of digital content. A classic Marxist conundrum; and one we are all complicit in. The title references the biblical story of the origin city of Babel, where humans angered God, and the tower fell when they all began to speak in different tongues. The fact that Babel 7.19 is the name of a JavaScript compiler is no small irony.

_Cloud — is matter
#cloudmatters *reified
narsissist engine pulling —
its weight — punching above its —
waterline — cloud reboot #resource
a mile high Babel — brimming with dissent #indecent
bleeding selfies – translating the Void — — — an event horizon
*collecting a waterfall — filing away a river — taxonomies in the dirt of desire ©
& who scatters the ash of creation on the frenzy of self — binary GODS clad in
SWAG _burning holes in their pockets — opening clouds in their souls — #immortals @BABEL™
If I could speak of disappointment — voices carried on a hot burning wind — speaking in tongues ...
that lick the silver-linings ¦ masturbating at the peripheries to a fathom of tits & ass —to be falling —
in python & java through time — dreams In stasis — presence preserved —mummified
_in desire building up trays ~~ an affront to the water nymphs ~~
— a smoke signal to the heavens _ to be
heard & seen — upon
a cloud — no matter
the
cost

ANNE-MARIE TULLY, 2022

Cloud Babel - A Shape Poem

Digital Art
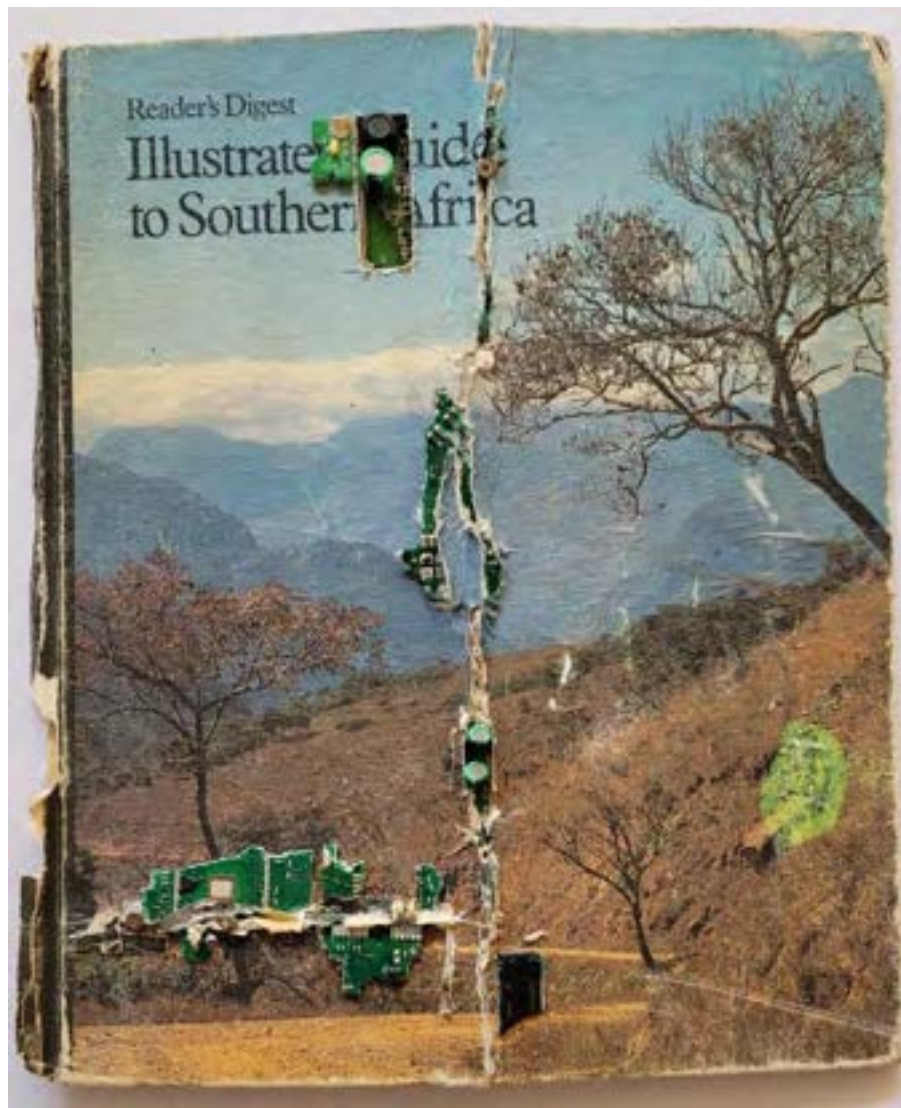
ANNEMI CONRADIE-CHETTY, 2022

Illustrated Guide 1

Mixed media (vintage book cover, discarded modem)

ANNEMI CONRADIE-CHETTY

@artword_za

This artwork is a mash-up of a cover of Reader's Digest *Illustrated Guide to South Africa* and a discarded modem. Like cell phones and computers, the modem presumably had its own illustrated guide to help users install and use it correctly and optimally.

