

Time and entanglement in Comparative Monument (Shellal)

Bridget Crone

Tom Nicholson's *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* (2014–17) is the third and final project in the series that includes *Comparative Monument (Palestine)* (2012) and *Comparative Monument (Ma'man Allah)* (2014). Building progressively through the series, and in Nicholson's recent work more broadly, is an increasingly overt address to the future. This is a future that is not separated from the past or present but is rather a 'time of continued presence'¹ akin to what the French philosopher Henri Bergson termed 'duration'—a time that is continuous, expansive and qualitative rather than quantitative.² Here time is 'potentiality' and continuity rather than a succession of instants, a mode of temporality that can be termed horizontal for the way in which it expands across these delineations. *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* articulates this 'time of continued presence' in the terms of what the Bedouin Palestinian activist Nuri el'Okbi names as *sumud*: continued presence. El'Okbi, speaking in one of the videos from Nicholson's project, states: 'What is more important than resistance is our living / . . . I mean this "sumud" (steadfastness) is resistance.'³ *Sumud* therefore names a continued presence and a continued connection to land, and it projects this connection both forwards and backwards in time—as el Okbi notes, it is *our living*: collective, continuous, elastic, projective. *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* therefore demands that we reformulate our perceptions of time and presence so that the idea of return (or repatriation) exists without departure, exile without leaving, and presence without absence.

The notion of time as continuous and non-linear is central to various forms and expressions of animism, horizontal social organisation, and attachments to land across a range of different contexts.⁴ For example, the practice of *sumud* as steadfastness or resistance (in el'Okbi's terms), might be likened to what Dion Mundine has recently described in relation to Aboriginal Australians' ongoing struggles for sovereignty and survival as the 'assertion of continued presence'—to stand firm, to stay, to remain living.⁵ Tony Birch has also recently articulated something similar to the notion of *sumud* in relation to sovereignty as 'a word and concept beyond understanding'.⁶ Related to 'the power of presence', Birch writes that for Aboriginal Australians, sovereignty is embodied, 'transcribed on and with the body' but it also immaterial and *unseen*: a continuing connection and *vitality*.⁷ Thus sovereignty and *sumud* evoke time as a duration that runs across arbitrary delineations of time and space (delineations which seek to divide time and possession into a 'before' and an 'after') emphasising continuity that is seen or *unseen*, and without end.⁸

This 'steadfastness' or 'continued presence' is both a practice and an understanding of the world; it causes us to consider what 'presence' is and how it might be practiced, as well as emphasising a different conception of time. Nicholson has taken up the provocation of the practice of *sumud* or 'continued presence' in relation to both Palestinian and Aboriginal Australian struggles in various artworks over the last twenty years; his work therefore belongs to a body of work that we see coming from both Aboriginal Australia and the Arab world, work that responds to questions of belonging and return as an embedded form of practice (or of *practising* presence). As Esmail Nashif asks: 'can we not think of the possibility of an actual return as a practice, rather than as a legal rights discourse?'⁹ It is with this *practice* of return, or rather of *continued* presence, that *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* engages.

'Resistance is our living'

Comparative Monument (Shellal) make a claim for continuity and connection through the juxtaposition of two distinct world views that are integral to the work's conceptual and formal construction: the monotheistic vision of early 20th century Australian artist Napier Waller's mosaic for the Hall of Memory, and the early Christian Byzantine mosaics from which the work takes its name. These mosaics lie adjacent in the Australian War Memorial (AWM) in Canberra. The Shellal mosaic is a sixth-century Byzantine floor mosaic that was discovered by Australian and New Zealand soldiers (ANZACS) during the Second Battle of Gaza at a site lying fourteen miles south of Gaza between Be'er Sheva and Khan Yunis, 'on the main road from Jerusalem to Egypt'.¹⁰ Before being removed by Australian soldiers, the Shellal mosaic was an elaborate floor piece more than eight metres in length. Its complex horizontal arrangement presents animal forms and other objects in a complex bestiary linked by vines and decorative elements. It was excavated by a group of volunteers and shipped to Australia at the end of 1917 after a dispute regarding its potential ownership (with Britain laying a claim). After touring the country on exhibition with other war trophies, the mosaic was cemented into the wall of the AWM. At this point, the significance of the Shellal mosaic shifts from that of a floor mosaic rich in symbolism to a symbol of acquisition and conquest.

