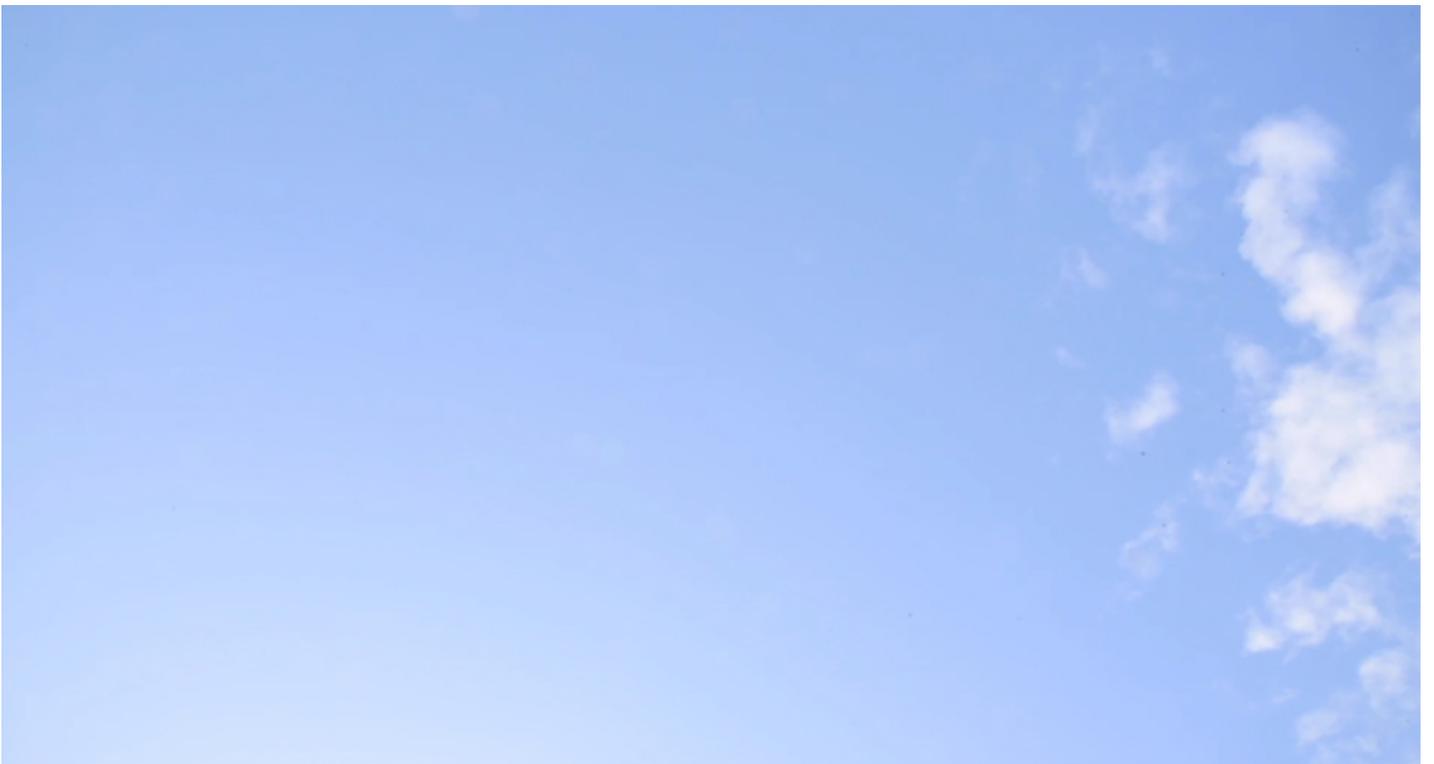


Atmospheric Conditions

Jabulani Maseko & Sofia Steinvorth



The following five days will be dedicated to the sky. To the great immensity above us and the clouds in movement. To the possibility that lies in the air and the cyclic mixture of changing combinations of elements. Throughout the video series *Atmospheric Conditions* Jabulani Maseko inspects the phenomena of slow observation and non-expectation. Rather than reacting and communicating, these works are traces from an undemanding and concentrated practice of presence that come from a state of listening and receiving. Visuals and soundscapes come together as settings that expand space and conjure unexpected relations, inviting images from times past, present and yet to come. As in a series of photographs and installation drafts from Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, in which walls and windows become sky and clouds, so too do Jabulani's *Atmospheric Conditions* turn our attention from an apparently solid and confining interior towards the sky as an infinite projection space.