The book cover depicted a South African landscape, but is now pierced, cracked, and eroded, as though someone followed the wrong manual when handling it. That manual discarded and ignored the guides and guidelines of natural stewardship, resulting in natural destruction, but delivering on the insatiable demand for newer, faster, smarter, flashier, and cheaper devices, storage, and connections.
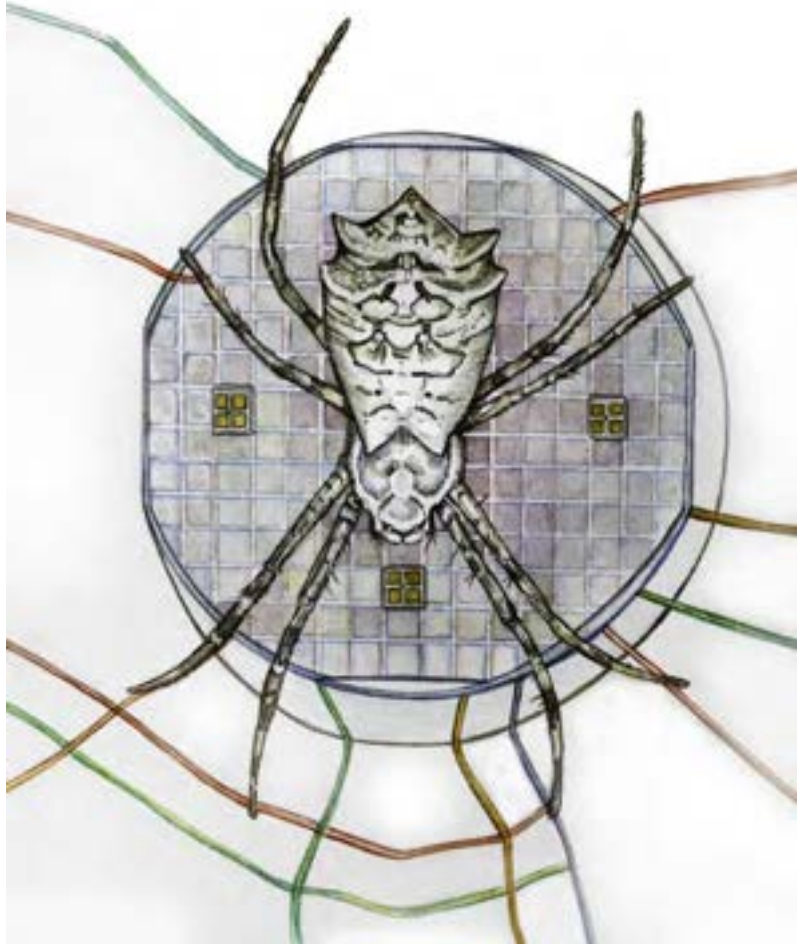
ANNEMI CONRADIE-CHETTY, 2022

Illustrated Guide 2 & 3

Mixed media (vintage book cover, discarded modem)

CATHARINA DE KLERK

An orb web spider hovers protectively over a silicon wafer, connected with colourful wires, weaving connections. The silicon wafer represents a critical step in the complex process of building integrated circuits, transforming how connections are formed, with chips tested, before completed wafers are sliced into individual chips. Jacquard loom cards are an early example of automatic control, used to weave integrated designs. The Greek myth of Arachne is recalled, a weaver turned into a spider after daring to challenge Athena to determine the better weaver. A warning against overconfidence about one's abilities, the story also questions the consequences of censorship.

CATHARINA DE KLERK, 2022

Weaving connections

Watercolour painting and colour pencil on paper

A line drawing of a jellyfish is laid over a watercolour depiction of an alloy junction transistor. The shape of an old transistor is reminiscent of a jellyfish moving against the tide, bell-shaped with tentacle-like wires. The encounter between a jellyfish and a deep sea Internet cable is imagined, emphasising the physicality of the infrastructure and the increasing amount of resources needed, despite the perception of the Cloud as something ephemeral. The fragility of communication infrastructure also stands out through such an imagined encounter, with the possibility of damage to undersea cables to cause outages still a threat.

CATHARINA DE KLERK, 2022

Undersea encounter

Watercolour painting and colour pencil on paper

CHIRO PARK

The cloud, although vast and generalised, is used in very personal capacities by people. The cloud retains a record of who we are and has become our weakest target for attacks – the cloud is personal; the cloud is us.

Ironically, the cloud is not found in the sky but actually in the sea and the only "impartial" party who has attempted to stop the ever-expanding cloud are the sharks.

The poem 'What the sharks aren't saying' explores the cloud as a cityscape, a reflection of those who use it, and provides a glimpse into the rationale behind the vigilante sea dog attacks on its infrastructure.

What the sharks aren't saying

By Chiro Park | August 2022

Matter matters most to those
Who experience mass over time.