Nicholson's proposal for remaking or indeed repatriating the existing Shellal mosaic to its original site opens up long and complex questions of possession and ownership in a field of competing claims. Not the least of these is the territorial claim made by Australia through the actions of cementing the mosaic into the wall of the AWM and, most significantly, the competing claims made upon the Palestinian land from which it was plundered or 'rescued'. Situated in proximity for the last 50 years but radically different to the Shellal mosaic in history, style and worldview is the work of Waller, an artist working in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century, who was commissioned to design a series of mosaics and stained glass windows for the Hall of Memory in AWM. Waller had been in service during World War I where he lost his right arm, and had subsequently trained himself to write and draw using his left hand and to build a significant reputation as a mosaicist and muralist. He was invited to submit sketches for what was to become the Hall of Memory in 1937, with the work finally completed in the 1950s. Waller's work for the Hall of Memory comprises the well-known mosaic which forms the basis of Nicholson's *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*. This mosaic—a golden dome—presents a monotheistic, transcendental view of the world, particularly as it is preceded by a series of stained glass windows depicting the exemplary qualities of Australian service personnel; qualities, it is suggested, which have led them to ascend to the heights (or heavens) of the golden dome.

Nicholson has woven these mosaics together to produce a constellation of new mosaics. These were created with the Mosaic Centre, Jericho and mosaicists Rafat Al Khatib and Renan Barham. With the assistance of artist Jamie O'Connell, Nicholson developed a series of cartoons for mapping the integration of the two mosaic 'systems' together. *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* therefore comprises a number of individual pieces of mosaic presented in shallow wooden crates, just as the Shellal work was transported in fragments from Palestine to Australia in the early twentieth century. The crated mosaics are presented on the floor of

the gallery, lying flat or propped diagonally against another or against the wall. This presentation of the work echoes the flat, horizontal forms found in the original Shellal mosaic—a reminder of its original positioning on the floor, and its presentation of a world to be immersed within (rather than to-be-looked-at). The spatial installation of *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* similarly demands that we must enter into, and intermingle with, the work.

Nicholson's presentation of the mosaics is punctuated by two video works that refer to, on the one hand, the history of the Shellal mosaic and the Australian involvement in its 'preservation', and on the other, the present conditions surrounding the site from which it was removed. Combining the chromatic order of Waller's commission with the expansive interwoven animal and plant form of the Shellal composition produces new forms, and gives the work an overall golden glow. Thus the transcendence of Waller's dome is grounded in a horizontal form. In entangling the Shellal mosaic with the Waller mosaic and windows, Nicholson activates a confrontation between different spiritual orders of being in the world: the monotheistic, which is represented by the unitary and transcendent nature of Waller's golden dome, and the embedded and embodied world that characterises animism and which is suggested by the Shellal.

Comprising a complex interrelationship of parts ("I am the true vine; ye are the branches")¹¹ and a symbolic world that one enters into in walking upon it, the Shellal mosaic undergoes a shift from the horizontal to the vertical once affixed to the wall on arrival at the AWM. This move from the floor to the wall is significant for the manner in which it alters the position of the viewer from an embodied experience of being *within* the space of the mosaic (entering into its symbolic world) to that of a disembodied eye that looks at or upon the mosaic from a distance. This disembodied view is precisely that found in the Waller mosaics, which were designed to be viewed from a distance. Unlike the dispersed nature of the Shellal mosaic, the Waller corrals the space to direct its figures—representatives of army, navy and airforce—towards a singular, golden lit dome.¹² The contrast is immediately stark—a contrast between a complex horizontal interrelationship of animals, vegetal and other decorative forms, and a vertical movement of human forms towards a singular moment of transcendence that is suggested by the soft golden glow at the central, highest point of the dome. Waller *represents* symbols of loss and service—the soldier, sailor, airman and service woman who move upwards through the divide between the human and spiritual—whereas, in its original orientation as a floor mosaic, one would enter *into* the physical space of the Shellal mosaic. In the Waller work, a division is set up as a true ascendancy in which those figures that display model Australian qualities rise upwards towards the golden heights of the dome. These qualities—resource, candour, devotion, curiosity, independence, comradeship, patriotism, chivalry and loyalty, as they are named by Waller in the mosaic—are represented through a series of stained glass windows situated in the lower portion of the dome alongside the mosaics. These figures then rise *above* the earth (following the vertical axis dominant in the Christian tradition and associated philosophies), their souls rising towards the heavens depicted by the Southern Cross.¹³

