

SPECIAL ISSUE | FALL 2018



THE

BRITISH



BORN DIGITAL

SPECIAL ISSUE | FALL 2018

Produced in partnership with Vector Festival, this issue offers a critical response to its 2018 festival program: *Born Digital* (July 12-16). Portions of this text have been published previously as part of *KAPSULA Dispatches* and can be found at:

ABOUT VECTOR FESTIVAL

Vector Festival is a participatory and community-oriented initiative dedicated to showcasing digital games and creative media practices. Presenting works across a dynamic range of exhibitions, screenings, performances, lectures, and workshops, Vector acts as a critical bridge between emergent digital platforms and new media art practice. In 2015, the Festival was acquired by its long-time presenting partner InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre.

All photography by Yuula Benivolski except where otherwise noted. Images courtesy of InterAccess.

Cover image: Documentation of the exhibition opening for Born Digital at InterAccess, Toronto, July 12th, 2018.

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FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR

Danica Evering

Biography

Danica Evering was born in Cobourg and lives in Hamilton. Through writing, sound composition, and curation, she works through difficulty and belonging, reaching out intentionally, and complicating narratives. Her SSHRC-supported MA in Media Studies from Concordia University questions power dynamics and insider/outsider relationships in social practice through interviews with artists and creative analysis of her own field work. Currently working as the Education Officer at Humber Galleries, her side hustles are researching, facilitating, presenting, moderating, editing, and consulting.

Danica's writing has recently appeared in [No More Potlucks](#), [Lemon Hound](#), [Public](#), and [Susan Hobbs Gallery's](#) Framework Series, and she made poetry for and performed in Althea Thauberger's experimental video work [L'arbre est dans ses feuilles](#) as part of In Search of Expo 67 curated by Lesley Johnstone and Monika Kin Gagnon at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. She recently composed a sound walk as part of a co-located audio mapping exchange between Montreal QC and Morecambe UK, programmed by the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster University. She was a founding member of the editorial collective of [Publication Studio Guelph](#), a sibling studio of an international publishing network that attends to the social lives of books, and participated in the creation and development of the [Benčić Youth Council](#), a radical arts education program for youth in Rijeka.