Disperse and disapparate! clobbered the secure network.
Store, store, store, subscription capacity met.
More, more, more they yelled! Sync, backup and restore.
Who will stop us? Who will tell us no? We are the future - grow!
Private and personal data lake's unite...
Processors churning, heating and beating
Am I, I?
Mine...mining.

Untimely uptime offloading voice notes of deceased server connections.
Screenshots of screenshots crowding data centres - homeless, useless.
Remember us! Make space for us!

Dick pics line the optic roads, swelling and flexing with storage power.
Don't you drag, don't you lag!
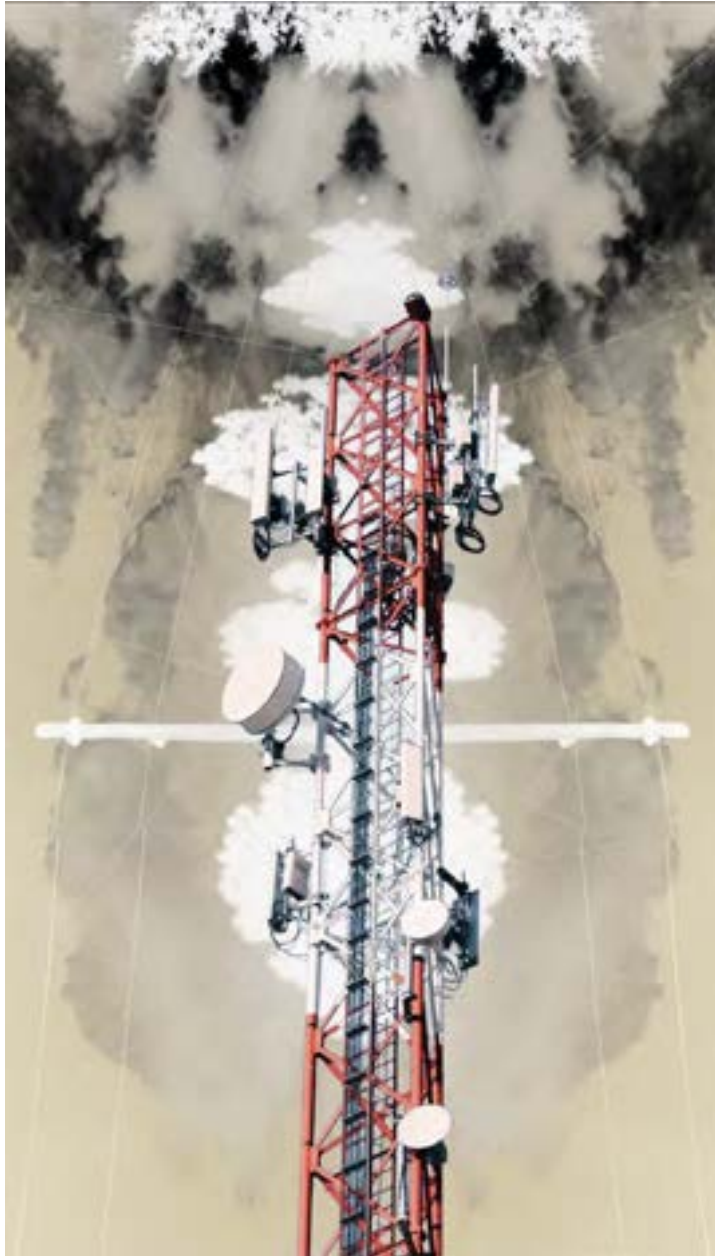Cache me.... whispered the cookies.

Wireless transactions, contextualised as rapport.
We have you surrounded, passwords stored. We won't be ignored!

Cut the purse strings, the submarine umbilical cord.
...Down.

CHIRO PARK, 2022

What the sharks aren't saying

Poem

COLETTE LOTZ

https://humanities.nwu.ac.za/vinco

Cloud technology does not only have a huge effect on the environment, but also has an intrusive effect on the security and privacy from the point of view of information data, intelligence data, etc., on people who use cloud technology. Cloud computing is often referred to as disruptive technology, i.e., technology that changes the way we share and access data on the Internet and intrude on users' privacy. *Mixed Signals* demonstrates the spatial intrusiveness of mobile tower structures, electricity poles, and wires in nature. In the background, inverted clouds represent natural space. The white lines, bouncing in all directions, represents the unseen signals that also invade nature's frequencies.

COLETTE LOTZ, 2022

Mixed signals

Digital photography and rendering

Referring to cloud computing and the Internet that result in personal information and intelligence data being not so private and secure any more, *The eyes that watch* is a work that was developed upon the notion that 'Big Brother' is watching you. The eyes create a sense that you are always being surveyed and your location and information are readily available. The eyes in this work were created through manipulation of the cloud's form, thus highlighting human intrusion on nature.

COLETTE LOTZ, 2022

The eyes that watch

Digital photography and rendering

Watching from the clouds demonstrates how natural space and cloud technology became inevitably intertwined. The white lines, bouncing around in space, represents the unseen signals that also invade nature's frequencies and provides a sense of disruption.