The Byzantine world viewed the image as more than simply an aesthetic or signifying form, but as itself an embodiment or presence and part of an intricate, complex and interconnected world, as the Byzantine Shellal mosaic's design motifs of vines and whorls suggests. Here the separation between body and image as, on the one hand, a living, animate presence (the body) and, on the other, an inanimate depiction or trace

of that presence is collapsed such that the image itself is a living form. In her essay, 'Presence and the Image Controversies in the Third and Fourth Century AD', Marina Prusac observes that images and idols were considered to be 'matter animated by spirit'¹⁴. They are therefore not dead traces of a past action or other presence, but a kind of "linkage" between what is presented (the metaphysical) and what is seen (the representation or likeness), so that the image is always a type of 'presence'¹⁵ and was recognised to as such (Prusac notes that the 'metaphysical aspect of images is usually referred to as presence or prototype').¹⁶ Here, images are active or 'performing agents', rather than the static, isolated and mimetic traces of human agency that we too often consider them to be today.¹⁷

To think of an image as an actor or performer that forms a "linkage" between worlds demands that we similarly consider time beyond our limited experience of it. The animism of the Byzantine mosaic with its interrelated and embodied parts demands that we imagine time beyond the existing limits of the human (the human body and humanistic discourse). To imagine an image within the wild terrain of animated matter (or as itself animated) is to consider its life within and *beyond* the continuum of life as we understand or experience it.¹⁸ The image, therefore, has a life that extends beyond our own mortal presence and limited interface with the present, and thus extends the notion of 'presence' beyond simply *being present* towards a differing, more expansive attachment to time and space. The Shellal mosaic announces a particular world order that is proposed by the 'living' image—an image that *acts* and *lives* amongst a polyphony of other living things.¹⁹ It also points to a particular conception of time that is not based on the ordering and management of time according to a human priority of organisation and division, but to a time that is more expansive—a time of continuing presence. This is the same time gestured towards in these lines from Nicholson's work *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* (2009): '*... the spores hidden again in the ground /... for the next flooding.*'²⁰

'making something for a future'

The terms "presence" and "present", in which one is folded into the other (present-presence, presence-present), introduce a correlation of space and time that emphasises an event of 'now' but also seeks to escape it. Therefore, "presence" suggests both a time of encounter—an encounter with other material bodies—and a possibility of something outside of this: the "present" is activated not so much as a measurement or delineation of time, but as an unfolding or ongoing site of activity. Nicholson articulates this sense of unfolding clearly in relation to *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*, stating that he is 'making something for a future' through 'claims upon the present'.²¹ This thinking can also be found in the early Christian worldview still inflected by the sort of animism that we see in the Shellal mosaic, in which the future could only be attained through an emphasis on presence and the present through the living presence of iconography as well as an emphasis on conduct such that: 'man [sic] must always relate to the spiritual through the physical'.²² Here the suggestion is that the future is not only transcendental, as we find in later and now more ubiquitous Christian views in which the afterlife exists as a separate place-time, but that there is more of an entanglement of the two (life and afterlife).

This 'making something for a future' through the present is achieved in Nicholson's artwork through an emphasis on labour or process. In the instance of *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*, this was a particularly