Day 1

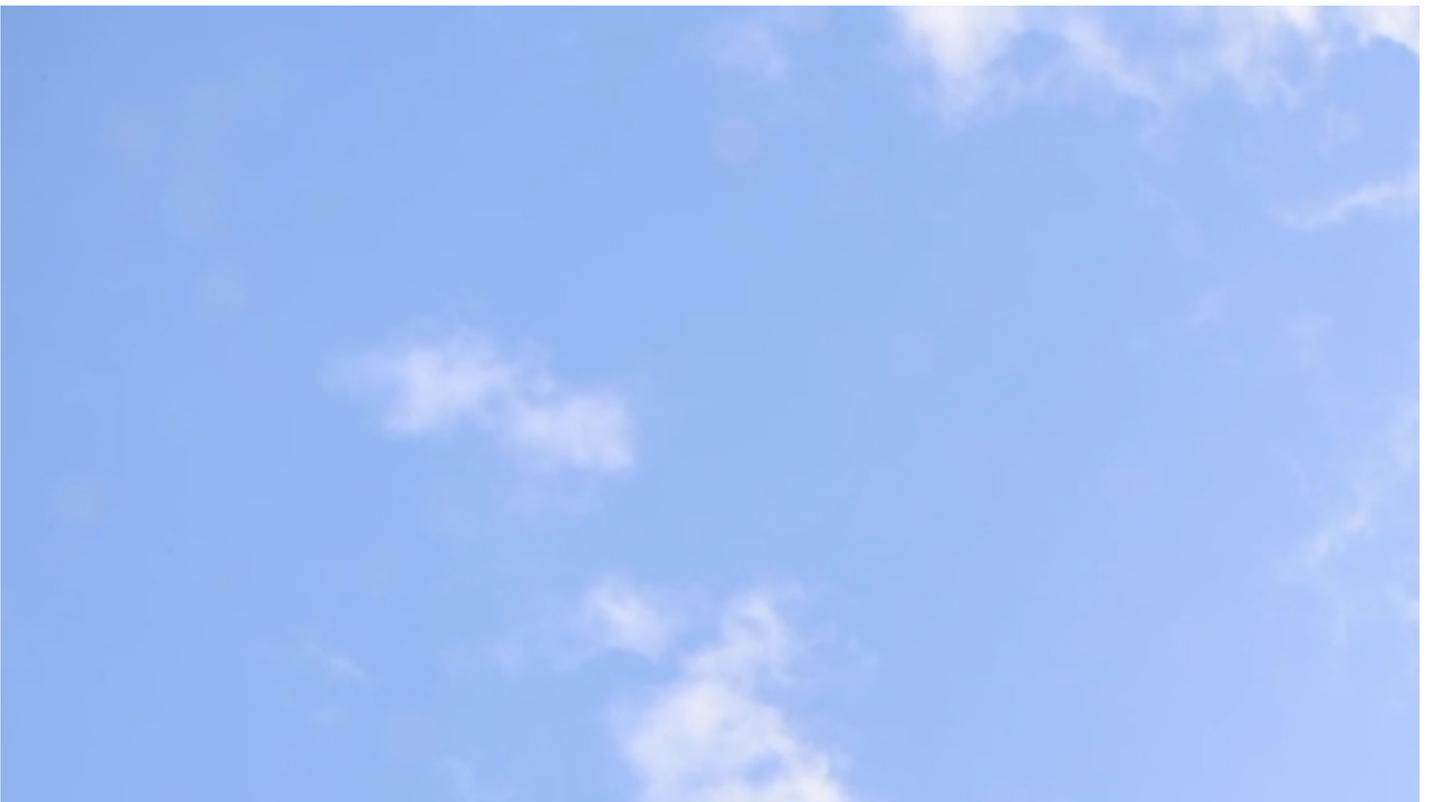
An exercise.

A musical instruction by Yoko Ono.

EARTH PIECE

Listen to the sound of the earth turning.