Cloud technology has a huge effect on the environment, but also has an intrusive effect on the security and privacy from the point of view of information data, intelligence data, etc., on people who use cloud technology. For that reason the eyes shining through the trees remind of the notion of 'Big Brother' that is watching you.

COLETTE LOTZ, 2022
Watching from the clouds
Digital photography and rendering

DANEEL THUMBIRAN

instagram- @dbt_daneel

Saviour in the clouds has a strong sense of previous technological aspects. Maybe somewhere along the lines of we as people messed up to lead us here with the cloud. My work questions that maybe previous technology might have been a better path, it may have been bad but was it to the extent of the cloud? What if we took a step back having one foot in the past and one in the future maybe we could create something better. My work pushes the past as a solution that needs to be considered for the future and our saviour.

DANEEL THUMBIRAN, 2022

Saviour in the clouds

Digital media

DANELLE HEENOP

@dh.playprojects

DANELLE HEENOP, 2022

Progress, no matter the cost

Collage and thread

DANELLE HEENOP, 2022

*Progress, no matter what, Blue reality*

Collage and thread

DUMA MTIMKULU

@duma.mtkl

Words and codes. In the early 1800s one of the earliest communication devices was developed. The telegraph used sounds that, when converted into symbols are known as the Morse code. The first message sent out from the telegraph "What hath God wrought" using the Morse code in 1944 is reworded/ re-coded by the artist, to fit today's climate of mass production of technological devices, "What hath man wrought" replaces it. The viewer is forced to pause and decipher the message, a counteraction to the simple act of reading words, as well as the speedy mass production of technological devices that pervade the earth we inhabit today.
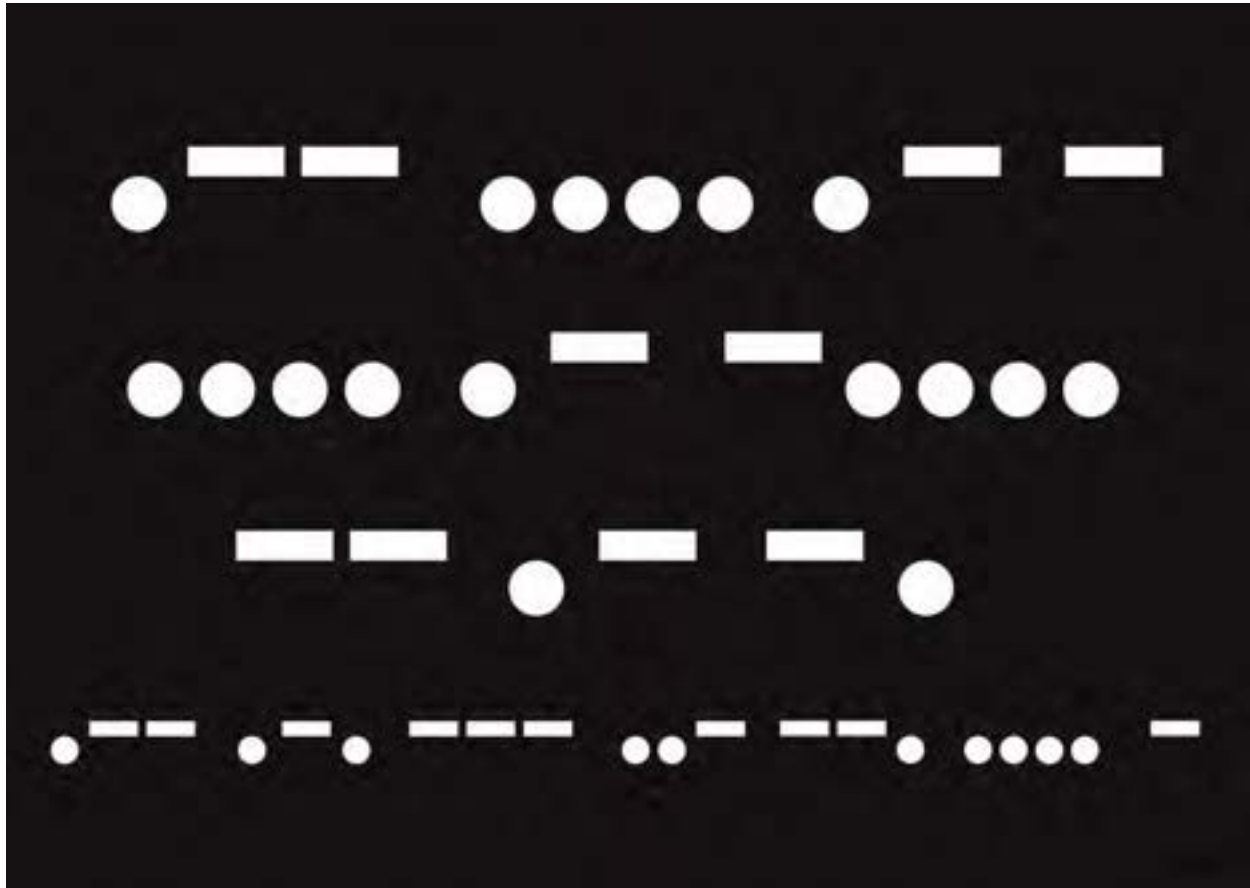
DUMA MTIMKULU, 2022