laborious activity in which Nicholson utilised a complex numbering system in order to painstakingly plot the transition from the Waller to the Shellal mosaics, such that tiles from one visual system could be mapped onto another. Most obviously, this means that in Nicholson's reconstruction the Shellal mosaic changes colour, taking on the golden hues of Waller's dome. Less obviously, it presents a giant puzzle in which the unity of the Waller is disassembled into the horizontal network of the Shellal. In this endeavour, Nicholson worked extensively with O'Connell on developing complex 'cartoons' for the mosaics; these were plans for the puzzle of remaking of the Shellal using the visual system of the glass tesserae from the Waller dome. Nicholson and O'Connell's system ensured that all the tiles that were taken from the Waller dome would find a place within the pictorial logic of Nicholson's Shellal reconstruction, a process that involved treating the tiles like digital pixels and compiling, taking apart then recompiling a huge data-set. (This is, incidentally, not dissimilar to what a data-analyst does in looking for equivalences and transferences between sets of data, patterns and codes. This brings into play a series of questions and equivalences concerning the human-machine interface. This could be connected into a discussion of animism or a digital animism that might also reflect upon the original location of the Shellal mosaic upon a hill that now lies between the hi-tech Israeli city of Be'er Sheva, and Gaza City.) Nicholson's combining of the different visual systems and processes of the original mosaics results in a process of reanimation where familiar forms are estranged—the common Byzantine motif of the peacock in the Shellal mosaic, for example, is rendered something more akin to a lyrebird. The process of making a Byzantine mosaic proceeds through making an outline of a form and then following this line to fill the space between one form and another, ultimately producing what has been suggested earlier as a vast interlinking system.²³ The Waller mosaic takes a more linear, unitary approach to composition in which colour is mapped or plotted across the dome, gradating in intensity towards the central, uppermost point. As Nicholson has observed, the single source of light and tight unitary system presented by Waller gives way in *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* to the many folds of the Byzantine mosaic.²⁴

Like many of Nicholson's 'monument' works, there is an emphasis on a process of collective action in *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* and here time is also related to a collective process or collective presence. We see these precedents most significantly in Nicholson's early banner marching projects, in which groups of volunteers navigate through a given city following a route that retraced post-1901 (Australian Federation) national boundaries whilst carrying large banners bearing pixelated, dot-matrix-like (but fastidiously painted) portraits (see, for example, *Documents Towards a Banner Marching Project*, 2004–7). Here, there is a reactivation or re-tracing of the shape of an historical event through activity that takes place in the present, and is translated across different geographic as well as historical terrains. This activation of the possibilities of the present also occurs in more recent examples, such as *Comparative Monument (Palestine)* (2012), or the earlier work *Unfinished Monument for Batman's Treaty* (2011). In these projects too there is a mobilisation of the (collective) activity of distribution, such that audience-viewers are invited to circulate posters across Ramallah or display them in their Melbourne homes, thus propelling the work's production of a vast distributed 'monument'. However, unlike the earlier banner marching projects, there is a turn towards the future in these later projects, as in *Unfinished Monument for Batman's Treaty* these posters are distributed and laid ready to be summonsed or gathered up for a vast future collective 'monument' across the city. Like seeds, these 'unfinished' monuments are latent and ready for fruition. It is in these works that a future is addressed as expanding from the present (or action in the present), as the activity of the present

distribution extends beyond its bounds towards a potential future. It is this gesture towards a possible future that becomes more evident in Nicholson's *Comparative Monuments* series. Time exists here across a horizontal rather than vertical axis; rather than being neatly segmented and arranged according to assumptions and hierarchies of progress, it manifests as a horizontal flow between parts. Like the Shellal mosaic in its emphasis not on individual tiles or forms but on the space *between* forms, time exists here as a combination of histories, hopes and present-day conditions that are never neatly ordered (or resolved) into a division between past-present-future, but stretch and loop, liquid-like across delineations.

The idea of the 'future' is something that many have taken for granted until quite recently. Ideas of 'investing' in the future or believing in a notion of progress in which we all sail happily forward into an ever-better world are adages that we have inherited from our parents or grandparents. Yet what of the so-called future? Theorists such as Mark Fisher have addressed the pervasive sense of 'no future' concurrent with the increasing power of neo-liberalism and financialisation across most of the world. Fisher's infamous line that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' well expresses this sense of hopelessness that many of us share.²⁵ In an interview with Yoa'd Ghanadry, a psychologist working with the Palestinian Counselling Centre (PCC), the artist Uriel Orlow explores the complex temporalities of stress and trauma in the Palestinian world, which echo and magnify the vision of 'no future'. Ghanadry states: 'there's little hope for the future . . . no political hope for people to attach to'.²⁶ She describes a situation in which stress and trauma exist in layers and layers of increased and increasing intensity without end and, she suggests, outside of the strictures of linear time.