1963 spring



Still from *Atmospheric Conditions* – Day 1

Day 2



Still from *Atmospheric Conditions – Day 2*

One cloud, two clouds, three clouds, four clouds, five clouds, six clouds, seven clouds, eight clouds, nine clouds, ten clouds, eleven clouds, twelve clouds, thirteen clouds, fourteen clouds, fifteen clouds, sixteen clouds, seventeen clouds, eighteen clouds, nineteen clouds, twenty clouds, twenty one clouds, twenty two clouds, twenty three clouds, twenty four clouds, twenty five clouds, twenty six clouds, twenty seven clouds, twenty eight clouds, twenty nine clouds, thirty clouds, thirty one clouds, thirty two clouds, thirty three clouds, thirty four clouds, thirty five clouds, thirty six clouds, thirty seven clouds, thirty eight clouds, thirty nine clouds, forty clouds, forty one clouds, forty two clouds, forty three clouds, forty four clouds, forty five clouds, forty six clouds, forty seven clouds, forty eight clouds, forty nine clouds, fifty clouds, fifty one clouds, fifty two clouds, fifty three clouds, fifty four clouds, fifty five clouds, fifty six clouds, fifty seven clouds, fifty eight clouds, fifty nine clouds, sixty clouds, sixty one clouds, sixty two clouds, sixty three clouds, sixty four clouds, sixty five clouds, sixty six clouds, sixty seven clouds, sixty eight clouds, sixty nine clouds, seventy, seventy one clouds, seventy two clouds, seventy three clouds, seventy four clouds, seventy five clouds, seventy six clouds, seventy seven clouds, seventy eight clouds, seventy nine clouds, eighty clouds, eighty one clouds, eighty two clouds, eighty three clouds, eighty four clouds, eighty five clouds, eighty six clouds, eighty seven clouds, eighty eight clouds, eighty nine clouds, ninety, ninety one clouds, ninety two clouds, ninety three clouds, ninety four clouds, ninety five clouds, ninety six clouds, ninety seven clouds, ninety eight clouds, ninety nine clouds, a hundred clouds, a hundred and one clouds...

Day 3

Sofia Steinvorth: Jabulani, we started our conversations talking about infrastructure and its undeniable influence in our lives – both in public space and our domestic environment. How do the skies in *Atmospheric Conditions* reflect the sudden and dramatic change that Covid-19 has brought in terms of a 'normal' functioning of our infrastructure?

Jabulani Maseko: At some point early in February NASA released some satellite images of the world highlighting the reduction of pollution from some of the most densely populated cities in the East, namely China. These images did the rounds and generated conversation. Shortly after, as the Covid-19 scenario moved further afield, more satellite images were released showing other world landmarks which are renowned for their heavy human traffic – deserted. These images were one of those reminders of how we are being watched from above. Later on, around mid-March, I encountered an article talking about the lack of parking space for aeroplanes as more and more airlines were grounding their fleets due to the reduced numbers of passengers from the spreading lockdown we were experiencing from the global pandemic. It was at this point that I started to look up and notice how much emptier the sky was, how much quieter the atmosphere was. Traffic on the ground was reducing dramatically, and it was reducing in the sky, too. We were living an unprecedented moment. We had been ordered to stop moving, we had been ordered to stay home. All the tools and instruments of modernity had been paralysed and we were all still awake to see it. It was at this point I decided to point my camera skywards. Firstly, to observe the sky without the distraction of any aeroplanes criss-crossing it. Secondly, and equally importantly, to embrace this order to pause. After all, this is what it was going to be – a momentary pause before having to get back up and get on with the business of rushing around again. Up until this point nobody could remember a time in living memory where we had been ordered to put down our tools and go inside, during peace time, and wait. Suddenly, we were starting to understand that this modern world where one is expected to be a fully participating player, this being defined best by how far and how fast one can move, was built on a strangely precarious infrastructure. An infrastructure which only works as long as everything and everyone is moving frantically. Should any cog of this machine need to stop completely the repercussions reverberate all the way down the line in ways we had never imagined before.



Still from *Atmospheric Conditions* – Day 3

Day 4

Sofia Steinvorth: Especially throughout the past years, a significant part of your work has evolved around domestic space. How is this very specific part of our infrastructure worth reflecting upon?