A cloud of words, a burden to the loams

Digital art

The Hungry Glow Cloud

Elsje Jordaan

there's nothing quite left of the clouds, or trees, or
the sunrise – diluted rays
diminished to pixels, and pixels diminished to
windows?
or mirrors?   (I never realy know)
all I know: the soulles thief somehow connects
through **destruction**
All-mighty. All-consuming.
Devouring what could have once been a sunrise
or tree, or cloud,
Unquencing thirst reaching for lakes, shores, anything
All hail the Mighty Glow Cloud

the Glutton absorbs truth, knowledge, life, lies, nature,
greed, hate, destruction, death, Activism
Mangle them: another morsel to add to its ever-growing diet
It's just more matter
(matter? does anything matter?)
There's a world out there that matters
It's in a Cloud somewhere.
a virtual copy, innovation, sick mimic, siren call.

And I keep waiting for
(something real?)
The Future. does it look this brightly technicoloured?
This all-consuming? connected? lonely?

When the Mighty Glow Cloud lifts   *where are we?*
Virtual as on a desolate planet?
Sunshine cracking through thick smog
Searching. Searching. Searching.
For whatever the Glow Cloud might have missed
finding
nothing.

ELSJE-MARIE JORDAAN

ELSJE-MARIE JORDAAN, 2022

The Hungry Glow Cloud

Poem

Brokaat Land

gru grond; mond van baie
trek terug die bloed van sade
maanoog knik met oorgawe

vier vierkant hektaar gebare
breek in luim bruin ligamente
spoor van mag se kwik
teen elk genoemde figuur
leun jy teen sensuur

klip kraai met en kwartyn
oker smeer tand as wyn

vra skuil in omber kleef
konveksie kuil kontraksie

gebore van staal heinings
gras en traan kweining

HENRIETTA SCHOLTZ

@henrietta_scholtz_artist

The digital affects the physical, which is our bodies, hearts and minds. We all have only one of each and one world to live, love and enjoy them within. The still on the following page is extracted from an animated video that includes a read poem about our complicated relationship with place and the people in it. It can also be viewed online by scanning the QR code below.

HENRIETTA SCHOLTZ, 2022

Extraction/contraction

Painting/digital editing

JEAN LAMPEN

@jnlmpn

JEAN LAMPEN, 2022

Silent tears

Watercolour on paper

JEAN LAMPEN, 2022

Thinking about this

Watercolour on paper

JO-ANN CHAN

@joannchancreative

Electricity is a core component of modern industrialization, and while 4IR technologies hold the potential to support environmental sustainability, even the more sustainable energy sources come at a cost that is often overlooked. The marketing rhetoric of the eco-friendly energy movement still anthropocentrically prioritises the impact of these on the human environment - our homes, our workplaces, our lives, our image. Our spaces are, however, not the only ones affected. With increased dependence on digital technologies, comes a greater electricity demand, the infrastructure for which puts bird life at risk. Even if collision safeguards are put into place around wind turbines and electrocution deterrents are installed around live hubs, the clearing of areas to make space for solar and wind farms, displaces many species; and research published in the journal 'Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment' reports that "mitigation translocations" rarely succeed.