A similar kind of temporality is at work in Orlow's practice. Orlow's project *Unmade Film* (2012-14) is a large multipart project that acts as a proposal for a film that could never be made; Orlow writes that it 'points to the potential of a film; a future film', but it also undoes the possibility of this film by presenting the constituent parts for a film.²⁷ Comprising an enormous research project alongside scripts, videos, sound works, performance, drawings and photographs, *Unmade Film* begins from the possibility of representing a landscape. The land in question is the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin now Kfar Sha'ul in Israel. In 1948, it was the site of a bloody massacre during which the Israeli army murdered and drove out the village. Later the site became the site for a mental health hospital treating Holocaust survivors. Orlow's project attempts to map the complexities of the conflict both in terms of the land, the social experience and temporal presenting a project that focusses on process, potential and possibility. And like, Nicholson his project is invested in the opening up of possibilities of hope within in the space of hopelessness that Ghanadry so poignantly exposes.

Returning to the contemporary situation and the work of the PCC, Ghanadry describes a situation in which continuity is a curse of stasis, of hopelessness and in which trauma itself is continuous and normalised. This is a situation in which standard therapeutic tools are ill-equipped, and the expected temporalities of stress and catharsis are altered. If the trauma is ongoing, continuous without end, then what is the status of the 'post' in post-traumatic stress disorder? Where is the exact site and time of the event of trauma itself? Ghanadry notes that Freudian psychoanalysis is based upon reflection after the event such that therapy occurs in the aftermath, and has been active in lobbying the American Institute of Psychiatry to change the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder to *continuous* traumatic stress disorder in recognition of the

nature of the trauma being suffered in Palestine. Yet like *Unmade Film*, there is a great complexity here as Orlow intersperses his interview with Ghanadry with his memories of visiting his aunt in hospital who, after surviving Auschwitz, lived out her life at the mental health hospital in Kfar Sha'ul (then Deir Yassin). Thus the repeated phrase 'I remember...' punctuates the conversation, and in doing so it introduces a different form of temporality: one in which the action is complete, separated from the present and looked back upon as an event that has taken place. We might connect this with the electric shock treatment given to patients in Kfar Sha'ul in order to literally shock them out of the continuation of their trauma (and, one presumes, thus introduce the 'post' in their experience of time).

Nicholson's projects are not simply works of memory but also enact the 'haunting of an unresolved past' that extends beyond the temporal boundaries attributed to past, present, future.²⁸ As Avery Gordon observes in relation to Orlow's work, this haunting alters the 'experience of being in linear time'.²⁹ What might the future bring to such a place where the future has already been unmade or abandoned? In other words, how might reclaiming a sense of the potential or the possible be itself a radical act within a situation in which hope has been lost? The terms of latency that we see utilised by contemporary Lebanese artists such as Rabih Mroué, as well as Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, finds an equivalent in the notion of 'seeding' propagated by many of Nicholson's works, including *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* and *Comparative Monument (Ma'Man Allah)* (2013–14), as well as in a more abstract manner through the dispersed monument works such as *Comparative Monument (Palestine)*.³⁰ In Nicholson's work, and in Orlow's work similarly, it is the focus on process and the continuity of time outside of the present moment that creates the possibility for rethinking the future not simply as a misplaced site of 'progress'. The focus on process (and upon collective processes of assembly and disassembly) inherent to Nicholson's work opens up the site for a possible collaboration. As Orlow has stated in relation to his own work: 'A proposal cannot just be consumed or experienced like other works; it asks for a particular kind of collaboration.'³¹

"This mosaic is repatriated." "This sea is mine."