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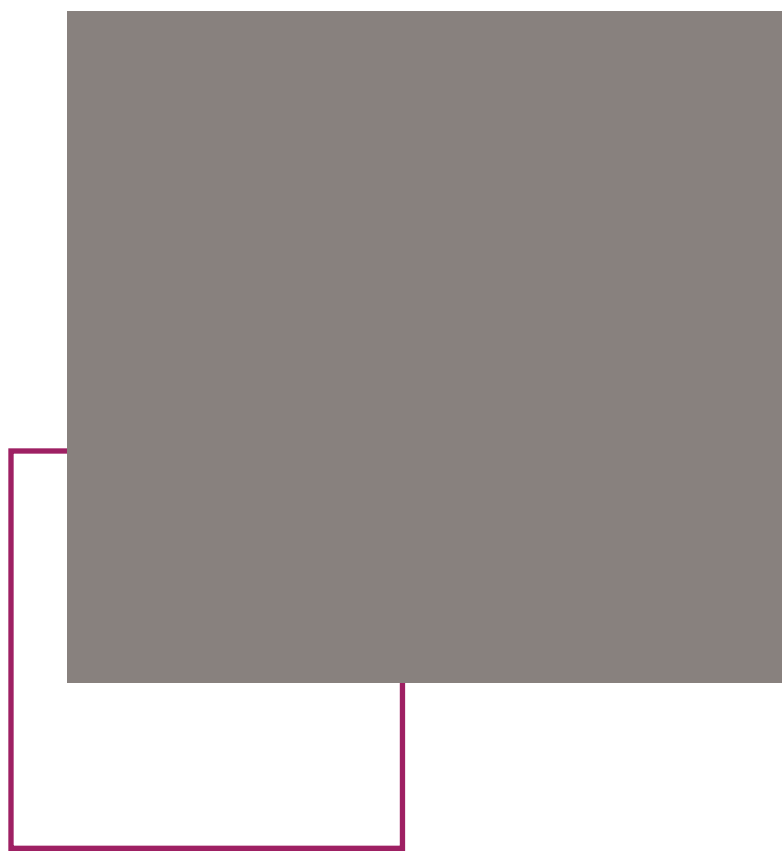
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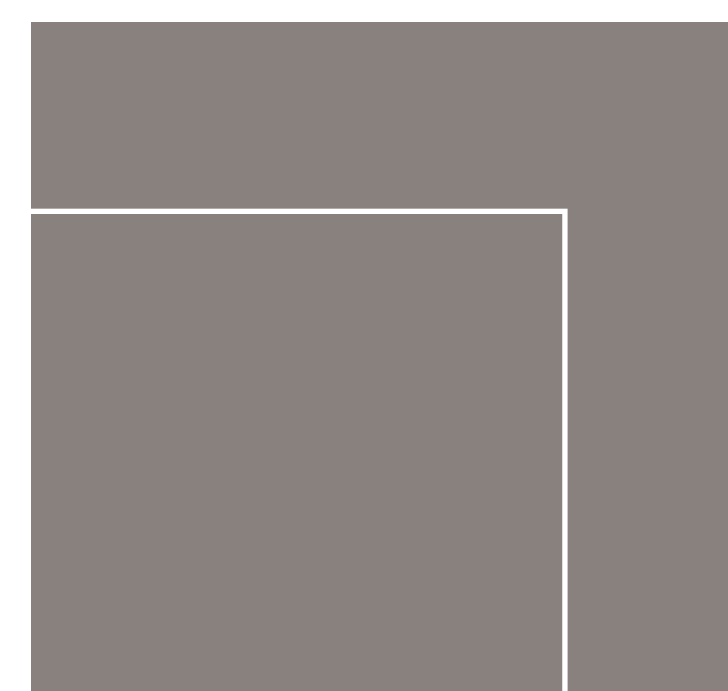
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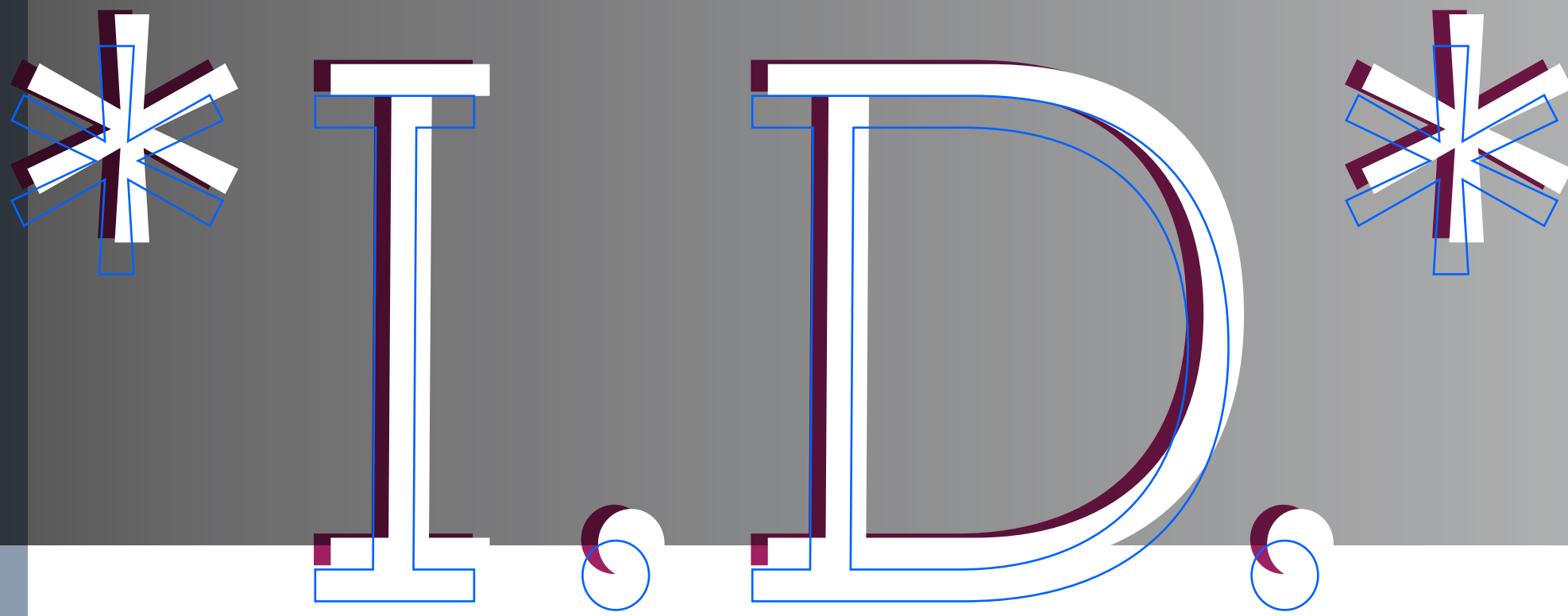
*Death isn't biology but physics
(I was told this in the street late one night on my way home)
((conspiracy theory? Y/N))
I do know this: I am changing, always
A perpetual emotion device
An impossible machine*

