

Subject to Change

Superflux

Superflux: Translating future uncertainty
into present day choices

exhibition@**droog**
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Message from the curator

At the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale, I was triggered by a huge wooden table, set for fourteen guests. It was the installation 'Refuge for Resurgence' by Superflux. The chairs around the table, the plates, the cutlery, the entire setting announced the identity of the invited guests: a fox, rat, wasp, pigeon, cow, human adults and child, wild boar, snake, beaver, wolf, raven, and mushroom.

At the end of the table, a projection provided a window view of a cityscape in the aftermath of a catastrophe, with flooded streets and ruined buildings. But it wasn't a complete disaster. Green plants and trees could be seen creeping in, and wild animals roaming. All conveying a positive message: nature is building a new world from the wreckage of the old one, and the assignment for the creatures around the table is to work together and find their respective places in it. It is time for a more-than-human life.

'Refuge for Resurgence' is not only highly topical but also deeply poetic. It's an excellent example of the Superflux approach, which resonates within all their recent stories and installations: an invitation to remain open to a multitude of possibilities. Their stories, films, objects and immersive installations craft new, hopeful, and enduring relationships with our planet, with other species, technology, landscapes, and with each other.

Their motto 'Translating future uncertainty into present day choices' clearly communicates what they are aiming for. So does their recently published manifesto 'More-than-Human', in which they express the desire to move from fixing to caring, from planning to gardening, from systems to assemblage, from innovation to resurgence, from independence to interdependence and from extinction to precarity.

We are all confronted with uncertainty every day. Superflux, however, looks beyond the anxieties of our current times and helps us to reimagine our future.

Renny Ramakers

Superflux Manifesto

We are more than human. We know where we are.

Our actions have caused disastrous imbalances. The Earth's climate system is in peril: animal populations destroyed, soil degraded. People alive today will witness the extinction of thousands, if not millions, of species. But this isn't just an abstract tragedy happening to other lifeforms. Our fates, it turns out, are more interwoven than our predecessors knew. Without our kin – butterflies, birds, bees, lichen – humanity can not survive on earth.

That's why we're calling time on human exceptionalism. It's not working for the planet. It's not working for humanity. We believe that humankind needs to think beyond itself.

We need to remember that we are not just on this Earth: we are of this Earth. The interdependence is real: humanity as ecology, ecology as humanity. Both the head and the heart demand this mental leap, this act of surrender.

We need to remember that we are not just on this Earth: we are of this Earth

The awe of small things helps: the morning bird song; the smell of rain; the winter sunset. We need to cultivate a reverence for the beauty and embodied intelligence of our ecosystem. We need to feel that its intelligence may be greater than ours.

No more treating nature as a resource for extraction, exploitation and consumption. There is no nourishment here. Instead, we must foster mutual admiration and respect.

This more-than-human spirit will encourage us to forge new relationships with the species we share our planet with. Stripping an ecosystem for our "needs" must become as aberrant to us as cutting a piece of your flesh off to feed yourself.

Real change – more-than-human change – is possible.

For those schooled in a dichotomy between "humanity" and "nature", we will need to change how we think. This will be hard. We will need a renewal of our beliefs, of what we value or think of as "good". New taboos, too. We will rediscover old stories, stories that, though muted by the norms of an extractive capitalism, have never gone away.

But where there is life, hope remains. We can pair incredible power with humility and care, foresight with stewardship. Real change – more-than-human change – is possible.

We need to move.

Here's how:

Move from fixing to caring

Let's move away from the techno-deterministic pull of the language around "fixing". When we foreground the idea of care, it inherently embodies ideas of fixing, building, making and everything necessary to take care of that particular thing, person, tree, insect, bird, animal, us, them, everyone.

Move from planning to gardening

Modernism's most spectacular failures have happened when a belief in top-down planning crashes into the messy complexities of life. We should swap set squares for gardening gloves: we need to nurture and grow, adapt to rather than impose on.

Move from systems to assemblages, from knots to nodes

Acknowledging the entanglements without the desire to have the "full overview", keeps us open to surprising possibilities. And it reflects the deeply entangled co-evolution of humans and non-humans – think wolves, men and dogs, or the soil as a living organism.

Move from innovation to resurgence

After a forest fire, seedlings sprout in the ashes, and, with time, another forest may grow up in the burn. The regrowing forest is an example of what we are calling resurgence. Whereas "innovation" fixates on the new and the different, resurgence forges assemblages of multispecies livability in the midst of disturbance.

Move from independence to interdependence

We value and celebrate independence, from the first steps a baby takes to the geopolitical decisions we make. What if, instead of independence, instead of constantly valuing individual success, we celebrate our interdependence with each other and all species?

Move from extinction to precarity

Rather than retreat from the anxiety of a singular, apocalyptic endpoint such as extinction, could we instead consider the possibility of precarious flourishing?