"This mosaic is repatriated."³² These are the words that begin the final chapter of one of the two videos in *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*.³³ "This mosaic is repatriated". The baldness of syntax in this statement echoes the lines of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's epic poem *Jidarriya (Mural)* (2000). Darwish's statement, "This sea is mine", forms the title of the 2016 'Qalandiya International', where *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* was first exhibited. The phrase is repeated throughout *Mural* as a statement, a form of incantation, and a claim. What happens to notions of presence and absence, or exile, if these two declarations—"This mosaic is repatriated. This sea is mine"—are combined? Both statements address the material and immaterial, fluid and stable, irrefutable and imaginative. More importantly, they speak to a continuity of belonging. By speaking to the impossibility of containment inherent in the popular image of the sea as fluid and uncontainable and, at the same time, evoking a very particular attachment to that sea, Darwish un-fixes the notion of belonging from a simple factual contract (without denying its importance), aligning it with something much deeper and more temporally complex. 'Mine is the ghost and the haunted one', he writes. 'Mine is the temporal body, present, and absent.'³⁴ Here again, time is related to presence, to states of being-present—the material thickness of the body—and to absence as an immaterial presence that lingers *stubbornly*, haunting the future.

In many ways, Nicholson's work has always gestured beyond itself towards what we might understand as a future (particularly if we consider this future outside of the hegemonic narratives of progress and linear development). Even the titles he chooses for his works gesture toward other possible places and times. We see this in the repeated use of 'for' and 'towards' (*Lines towards another century*, 2009)— and most especially in relation to the monument, which is never complete but always in progress: *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* (2009); *Towards a monument to Batman's Treaty* (2014). The title *Comparative monument* similarly gestures beyond itself, seeking the collaboration of another possible monument and another possible protagonist with which to make this comparison. This movement outwards from the artwork and from the present moment of viewing or of acting is most often recognised in relation to the history that is at the heart of the work, and which Nicholson invites us to engage with in a form of reparation. Yet this continuity must also be seen to extend towards other temporal dimensions: towards a time outside of ourselves and towards other potentials—another possible future. Darwish's claim on the sea gives us a particular insight into this idea of time as a viscous continuity that is not contained by the delineations and divisions—past, present, future—imposed upon it. Through the sea, Darwish makes a claim for a time of continuity, for presence through (physical) absence. It is a line that is at once declarative and deeply felt in a personal, embodied register. This liquidity of presence and of time that extends beyond boundaries of containment further elucidates Nicholson's use of 'for', 'towards', 'with' in the titles of his work, and the action of seeding that is inherent in much of his work (particularly, *Comparative Monument (Ma'man Allah)* (2014) and *Monument for the Flooding of Royal Park* (2009), suggesting a future in and of the present, and a past also.

Coupling the lines 'This mosaic is repatriated. This sea is mine' highlights the temporal complexities at work in *Comparative monument (Shellal)*. It positions the work as a tribute to the power of *sumud* as 'steadfastness' and 'continued presence' that goes beyond the physical towards an uncontainable immaterial and timeless *presence*. In Nicholson's video, 'Fragments from conversations with Nuri el-Okbi', the camera allows us to watch the setting sun with el-Okbi (and we cannot help but think of the corresponding golden orb at the centre of Waller's mosaic). In this scene, the continuous presence of the sun is discussed with fulsome joy; it is a companion in *sumud*. 'It's better when it's sunrise. The sunrise is much better. There is optimism', el-Okbi states.³⁵ This optimism is woven into the core of *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* through the entanglement of the world orders of the Waller and Shellal mosaics; it is what projects towards a future of *continuing* presence. The Waller mosaic, designed to be seen from a distance, makes a promise towards a transcendent future that is distinct from the present. While the Shellal composition, originally a floor mosaic designed to be stood upon (or within), presents a world that surrounds the viewer in its immanence, proposing a future that opens or expands from within this present. It is this knotting together of the (imagined) action of standing upon or *within* the floor mosaic, materially encountering it and entering into its world, that Nicholson orientates towards the future. This is a future that begins from the density of the 'presence-present' couplet. That is to say, it begins with the practice of *sumud*, the steadfastness that calls forth a presence and belonging that extends from now into the future and beyond. It is a future that occurs 'at an edge before imagining begins.'³⁶ It is an opening, expanding—a call for optimism—and in this way *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* stands as a tribute to *sumud*, and to the power of 'continued presence' in the Australian context. It is thus:

'A glass surface to stand upon. / A place to look out from. / A viewing platform.

... This mosaic is a ground for this coming into view.¹³⁷

This text is the reworking of a previous essay, 'Comparative Monument (Shellal): Steadfastness and the Temporal Body', in *di'van | A Journal of Accounts* Issue 2, July 2017, published by Alan Cruickshank and the University of New South Wales Art & Design, Sydney.