Digital beings are incorporeal selves. Beings of light, information shared over glass drawn out slightly thicker than a human hair. Made by us, so connected to us. They can be traces of our memories and histories, content and data standing in for people who are not here anymore. They are also projected and idealized versions of ourselves, allowing us to spend time in worlds that are not ours. Can we measure the virtual world without connecting to the IRL world? I want to know how analog people engage virtually, how digital spaces affect democracy and sovereignty, how data is stored in bunkers and cooled by dwindling rivers. Still: it does also seem significant to consider the agency of robots, games, renderings, and programs. I remember sitting in on a lecture by artist [Erin Gee](#) considering the artistic rights of Hatsune Miku, a Vocaloid software and [moe anthropomorph](#) superstar. Miku's voice is synthesized from the neutral tone samples of a voice actress; she is activated by a keyboard, and different filters are added. She performs with a human band, rear-projected onto a glass screen, [and the human crowd pumps excited hands holding glow sticks aloft](#). She was created by many, and yet she is also an entity unto herself. Who does her labour benefit? (It is hard to put a finger on what labour means where there's unlimited energy and no exhaustion. How does the labour of her many creators resonate in her actions? Does she herself profit at all from her work as a performer?) Captain Jean-Luc Picard entreats the magistrate in the courtroom of the Enterprise for his robotic

colleague Data's sentience, his words an echo, a haunt, for Hatsune Miku and all our newly born digital bodies: ["...the decision you reach here today will determine how we will regard this creation of our genius. It will reveal the kind of a people we are, what he is destined to be."](#) Casting aside the notion of human genius (acknowledging both the false hierarchy implicit in that term and also the knowledge that computers are [already beating us at our own games](#)), how do we regard these entities we have made? How might we live in relation to them?

What follows are five dispatches from the 2018 Vector Festival, *Born Digital*, which explored the births, deaths, pasts, and futures of the digital. It asked how human connections are framed by digital and technological devices, through new and historical works of art, film, and performance. Edited for length and flow, these dispatches were written each morning after in response to works experienced during the previous day of the festival. Each is a short piece of experimental writing that reflects on corporeality—the embodied and affective connection to digital beings. I think of how stories are contained in them, ethereal vessels of important words and teachings long after we are gone; how they exist in time, undergoing hundreds of tiny transitions; how they themselves might rot and decay. Or, when unearthed, still glowing.

—Danica Evering



“I look at my bare feet on the tiles in front of me and think: Those are her feet. I stand up and look in the mirror and think: There she is. She’s looking at you. Then I understand and say to myself: You have to say *she* if it’s outside you. If your foot is over there, it’s there away from you, it’s *her* foot. In the mirror, you see something like your face. It’s *her* face.”

Lydia Davis, “Examples of Confusion,”
in *Almost No Memory* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997).

... ..

Three morse ‘S’-s
hissing like the sticky guttering pennant
of a forked pink tongue.

Does a rendering need bones? It has bones because we have bones. It has bones because we want it to look like us. Throughout Lu Yang’s , the newborn 3D model morphs fluidly across genders and bodies. They lumber and stagger. Three copies dance in unison. Their skin and bones fall away until they are only a head, until they are only rhythmically moving lungs, until they are a bumping heart, a twitching intestine. Near the end they are a neon cart carrying a coffin, they are blinking lights, **they are blowing billowing curtains of hair off their nose.** I identify with its viscera, and at the same time it’s outside of myself. As Lydia Davis insists, you have to use the third person. Those are *their* teeth. A digital child: that is *their* intestines.