JO-ANN CHAN, 2022

In the wake of progress

Digital illustration
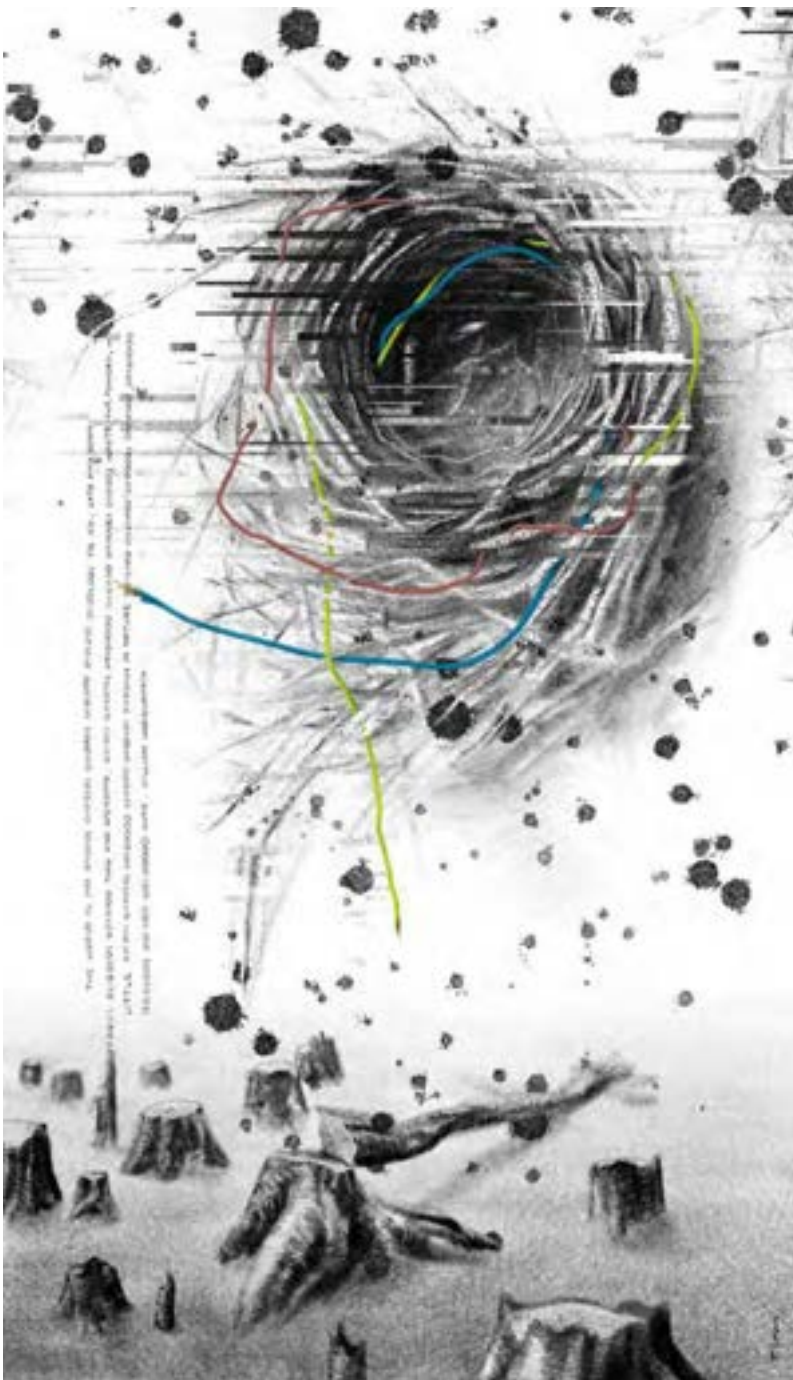
KIVESHAN THUMBIRAN, 2022

Lakshimi space age

Digital print

KIVESHAN THUMBIRAN

The work uses the Hindu creator deities (Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer), as figures which encapsulate the life of technology as well as where it ends up. The work looks at how technology is created by humanity - which could be thought of as its own divine creator - and how this technology moves from life into death and how its death affects the earth. The final work (*Shiva space age*) looks at how technology destroys and pollutes the world as a poison which is consumed by Shiva in Hindu mythology and is described as a blue smoke or cloud.

KIVESHAN THUMBIRAN, 2022

Vishnu cloud copy

Digital print

KIVESHAN THUMBIRAN, 2022

Ram space age

Digital print

KIVESHAN THUMBIRAN, 2022

Shiva space age

Digital print

LEE SCOTT, 2022
Water & Whine
Film still

Link to animation film:

LEE SCOTT

@leescotthempson

When researching for 'Cloud Matters', what struck me most was the barely acknowledged sonic pollution that is emitted by data storage server housing units. When I decided to film our small work server as a part of my story, this became very apparent, and it was this high-pitched whine that aided the direction of the visuals and poem.

The animations, overlays and the editing of the film footage were synchronous with the writing. There was very much a rhizomatic melding of these two creative actions. I find the very act of creating/making animation/photo-film and inclusion of the written, allows my creative practice to be multifaceted. The fusion with AR applications enables the viewing of a whole story and this two dimensional 'canvas' to become holographic in intent.

Water & Whine

Server fans play

Sonic shrill cloud music

A discordant symphony

Of snaking cables and digital choices.

Un-hear, un-hear!

How can I when

My senses rattle,

When all I hear is

Bitch-slapped by the scream of the cacophonic

Algae waters that push side-up fish?

The flow of worship

Rivers our prayers and we

Raise our arms heavenward

To the rapture of information,

Of accessibility, of ease.

Water and whine

We worship a deceitful god

In the name of

UPSs, CRACs, SANs and ICTs.

LEE SCOTT, 2022

Water & Whine

Poem and animation

The poem is about sonic pollution that is emitted by data storage server housing units and the consequences of carbon emissions by server units.

Scan QR code to watch animation

LEE SCOTT, 2022

Water & Whine

Film stills

LEE SCOTT, 2022

Water & Whine

Film stills

MARINA HERBST

Constant innovation in electronic goods is a double-edged sword. Advances in technology promise solutions to many problems, but such progress implies a high level of redundancy. The consequences of this can be dire, in terms of human and environmental impact, particularly in Africa, a destination for enormous quantities of electronic waste. Many in developing countries, however, also depend on this second-hand technology as a means of accessing an increasingly digitised economy they would be excluded from if they had to buy expensive new devices. This leads to a vicious circle, driven by relentless advances in technology, enabled in part by wealthy consumers in developed nations, for whom the burdens and consequences of the technology they casually discard remain out of sight, out of mind.