¹ Djon Mundine, 'An Assertion of Continued Presence', *di'van: a journal of accounts*, No. 1 (December 2016): 88–97.

² On Bergson's concept of duration see Henri Bergson, *Time and free will: an essay on the immediate data of consciousness*, trans. FL Pogson (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2001).

³ Cited in video component of Tom Nicholson, *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*, 2014–17. *Comparative Monument (Shellal)* was produced with the generous support and engagement from Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art.

⁴ We might call this an "ecology" following Felix Guattari's notion of three ecologies—social, perceptual and material ecologies—an idea that has been extended to include almost any form of social or other organisation, and which is currently being reinvigorated. See, for example, Erich Hörl's concept of 'general ecology' in Erich Hörl with James Burton, eds., *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

⁵ Djon Mundine, 'An Assertion of Continued Presence', 2016.

⁶ Tony Birch, "Our red sands dug and sifted": *Sovereignty and the act of being*, in Paola Bella and Max Delany, eds., *Sovereignty* (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2017), 19.

⁷ Tony Birch, "Our red sands dug and sifted": *Sovereignty and the act of being*, 21–22.

⁸ In his essay 'An Assertion of Continued Presence', Djon Mundine writes that: 'I thought about making that "assertion of continued presence" rather than a memorial.' ⁹⁰ There is not the space to go into this here but Mundine's statement connects directly with the methodology of much of Nicholson's work, which might also be understood as the assertion of the ongoing presence of Aboriginal Australians. For example, Nicholson's *Towards a monument to Batman's Treaty* (2014), gathers the bricks from the site of the Corranderk Aboriginal Station which were imagined to be distributed across present-day Healesville after Corranderk's dispersal.

⁹ Esmail Nashif, 'Talking Ruins' in Uriel Orlow and Andrea Thal, eds., *Unmade Film* (Zürich: edition fink, 2014), 123. I would include a number of recent works by Palestinian as well as Lebanese artists as practising *sumud* through creative means. Larissa Sansour's work *In the Future, They Ate From the Finest Porcelain* (2016), for example, uses the genre of speculative fiction to create a film that speaks to the continuity of belonging to land through the form of a porcelain jug and its carbon dating. We might also consider Rabi H Mroué's *Duo for Two Missing Persons* (2013) as presenting a form of time that is unfinished, such that people remain before, after and between life and death. The idea of latency is perhaps more widely used in relation to these works—especially those of the Lebanese artists—in which latency expresses a continued form of life that does not respect the delineation of life and death, presence and absence but *remains*.

¹⁰ A.D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic and Other Classical Antiquities in the Australian War Memorial Canberra* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1942), 9.

¹¹ A.D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic and Other Classical Antiquities*, 17. Here describing the popularity of the grape vine in floor mosaics.

¹² Trendall describes the design of the Shellal mosaic as a field surrounded by an ornate border and divided by 'vine-trellis forming medallions or by varying geometric patterns into compartments' filled with animals, birds, fruit and flowers. A.D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic and Other Classical Antiquities*, 21.

¹³ The Southern Cross is one of the popular national symbols used by Waller in his mosaic. Another example is the representation of the black swan, another 'uniquely' Australian symbol.

¹⁴ Prusac, Marina, 'Presence and the Image Controversies in the Third and Fourth Century AD' in Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac, eds. *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity* (Farnham, England and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2014), 41–56.

¹⁵ Here I refer to Heinrich Falk, 'On the belief in Avatars: what on earth have the aesthetics of the Byzantine icons to do with the avatar in social technologies?', *Digital Creativity* (Vol. 21, Issue 1, 2010), 4–10.