Anyone who has created an avatar knows the push-pull of this identification. Creating a virtual body with which to emerge from **cryogenic stasis, fight off ir-**

radiated beings, and find my missing son, I feel a mix of competing desires. Is she an ultimate self, or a new persona, or something different altogether? Am I? I want distance. My avatar is not only stronger than me and more able to pick a lock, but her hair is long, too, and a different colour. I give her a scar, and freckles. I do not give her my name. Yet I can still see myself in the largeness of her body, in the colour of her eyes. I take credit for her improving navigation skills and mourn her multiple deaths.

To identify is to make the same. It is an active process, a drawing of lines. They look so much like their parent, we coo with amazement. Does this attribute affinity, belonging, possession?

same/different
≠
I/O





*Her orange eye smoulders
There's fire in it
A signal, a portal
Inside and leaking out*

Liminal is a threshold, a door, a transition: on or to either side of a boundary. A *heterotopia* is a liminal space, a place that is absolutely real and unreal at the same time.

On a darkening hilltop the dragon Azdel Slade's wings are beating, casting dark shapes on the ground. (Is it possible to write about a dragon without writing bad fantasy?) The noise phases in and out of sounding like a heartbeat, a drum without a kickback: *thump thump thump*. This is a restaging of micha cárdenas' 2008 project *Becoming Dragon*, a 365-hour durational performance where she questioned the year-long "real-life experience" ("RLE," sometimes referred to as the Real Life Test) required to receive gender confirmation surgery. She applied the requirement to lead to Species Reassignment—a thought experiment tracking time spent in a digital body, rather

than a physical one—living in the online world Second Life as a dragon, an identity beyond binary gender categories.


The cyborg hybrid is a body that is absolutely real and unreal at the same time. Though cárdenas is a virtual dragon, in between roars of flame she speaks of the very real physical transition of her own body. Through Adzel Slade, cárdenas performs two poems written during her own hormone replacement therapy. She speaks of the immediate difference in the first few days, her heightened awareness of her changing self, and the liminal space between names and genders. She notes the dozens of tiny microtransitions that all of us make in the trajectories of our lives. Are any of us solid states?

Even her words come in waves.

Potentially through the glitchy internet connection or possibly the cameraperson's proximity to cárdenas-as-Azdel, her voice fades and raises and in moments cuts out altogether. We catch stray phrases, making liquid sense from uncertain fragments. What does it mean to sit with uncertainty, with transition, with partial understanding? As part of her 2014 project at SBC, *A Problem So Big It Needs Other People*, curator cheyanne turions provisionally defined sovereignty as "an oscillation between different ways of knowing; the recognition of other understandings as they rub up against one's own; the act of holding a space for not-knowing." Maybe it is this space that cárdenas is speaking from. Early in the performance, she talks about her first days on Estradiol, not being confident about anything, and the scariness of being a trans person admitting any doubt. In medium and content, she holds this space for us as well. We join her in the in-between.