MARINA HERBST, 2022

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Digital photograph

MARISA MARÉ, 2022

Process: Work in Progress

Digital work with images derived from bioplastic with seaweed

MARISA MARÉ

My practice involves producing experimental bioplastic sculptures derived from agricultural waste and seaweed. Digitally documenting the degradation of these objects and surfaces raises questions about the possibility of touching the earth lightly. Through my creative process, I aim to uncover how my choice of media is entangled with a more extensive web of environmental factors. At first glance, bioplastic, waste material and digital processes seem earth-friendly; however, it is not innocent. Every material and process is entangled in the mess of the Anthropocene. I am reminded that my actions as a human have an impact beyond my current existence and experience.

MAXINE MNISI

The work is called *'We are our own enemy'* as we are killing our planet. We are the cancer that consume our environment that sustains our lives. The ocean and the rivers are getting polluted and we need the natural cycle of water. We need this water for ourselves, plants, and animals. We are failing to care for our own planet. We are the problem.

MAXINE MNISI, 2022

We are our own enemy

Mix medium of digital drawing

MAXINE MNISI, 2022

I'm suffocating

Mix medium of digital drawing

MICAELA SCHOLTZ

@micaelascholtz

Red Cosmos signifies the large, complex, enraged universe. It is known that the word "cosmos" refers to an orderly, or harmonious universe, however the experience is rather different when considering the environmental impact of the cloud and information technology. *Red Cosmos* is set to disrupt the notion of order and harmony by incorporating deep tones of red. Red symbolises feelings of rage, evil, fear, and danger. However, it also represents the courage, energy, and willpower the human and the environment collectively encompass.

MICAELA SCHOLTZ, 2022

Red Cosmos

Digitally assembled, mixed media collage

PAULO MENEZES

https://www.paulomenezes.com

Inanimate Objects Photographed at Various Distances is a body of work that examines common objects in varying stages of construction and deconstruction.

The series frames 3-dimensional forms before, during, and after manipulation by the artist. This manipulation is intended to be at subtle and random as possible, while documenting the process.

PAULO MENEZES, 2016

Inanimate Objects Photographed at Various Distances No. 11

Digital Photographic Print

PAULO MENEZES, 2016

Inanimate Objects Photographed at Various Distances No. 15

Digital Photographic Print

PAULO MENEZES, 2016

Inanimate Objects Photographed at Various Distances No. 17

Digital Photographic Print

PAULO MENEZES, 2016

Inanimate Objects Photographed at Various Distances No. 21

Digital Photographic Print

STEPH CLOETE

There is a cold beauty to the manufactured electronics that fill our homes and landfills. The gleaming metallic surfaces' sharp edges and corners not only have the ability to slice skin and fingertips, but also slice and scar our fragile biosphere. Hard drives spin and hum, their reflective discs peppered with microscopic peaks and valleys…desperately trying to capture, emulate, and archive the green. They only succeed in flattening and sanitizing – a poor simulacra of the real.