¹⁶ Prusac, Marina, 'Presence and the Image Controversies in the Third and Fourth Century AD', 41–56.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁸ Micheal Taussig writes that 'wildness is the death space of signification', which is relevant here as it signals the animism of the image, to which I allude. See the reference to Taussig's work in Anselm Franke, 'Much Trouble in the Transportation of Souls, or the sudden disorganisations of boundaries', in Anselm Franke, ed., *Animism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 19. Franke also devotes a large section of a preceding passage to the discussion of the work of the nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Taylor, who observes that

animism is the 'primordial mistake of primitive people who attributed life and person-like qualities to objects in their environments.' Cited in Franke, 'Much Trouble in the Transportation of Souls', 11. As well as evoking the animism of the pre-modern Western world and that which is found in many Indigenous cultures, this form of connectivity—the world understood as a complex relationship of equal parts—we might also understand these ideas in relation to contemporary philosophical ideas related to the field of new materialism. This is taken up by Debra Bird Rose in her work on the concept of 'shimmer' in the Yolgnu tradition (which she explores through the Yolgnu term *bir'yun*). 'Shimmer' describes the interconnectedness of things and the intense vibrational space between people and things in the world. See Debra Bird Rose, 'Shimmer: When All You Love Is Being Trashed', in Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt, eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), G51–G63.

¹⁹ It is widely understood that the Byzantines considered painting as "living painting" and images or icons as embodied forms, see for example: Glenn Peers, 'Real Living Painting: Quasi Objects and Dividuation in the Byzantine World', *Religion and the Arts* (16, 2012), 433–460.

²⁰ Tom Nicholson, *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* (Melbourne: Schwartz City, 2009), 90–91. *Italics mine.*

²¹ Tom Nicholson, conversation with the author, 17 April 2017.

²² 'In the orthodox worldview, "man must always relate to the spiritual through the physical"'. Hieromonk [now Bishop] Auxentios, 'The Iconic and Symbolic in Orthodox iconography', cited in Heinrich Falk, 'On the belief in Avatars: what on earth have the aesthetics of the Byzantine icons to do with the avatar in social technologies?', *Digital Creativity* (Vol. 21, Issue 1, 2010), 6.

²³ In her writing, Debra Bird Rose describes the process for creating 'shimmer' or *bir'yun* in Yolgnu painting practice. Firstly, a figure is blocked out (this is described as 'dull') and then the space between figures is filled with delicate hatching which creates shimmer. Brilliance is created in the space between people, animals and things. As Bird Rose observes: 'Brilliance allows, or brings you, into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world.' See Debra Bird Rose, 'Shimmer: When All You Love Is Being Trashed', G51.

²⁴ Tom Nicholson, paraphrased from a conversation with the author, 17 April 2017.

²⁵ Mark Fisher, 'Chapter 1: It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' in *Capitalist Realism* (London: Zero Books, 2009), 1-11.

²⁶ Ghanadry, in 'Continuous Trauma: A Conversation Between Uriel Orlow and Yoa'd Ghanadry', 63.

²⁷ Uriel Orlow, *Unmade Film* (2014).

Orlow exhibited with Nicholson in 'FRACTURES, The Jerusalem Show VII', 2014. Like Nicholson he has worked extensively and in an ongoing manner within Israel and Palestine. In fact, Nicholson appears in one of the pieces that comprise Orlow vast multipart project *Unmade Film*. The piece *Unmade Film: the Staging* was made in Jerusalem at Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art and exhibited there as part of the above mentioned exhibition.

²⁸ Hanan Toukan, 'Continuity from Rupture: Deir Yassin's Absent Presence in an Unmade Film', in Uriel Orlow and Andrea Thal, eds., *Unmade Film*, 21–26.

²⁹ Avery Gordon, 'Deir Yassin // trauma // Unmade Film', in Uriel Orlow and Andrea Thal, eds., *Unmade Film*. (Zürich: edition fink, 2014), 37.

³⁰ In *Comparative Monument (Ma'Man Allah)* (2013-14) Nicholson collects the seeds of the sixty-nine Eucalyptus trees (red river gums) that *circumnavigate* the Ma'Man Allah Cemetery in Jerusalem.

³¹ Orlow, in Uriel Orlow and Andrea Thal, eds., *Unmade Film*, 2014, 144.

³³ Tom Nicholson, conversation with the author, 17 April 2017.

³⁴ Mahmoud Darwish, *Mural*. Translated by John Berger and Rema Hammami, London: Verso, 2009.

³⁵ el-Okbi, in Tom Nicholson, *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*, 2014–17.

³⁶ Tom Nicholson, *Comparative Monument (Shellal)*, 2014–7.

³⁷ *Ibid.* *Italics mine.*