Dragon
Azdel Slade





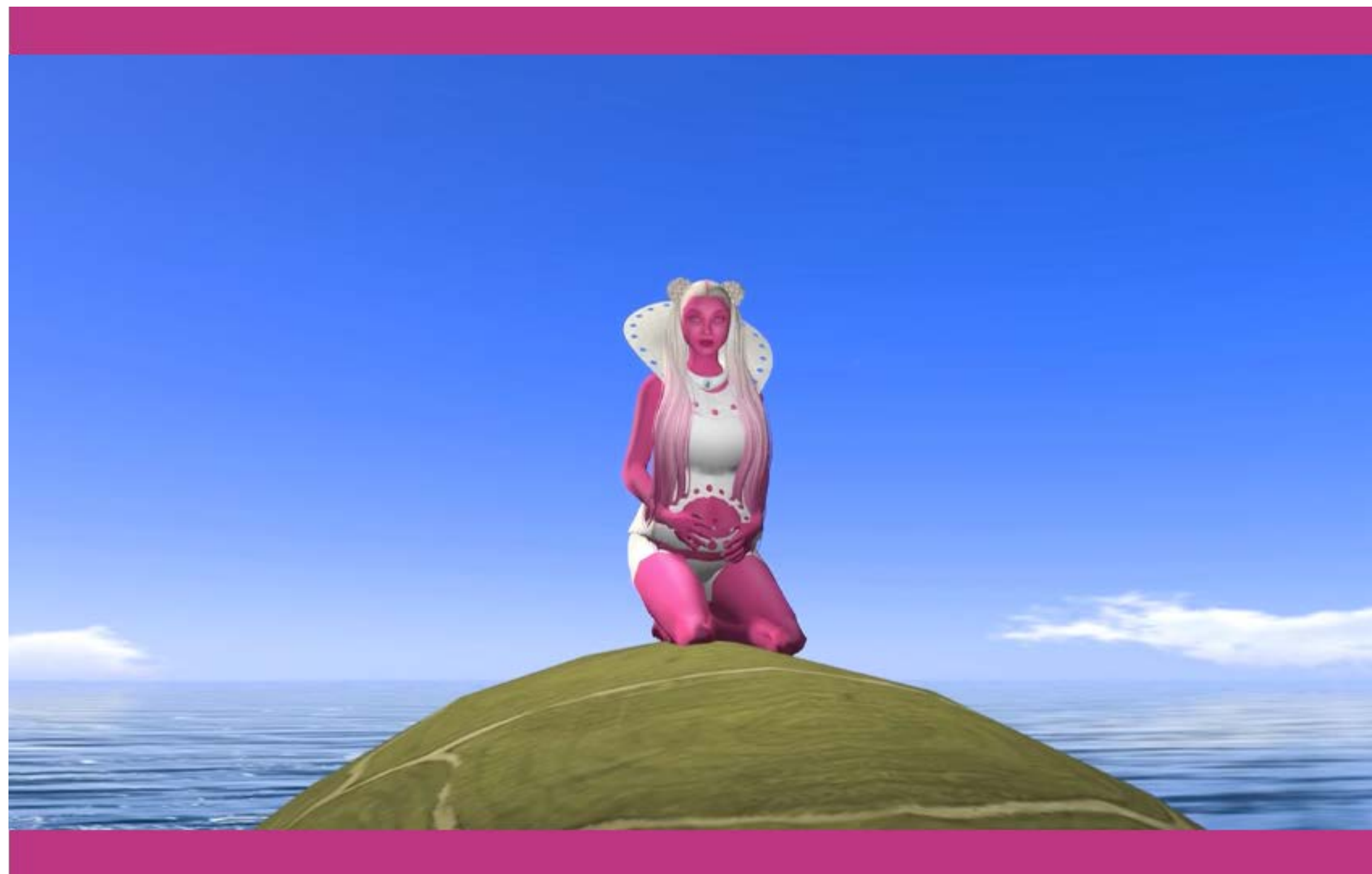
Words before all else:
we bring our minds together
as one, as we give thanks for
the people, now our minds
are one.

— Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen (or the Haudenosaunee “Thanksgiving Address”)

Skawennati’s *machinima* *Words Before All Else Part 1* (2017), sees her avatar, xox, recite the first verse of the *Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen* in English, French, and Kanien’kéha. The words, excerpted above, are traditionally spoken at the opening and closing of all Haudenosaunee gatherings. The piece is a more recent version of Skawennati’s 2002 collaboration with Jason Lewis, *Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Technological World*. Where the original Thanksgiving Address extends greetings and thanks to the natural world—earth, water, thunder, and the many plant and animal beings—Skawennati and Lewis thank the creator for technological gifts. They extend greetings and thanks to computers, TCP/IP, internet, C++ and Java, and more, bringing all human and other-than-human minds together as one.

(To bring our minds together is a reminder. Joining each other through spoken words, thanking the natural world as a way of remembering to live intentionally and carefully with it. Through the ceremony of opening and closing, drawn together into a mindset.)