STEPH CLOETE, 2022

HHIII
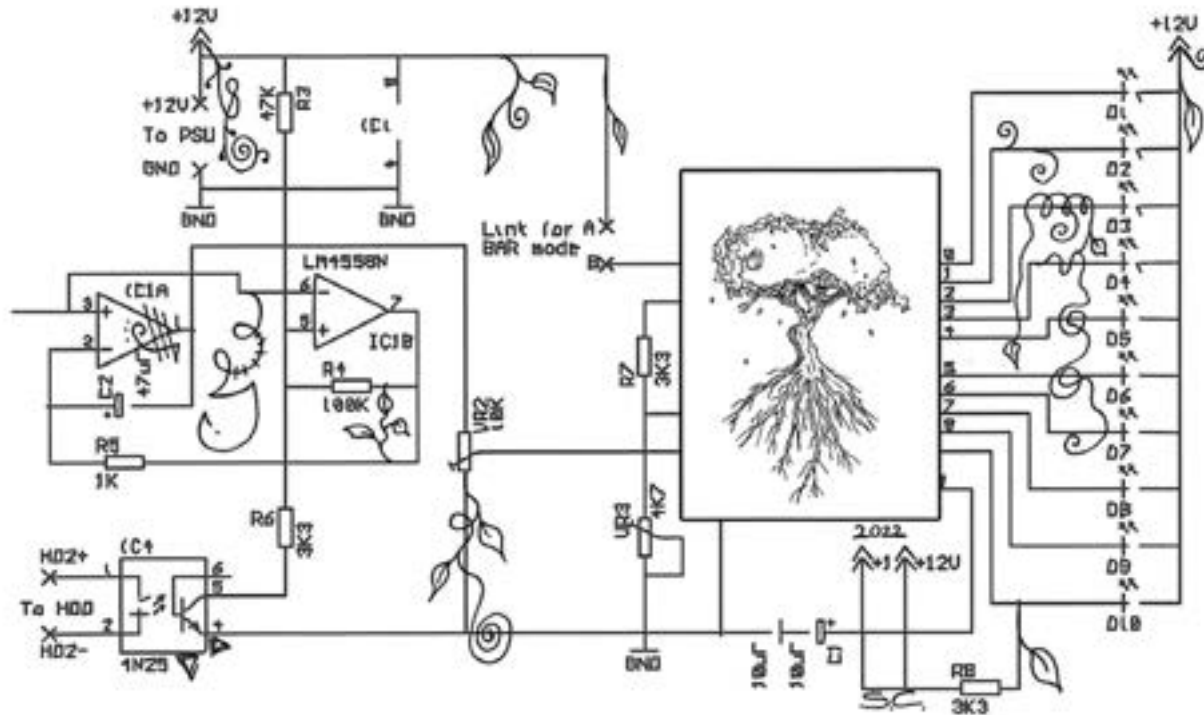
Photography

STEPH CLOETE, 2022

HHI

Photography

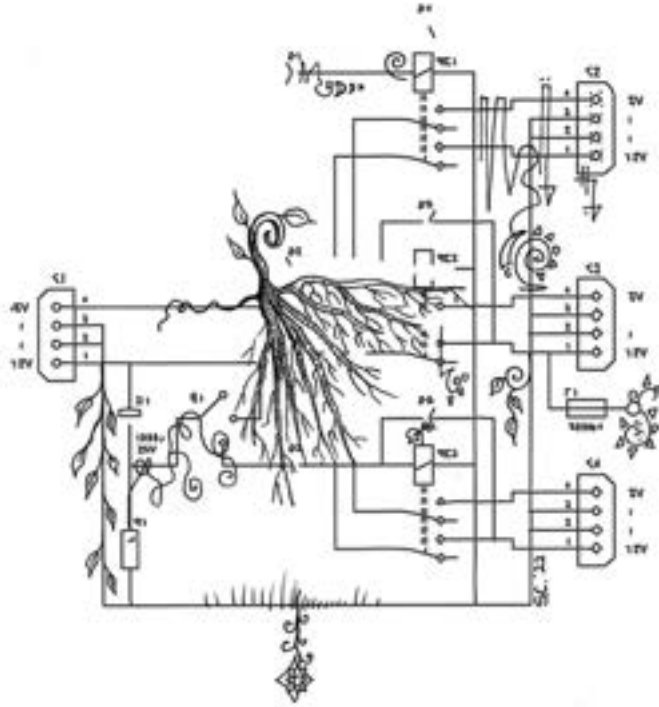

STEPH CLOETE, 2022

HHII

Photography

STEPH CLOETE, 2022

Surrogate

Ink pen and printed media

Mankind consumes. Modern agriculture is based on a constant process of refining genetic processes to create harvests that are immune to pests, disease, and harsh weather. When I look at cornfields the grids remind me of microcircuitry. Aerial views of patchwork farmlands remind me of green circuit boards, their colourful chips and transistors buildings, tractors, and water towers. Now imagine growing a supercomputer from plants and the size of a cornfield. It needs no cooling, uses little water, self-perpetuates, and grows new shoots to accommodate new information.

STEPH CLOETE, 2022

Entanglement

Ink pen and printed media
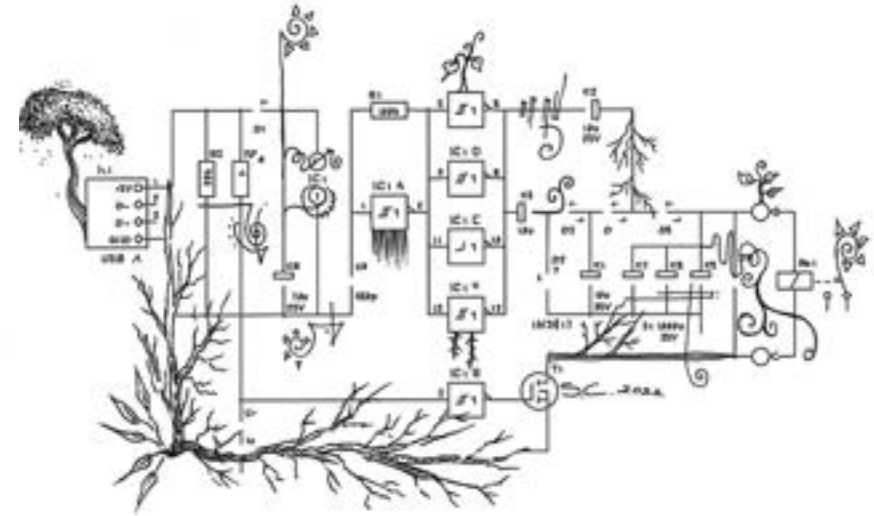
STEPH CLOETE, 2022

Homeostasis

Ink pen and printed media

THABISO SENYATSI

My drawing elaborates how cloud computing can bring light to our environmental impact, how our earth can be saved.

THABISO SENYATSI, 2022

Cloud computing on our environmental impact

Drawing