



**End Transmission** Christina Battle



*waiting for time to repeat itself (at the end of the world)*, 2013 (video still); HD video loop, 3.57 min.

## “Echoes in a Stranger Land”<sup>1</sup>

If no one listens and cries  
is it still poetry  
if no one sings the note  
    between the silence  
if the voice doesn't founder  
    on the edge of the air  
is it still music  
if there is no one to hear  
is it love  
or does the sea always roar  
in the shell at the ear?<sup>2</sup>

What if, instead of building more monuments to mark the land, we listened to the land more closely? What if we paid more attention to the land's transformations as living testimonials of culture and human relationships? Would we still think of particular sites as monuments as they transform over time? If the redwood forests of California burned down one day, would people still go there to visit the places where the trees once stood?

As I write from land that is both Indigenous *and* colonized in Toronto, Ontario, on the same day when thousands of Canadians gather to march for environmental justice, I am moved by the interconnectedness that land inherently offers people as a space/place of meaningful relationships. Land is the physical meeting place of diverse peoples, perspectives, and lives, and it is how we choose to meet, live with, and care for each other and the land that continues to be important in a time of intensifying social and environmental unrest. For a “meeting” entails commitment: it is a commitment to live both with each other, and with the land.

Taking a cue from M. NourbeSe Philip's writing on frontiers — in particular, how to work with, work against, or elide racial and cultural ones — I come to Christina Battle's installations with *sensitive* eyes. In the expansive, desolate and often obscure landscapes she presents in *End Transmission*, “absence is deceptive and is really a presence,”<sup>3</sup> albeit a hidden one. A presence of what, exactly? Of human relations and the histories they elicit, which have included colonization, genocide, climate change, food crises, and economic and natural disaster, all of which are ongoing phenomena across vast and diverse geographies. I see these dystopic transgressions moreso



as *transmissions*, which offer both Battle and viewers alike the occasion to think through what a more hospitable future may look like on this land, and on others.

The collective works in *End Transmission* offer a range of entry points into a complex narrative around land that implicates the past, present and future all at once as a finely balanced ecosystem. The landscapes portrayed refuse tangible ways of knowing through their unnamed and unbordered geographies that work to emphasize the overarching instability of land and of life. In doing so, they offer viewers the opportunity to move through the exhibition's hostile landscapes in a way that ultimately ensures their safety. Though there is nothing "safe" or stable about the growing realities of resource extraction, environmental degradation, and disaster. Just look to the screenshots of the Albertan tar sands on Google Earth, for example, or read about the community health impacts of hardrock mining in places like Southwestern Colorado.

Having lived between Alberta, Colorado, and Ontario, Battle brings a particular perspective to these topographies, creating an image of land as something nuanced and complex — as a living relation that is as much shared as it is divided. Focusing on such sites as White Sands National Monument in Las Cruces (an active military base in Southern New Mexico) and a northern winter and summer dustbowl in Alberta, Battle is able to reflect on the fact that geographies, like bodies, embody multiple identities at once. For instance, although political borders physically separate New Mexico and Alberta, both combine desert and prairie geographies and are technically part of the same region.

For so long now in the West, the border, or barricade, has represented "the unwanted obstacle that stretches to its limits the tenuous fantasy of settler belonging"<sup>4</sup> — or the notion that if we construct our own boundaries, then we must also be "belonging of them." However, Battle's exhibition reimagines the barricade by doing away with its physical manifestations, suggesting instead through an expanded narrative that "the barricade could provide an opening onto a different relationship to land and to one another — one that both acknowledges the violence of settlement and resource extraction, and that affirms shared obligations to care-take the land for the well-being of future generations."<sup>5</sup> These are the kinds of considerations Battle's work asks of its viewers, demanding attention to how land, and our relationships to it, is understood and, in turn, enacted.

Using fragmentation as a prompt, Battle stirs viewers to consider their relationship to land, including the desire to communicate and make meaning across vast geographies. The title *End Transmission* evokes the idea of communication over time, as the need to live and connect with others remains an important part of living with the land. It evokes the question, what did communication look like before contemporary technologies? Would more traditional forms (for example, the flare gun, smoke signal or Morse code) be recouped in times of distress, such as a post-collapse future? If life begins and ends with the land, then how can we live with it in ways that ensure a future on it for our children and our grandchildren?



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*End Transmission*, 2015 (video still); mixed-media video installation

The landscapes portrayed throughout the exhibition act as interruptions. They appear as “sights” within the videos, *not* as sites, because of their pauses, gaps and breaks that are most often digitally imposed and inexplicably spectacularized. These interventions — a pulsing spherical grid, for example, that hovers over a sprawling White Sands desert — remind viewers that land is a living relationship and as such, is extremely fragile and penetrable.

The *collapse* video (2015), which is the first work one sees when entering the exhibition, immediately alerts viewers to the dystopic tone of the collective works. Featuring disaster news footage collected from the past 30 years juxtaposed with more contemporary headlines, the artwork both visually and factually collapses representations of disaster, creating an intergenerational entry point unto a range of real and imagined landscapes, scenarios and journeys that viewers must walk/work through.

Inspired by the journal entries of the early conquistadors, imagined messages of a lone traveller appear throughout the exhibition as videos that describe a woman’s extreme journey in search of a more hospitable future. The messages, translated from Morse code into video in the series *Messages (1 through 5)* (2015), are seen as communiqués throughout the gallery and describe an apocalyptic reality reminiscent of many sites around where Battle herself lives. Denver, Colorado (not unlike Toronto and where the exhibition takes place in Chatham, Ontario) is a city surrounded by composite histories that tell their stories through landscape — sometimes visibly or invisibly. Abandoned mining communities, ghost towns, occupied

and contaminated land remain as pockets of seemingly vast and “promising” lands of the “New World.” However, what can a “new world” really promise when it fails to prioritize caring for the land on which we all stand? Or when it refuses to listen to the land’s original caretakers?