Mary Kunuk’s *Unikausiq (Stories)* engages the oral transmission of knowledge as an act of remembering. “These stories and songs remind me of my childhood and the stories that my mother used to tell me,” she says. “Recording them on video is my way of keeping them alive.” The stories, carefully rendered through hand-drawn computer animation, are unexpected and wonderful. In one of them, a snow bunting teases an Inuk arriving on a small island, “you come from nowhere, I won’t tell you where I am. A bird must have shit between your teeth.” The electronic continuation of storytelling in video is something Kunuk’s brother Zacharias Kunuk has spoken about, that “filming traditional knowledge is a way of collecting these old stories and retaining them for the future.” Knowledge is passed from elders by way of the video apparatus, while continuing the oral practice of speech, the closeness and specificity of voice. It can be played, replayed, shared widely (through channels like IsumaTV, and their *Mediaplayer* network and *Digital Indigenous Democracy* project).



(To pass on, to keep alive. The care of rendering: hand on mouse sketches, clicks, fills in. What of the relational intimacy of telling? My oma described to me the place she was born. Green layers of mountains and a valley below winding roads and grain-ripe. The sudden rush thunder as she tickled salmon in the stream. She is gone, we go there. I have seen it, though not with my eyes before now. None of this is an oral history. We haven't spoken like that for far too long.)

It is impossible to think about “words before all else” without thinking of the art community’s own recitations, and the territorial acknowledgements we give today. What does it mean to open in this way? How do we say it? Chelsea Vowel’s “Beyond territorial acknowledgements” is a reminder that in order for acknowledgements to be sites of potential disruption, they must discomfit those who speak them and those who speak and hear them.

We need to learn how to pronounce the names—**Anishinaabe** and **Haudenosaunee**—of those who made the first treaties in this area, the thinkers who conceptualized the Dish With One Spoon which we all eat from and have a responsibility to renew.

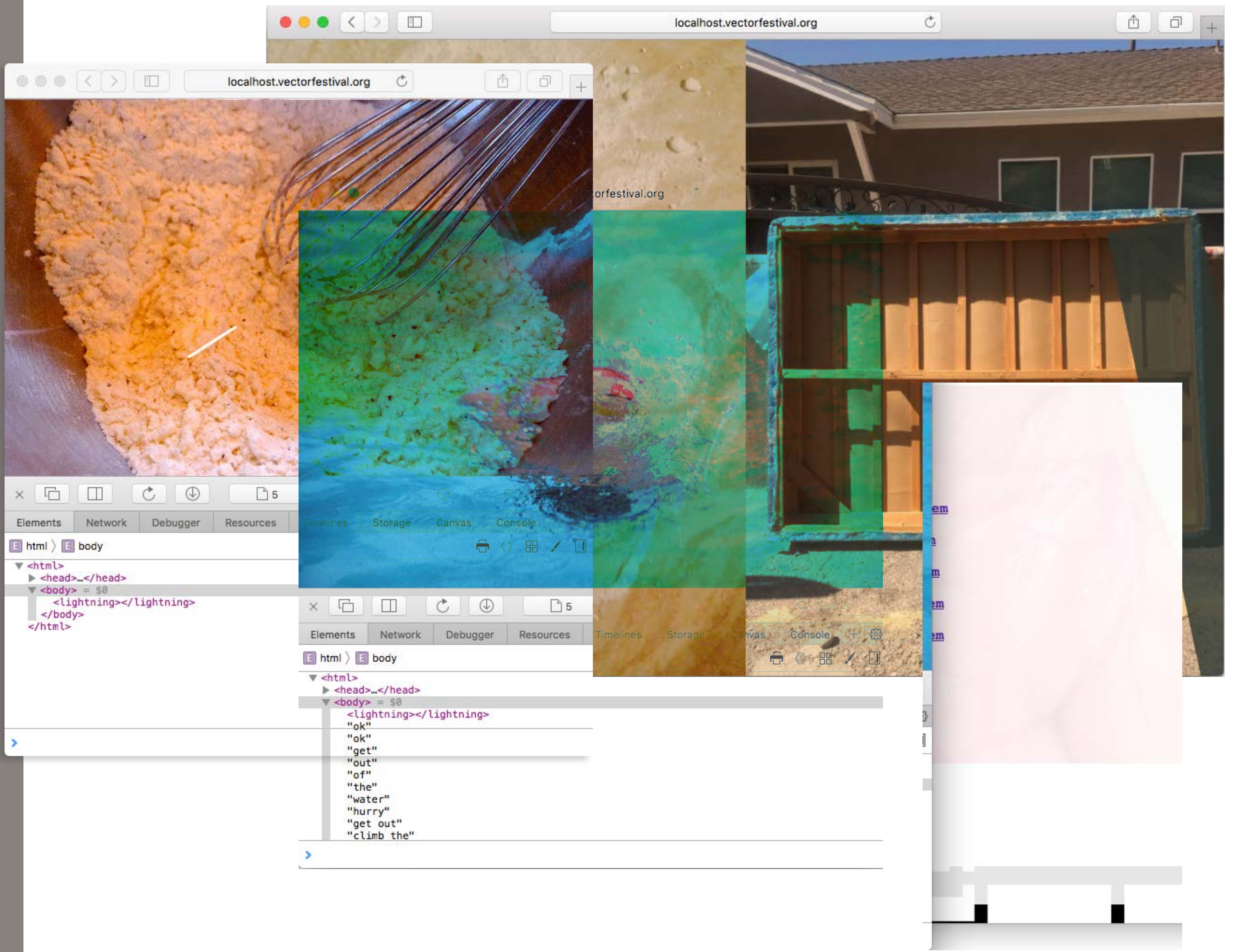
Words can only follow meaningful intention. Settlers have a long history of using words as an apparatus for violence and control. Historically this has manifested in the legal documents of misleading treaties and cultural genocide through language. In the present, words replace action as a form of superficial healing or appeasement. Beyond land acknowledgements, we are **tearfully very sorry, we insist** that the government’s nation-to-nation relationship is the most important. *We’re sorry, we said we’re sorry, we said it.* Without clear and articulated intention or action, how can settlers hope to take on the provocation of words?