SUBJECT TO CHANGE **SUPERFLUX**

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Superflux: Translating future uncertainty into present day choices

Who we are, how we act, what we gather around, our collective agency, our hopeful futures; are all deeply entangled with messy histories of mindless extraction, oppressive colonialism, social injustices and climate apathy. The roots of today's surveillance technologies, algorithmic culture wars, fractured post-truth narratives, climate crisis and the pandemic are part of this continuous narrative.

If we want to find hope amidst crisis, we must force a reckoning with such interconnected complexities, and imagine alternatives beyond our present limitations of reality.

SUBJECT TO CHANGE is a collection of SUPERFLUX's recent works that does just this. From climate crisis to ambient technologies, political unrest and culture wars, their immersive installations, speculations, and films confront some of the most complex challenges of our times, and carry us towards different worlds of possibility, care, and hope.

By reframing the human in direct interdependence with other species, Superflux's mythopoetic works acknowledge our shared purpose, our shared fates, our shared unison.

When we love our earth, our rivers, rocks, mountains, birds, animals, plants, and fungi, we care for them. And what we care for, we protect. A simple but powerful message framed through poignant, mythical story, folklore, and sensory immersion.

SUBJECT TO CHANGE is timely and prescient. The works are not solutions to our crisis, but perhaps more importantly, are beacons of hope, of reimagination, renewal, and precarious flourishing.

About Superflux

Artists and designers Anab Jain (1976) and Jon Arden (1978) are the founders of Superflux, an Anglo-Indian speculative design & art practice based in London. From climate change and growing inequality to the emergence of artificial intelligence, the metaverse and the future of work, Superflux have explored some of the biggest challenges of our times, and investigated their potential and unintended consequences with rigour, poetry and care.

About Renny Ramakers

Dutch art historian, critic, and curator Renny Ramakers, co-founder of Droog, has been championing the potential of design to reimagine today's world since the 1980s, bringing new technologies, social media, and the craft of design together to develop new social relationships. Throughout, she has aimed to move beyond the slick object, towards critical projects that open our eyes to changing realities while simultaneously bringing joy.

The Intersection

2021

'The Intersection' is a dramatised reconstruction of events during the pandemic, from the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor to the forest fires in Australia and California.

The film journeys from a violent present to a speculative, cooperative future, seen through the eyes of four protagonists, who gather with others from all corners of the US to tell stories of hope, change and activism. They talk about the changed role of ambient technology - think Alexa and Siri, smart watches, pills, homes, and cities. Once used for commercial purposes - with 'clicks' as a measure of success, resulting in fragmentation and exploitation - data on human behaviour now supports dialogue, trust, and collaboration.

With slow activism as credo, they propagate a new approach to technology. We cannot imagine the world without technology; so then let us use it for community building, supporting nature, and nurturing our relationship with the planet.

Server Frame Pack, Airborne Pollution Sensor, Illegal Logging Sensor & Sensor Monitor

2021

These objects are used in the film 'The Intersection'. Composed of waste from human activities, such as discarded electronics and household objects, they are aimed at a fair and just use of technology.

1. **Server Frame Pack**

In the film 'The Intersection', Jake, the journalist, carries the Server Frame Pack to collect and share data and information, making him a physical network node. Rather than clickbait journalism, this form of nomadic journalism is inspired by the principles of active listening; as Jake traverses across communities sharing stories and nurturing dialogue.

2. **Airborne Pollution Sensor**

In 'The Intersection', the Airborne Pollution Sensor forms part of a wider DIY hyper-local, sensor network that illustrates just and equitable uses of technology. Such sensors are distributed within a natural environment to collect data about its ecology and key environmental indicators —allowing communities to gain a better understanding of environmental condition such as air pollution.

3. **Illegal Logging Sensor**

In the film, this sensor is part of a wider DIY hyper-local, sensor network that illustrates just and equitable uses of technology. Such sensors are distributed within a natural environment to collect data about its ecology and key environmental indicators such as illegal logging —allowing communities to take action collectively.

4. **Sensor Monitor**

In 'The Intersection', this network monitoring device acts as an entry point into the sensor network, communicating with the network's environmental sensors surveying. The device provides a simple overview of the position of sensors and compiles the collected data for easy analyses.

Trigger Warning

2018

Trigger Warning is a fast-paced journey through a city of memes. An urban hinterland of embodied ideas and warring ideologies. Switching between various first-person perspectives, the film embodies the culture clashes bubbling away beneath the surface of the city. The algorithmically mediated networks which amplify opinions, manipulate biases and shape beliefs have caused widespread civic unrest.

People emerge from behind memes and screens to bear arms for their beliefs. Allegiances continue to fracture and fragment, until individual emotions and opinions reign supreme. Eventually, any sense of certainty evaporates.