The post-collapse future that Battle’s works independently and collectively depict move viewers to reflect on their current position in the world. What does one’s existence contribute to or take away from the land? If the land is what provides a space/place in which the very miracle of life is possible, must we not honour this possibility? Indeed, the tangibility of absence within Battle’s collective works offers the opportunity for reimagining, reevaluating, and renewing one’s relationship with the land. In doing so, we are moved towards a most needed practice of future-thinking.

vast lands —

- sprawling land
  - indigenous land
- contaminated land
  - indigenous land
- desolate land
  - indigenous land
- mined land
  - indigenous land
- prairie land
  - indigenous land
- desert land
  - indigenous land
- abandoned land
  - indigenous land
- occupied land
  - indigenous land
- military land
  - indigenous land
- state land
  - indigenous land
- hostile land
  - indigenous land
- sovereign land
  - indigenous land
- stolen land
  - indigenous land
- foreign land
  - indigenous land
- this land
  - indigenous land<sup>6</sup>

Notes

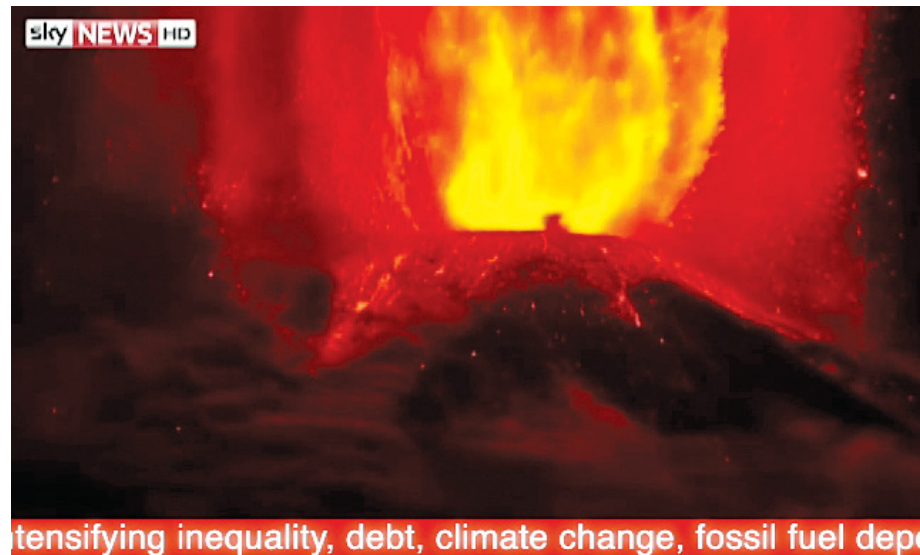
1. This is the same title of the introductory chapter in M. NourbeSe Philip's *FRONTIERS: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (Stratford, ON: The Mercury Press, 1992).
2. M. NourbeSe Philip, "Anonymous," *Salmon Courage* (Stratford, ON: Williams Wallace, 1984), 46.
3. Philip, *FRONTIERS: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (Stratford, ON: The Mercury Press, 1992).
4. Allison Hargreaves and David Jefferess, "Always Beginning: Imagining Reconciliation Beyond Inclusion or Loss," in *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation*, Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill & Sophie McCall, eds. (Winnipeg: Arp Books, 2015), 209.
5. Ibid., 210.
6. Ellyn Walker, "vast lands," a poem, 2015.

**Ellyn Walker** is a writer and curator based between Toronto and Kingston, Ontario, on Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wendat land. Her writing has been published in such venues as *Prefix Photo*, *BlackFlash Magazine*, *PUBLIC Journal*, the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, *Fuse* and *C Magazine*, among others. Her work explores the politics of resistance, re-imagination and (re)conciliation between cross-cultural communities in the arts, in particular, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. She is currently a PhD candidate at Queen's University in the Cultural Studies program.

## MESSAGE #1

After the collapse, I traveled over  
country, and found it all deserted.  
The people had fled, leaving houses  
and fields abandoned. |

*The Messages*, 2015 (video still); video loop, various lengths



*collapse*, 2015 (video still); video loop, 3.48 min.

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Originally from Edmonton, Alberta, **Christina Battle** is currently based in Denver, Colorado. She has a BSc with specialization in Environmental Biology from the University of Alberta, a certificate in Film Studies from Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario, and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in California. Her works are often inspired by the role of official and non-official archives, our notions of evidence and explore themes of history and counter-memory, political mythology and environmental catastrophe. She has exhibited internationally in festivals and galleries, most recently at: SOMArts (San Francisco); RLWindow Gallery (New York); RedLine Gallery (Denver); Deluge Contemporary Art (Victoria, BC); The ODD Gallery (Dawson City, YT); Gallery 44 (Toronto); WNDX Festival of Moving Image (Winnipeg); The Images Festival (Toronto); MCA Denver; the Aspen Art Museum; and the Ryerson Image Centre (Toronto). Christina is a contributing editor to *INCITE Journal of Experimental Media* and a co-conspirator of the media arts exhibition series *Nothing To See Here in Denver*.

Covers *End Transmission*, 2015 (video stills); mixed-media video installation



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