We open and close in context.

Not tray tables securely stowed not life vests under a seat not silencing cell phones not shuffling papers not final murmur to your companion not a word from our sponsor.

No:

A voice making intentional space.



*Can't rely on a shadow
to be there when you need it*

Probably leaves for something better soon

*Reach out for a hand
Grasp at its trace*



* Static *

*if you are uncertain, you may be wondering
what does it look like?*

if the site is drooping and your links are turning purple for unknown reasons, you will want to check

*carefully click on all of them
unhealthy ones lead to a 404*

*whether the problem is prolonged neglect or a singular changing context
does not matter*

YOU MUST ACT QUICKLY!

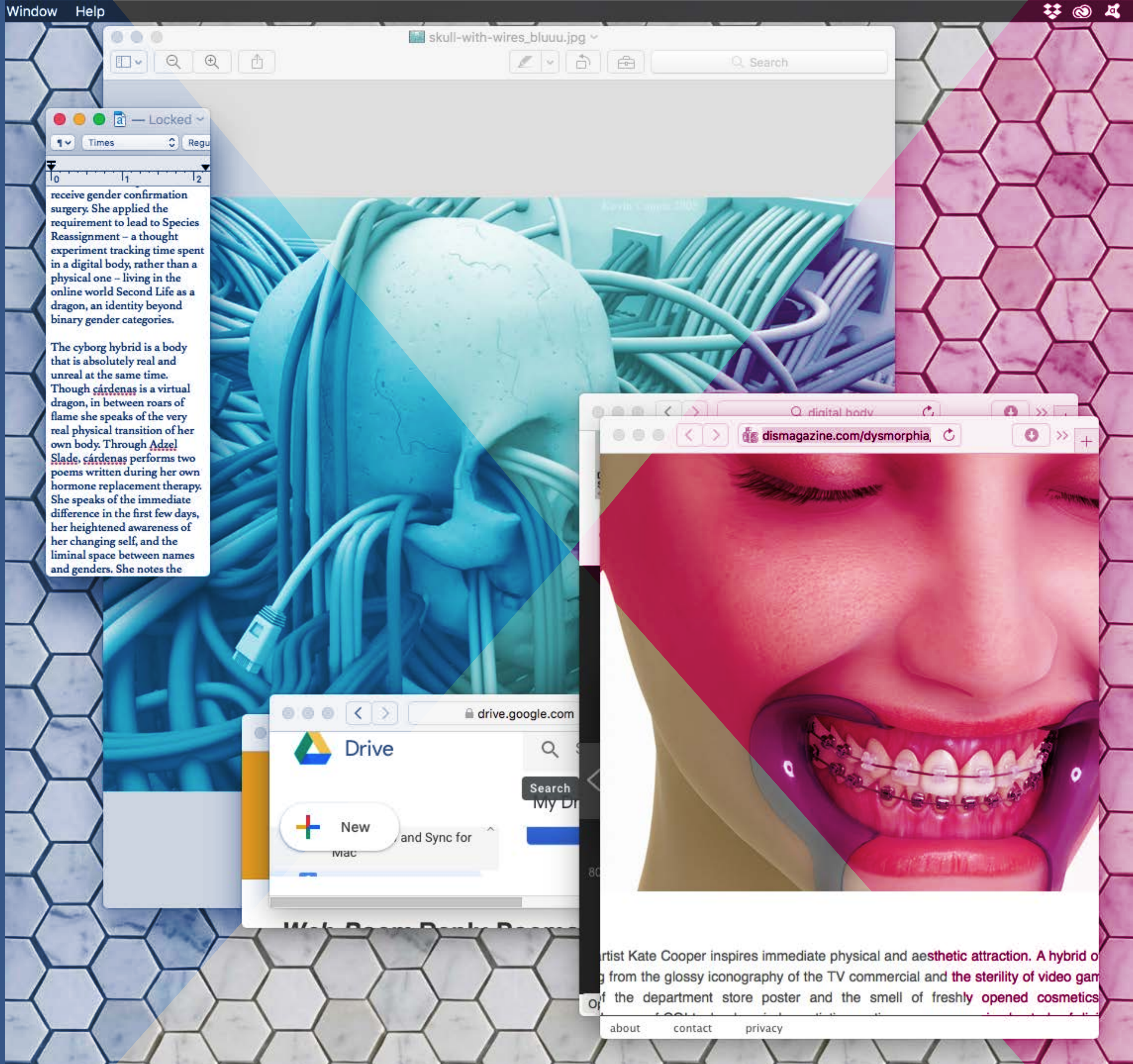
treating rot as soon as you can will give your site the best chance to survive and be relevant

Amanda Low's <http://www.eternallymoving.com> (2017) is a non-linear poem that portrays, or performs, the concept of "link rot." When the site a link is pointing to is removed or expires, the link is dead and the server generates a "404 Not Found" page. This is the half-life of the internet: its rotting synapses. Speaking of her work, Low noted the particular prevalence of this issue in the legal community—in 2014, a Harvard Law School study found that 50% of the URLs in U.S. Supreme Court opinions no longer link to their intended references. Low's poem builds on the already evocative term, from the coy ("where am i? i have moved") to something more fleshy and infected ("i am plagued by something insidious / my ends are rotting"). By giving the internet and perhaps also the illusive links themselves an identity in the form of the first-person, Low articulates a being, one dying a hypertextual death. Though perhaps it is not dying, only shifting: "internally i am always stirring and stirring."

(There are many metaphors we use to try and understand the internet. The early are infrastructural—the "series of tubes" and "information superhighway." The recent more environmental "cloud," leads us to imagine our information as intangible to us, to be pulled from the air. In actuality, of course, our cloud information is stored in data banks, in vast warehouses, in the Californian desert: cooled by enormous amounts of ever-scarcer water. In these re-conceptualized internets, I see that a metaphor is not just a poetic turn or a curious connection. It guides perceptions of what something can do and how we interact with it, even future policy actions we take on it. How does the rotting plant-like self that Low suggests in <http://www.eternallymoving.com> guide our perception of the internet? I feel more carefully, more tenderly.)

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receive gender confirmation surgery. She applied the requirement to lead to Species Reassignment – a thought experiment tracking time spent in a digital body, rather than a physical one – living in the online world Second Life as a dragon, an identity beyond binary gender categories.

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artist Kate Cooper inspires immediate physical and aesthetic attraction. A hybrid of the glossy iconography of the TV commercial and the sterility of video game, of the department store poster and the smell of freshly opened cosmetics

about contact privacy