Trigger Warning asks what lies on the horizon as these multi-layered fictions and polarised realities melt away? Will peace be possible?

Featuring an original soundtrack and narration by Ninja Tune musician and producer Nabihah Iqbal the film was commissioned by the University of South Australia for their exhibition 'Waging Peace'.

Fieldguide for a more-than human politics

2019

Anab Jain, one of Superflux' founders, first presented this Field Guide at the Tentacular technology festival in Madrid, November 2019.

The guide invites us to consider the practice of 'more-than-human politics', which allows us to imagine new models for living with global warming, practices of more-than-human care, humility, imagination, interdependence, resistance, revolt, loss, mourning and resurgence.

For this Field Guide, Superflux have drawn inspiration from the scholarly works of Anna Tsing, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Anne Galloway, Tim Ingold, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Vandana Shiva, Ursula Le Guin, Dorian Sagan, and Kim Stanley Robinson.

Invocation For Hope

2021

Invocation For Hope was an immersive installation in the central hall of the MAK in Vienna, for the Vienna Biennale 2021. Designed as a living, resurgent forest, its scale and sensory experience invokes hope for a better world in the face of climate change.

Accompanied by an original soundscape from Cosmo Sheldrake, visitors walk through a grid of 400 burnt pines destroyed by a recent wildfire. Moving through skeletal remains of fire-blackened trees towards the centre, death restores fertility, making way for new life – green shoots of hope. Wild maple, birch, and larch spring up organically around moss, ferns, and grass. Sounds of animal and bird song fill the forest. The pool at the heart of this resurgent forest does not reflect the viewer, but Alpine animals, which invite visitors to meditate on their place in this more-than-human world.

INVOCATION FOR HOPE was commissioned by MAK Vienna, for the Vienna Biennale for Change 2021 in response to the theme 'Planet Love: Climate Care in the Digital Age.' Curated by Marlies Wirth.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870759.

Refuge for Resurgence

2021

The installation Refuge for Resurgence is centred around a majestic oak table where multiple species gather, as equals, to dine together. The chairs around the table, the plates, the cutlery, the entire setting announced the identity of the invited guests: a fox, rat, wasp, pigeon, cow, human adults and child, wild boar, snake, beaver, wolf, raven, and mushroom.

At the end of the table, a projection provides a window view of a cityscape in the aftermath of a catastrophe, with flooded streets and ruined buildings. But it isn't a complete disaster. Green plants and trees can be seen creeping in, and wild animals roaming. All conveying a positive message: nature is building a new world from the wreckage of the old one, and the assignment for the creatures around the table is to work together and find their respective places in it.

Now, in the ruins of that old world, forms of life once labelled 'weeds', 'pests' or 'vermin' come to claim their rightful place at the table of planetary ecology, in a shared hope for a more-than-human future. Superflux: 'A hope in the resurgence of life, stretched thin around this rock, painting its surface blue and green as it spins wildly in the vast blackness.'

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870759.

Poem Recital Text

Together we shared our restless earth
Across millennia, epochs and aeons,
Our union coded in body and spirit
Over time so deep
it's marked in the rising of mountains
and the forming of oceans

But with the churning of the seas
And the slow drift of tectonic plates,
Some of us fractured our sublime union
With ravenous greed and mindless extraction
With a frightening desire for power and control
With an arrogant disregard for the bonds that sustain us

But the earth never forgot our sacred bond
Calling us back when we were lost
Reminding us of our timeless love
Rising in the grey rock of snow capped mountains
And moving in the flutter of the blue monarch's wings
A love etched in the rings of every tree
that has ever graced our restless earth

Now once again this vast love calls us home
To sit once more with humility and respect,
At the table of our kinship.
At the table of our shared purpose.
At the table of our shared fate.

To sit together in the acknowledgement that we are
one with the eternal dance of our restless earth.

Our forms changing
in unison with one another,
in unison with the changing climate and drifting continents.
A dance of life
ebbing and flowing across time.

Curator

Renny Ramakers

Tentoonstellings Lay-out

Superflux | Ed Lewis

Productie

Edith Gruson (ProArtsDesign) en Billy Leliveld

Media en techniek

Marcel Langenberg en Beam Systems Amsterdam

Grafisch ontwerp

Suze van As

Marketing en pers

Yev Kravt

Teksten

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Met dank aan

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Eshanthi Ranasinghe (Principal, Exploration and Future Sensing, Omidyar Network; TED)

Marlies Wirth (Curator, Digital Culture and MAK Design Collection, MAK, Vienna)

Christoph Thun-Hohenstein (Director, Vienna Biennale for Change, MAK, Vienna)

Hashim Sarkis (Curator, Biennale Architettura 2021, La Biennale Di Venezia)

CreaTures (Creative Practices for Transformational Futures)

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