Jabulani Maseko: I've always been struck by the network of infrastructure which underpins the lives we live both personally and collectively. The network of infrastructure which underpins the ideals we subscribe to. How much of who I am is really who I am, with free will? How far into my home/personal space is the collective vision embedded for me to believe I am the captain of my own ship? If you think about it this way, the domestic space is a direct reflection of the public space. For society to function, for the collective to exist, its norms and morals have to be adopted and normalised in the home so as not to cause a rupture in the facade when the individual goes outside and encounters the rest of the picture. But I'm interested... How do you think that art can engage with contemporary issues in a meaningful way?

Sofia Steinvorth: That's a question I'm really excited about and there are many possible answers. To speak about art in general terms, I believe that it has the potential to challenge our ways of knowing and understanding. This is especially so, when thinking about the space that art and art institutions of all sizes create for experimentation, reflection and different ways of communication and storytelling. This process can happen in different ways, for example by speaking to the senses and expanding our range of experience by moving it away from a solely rational and logical approach. But also, by the 'simple' fact of providing a different (visual) narrative than the one we absorb through the media. On the other hand, art often happens to give us tools to understand not only our personal realities but also the world we live in and the relations between these two spheres – which goes back to what you just mentioned, about understanding the entanglements between the personal/domestic space and the political/public space (as the sphere where dominant norms and morals of a society are performed and perpetuated).

Another important aspect that we should think about is that everything and everyone wants our attention nowadays. This is what is at the heart of what has been called the 'attention economy' in cognitive capitalism, for example. In addition to this, it becomes more and more difficult to shelter oneself from these 'outside' stimuli, because even at home, and especially thanks to the penetration of information technology into this sphere, it has become very hard to switch off. This is one of the reasons why Yves Citton, the cultural theorist, has described aesthetic experiences as 'vacuoles', "which allow for the temporary suspension of the demands of communicational attention, so as to be able to concentrate full attention on a privileged cultural object over an extended period of time" (Citton, 2017: 159). If you think about it this way, it is art that allows you to slow down or to switch off – and that's becoming a rare and ever more valuable experience.



Still from *Atmospheric Conditions* – Day 4

Day 5

Recently, Paul B. Preciado wrote about the current Covid-19 pandemic. To encourage us to disconnect ourselves from the satellites that monitor us, he calls out for "the big blackout".

Ours is blue.



Still from *Atmospheric Conditions* – Day 5

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Preciado, Paul B. (2020), "Aprendiendo del virus", in El País on 28 March 2020. Retrieved from: https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/03/27/opinion/1585316952_026489.html, last accessed on April 22, 2020.

Biographies

JABULANI MASEKO (South Africa, 1977) was born and raised in Johannesburg during the political regime of Apartheid. He left, by coincidence, in the same year that Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island and that South Africa changed its political establishment. He lived briefly in the United States of America before moving to the UK, his adoptive country, where he has lived most of his adult life in London. After spending a season in Portugal, in 2010 he left for Venice where he stayed a few months at the Bevilacqua la Massa Foundation, which was a very important experience for his artistic development. He took a master's degree at the London University, in the Slade School of Arts. He has exhibited in London, Luanda, Portugal, France and Switzerland. His work approaches intimate themes related to identity, domesticity and current affairs, staying always attentive to questions about integration. His critical sight is based on information absorbed through music, politics and an everyday life filled with activity. Recently, he has been exploring a body of work around the title of 'Domestic Violence', considering the situation of the individual inside the family collective.

SOFIA STEINVORTH (Germany, 1992) is a German/Costa Rican writer, researcher and curator based in Lisbon, Portugal. With a background in Dance, Philosophy and Culture Studies her practice focuses mainly on human geography, identity politics and artistic practices that explore, reveal and reshape the relations among people. Acknowledging the central role of situatedness and participation, her latest research addressed visual arts organizations and their impact in local contexts and art scenes. Since 2017 she has been involved in the production of ELECTRA Magazine for the EDP Foundation, working closely with writers, scholars from different disciplines and artists alike. She has collaborated on exhibitions and several publications with emerging artists. Currently one of the nine curators taking part of the 2019/2020 edition of CuratorLab at Konstfack University in Stockholm, she has been working closely with socially engaged artists alongside the Visible Project. This collaboration will lead to a publication exploring curatorial methodologies around socially engaged art under the umbrella topic 'Translocal Solidarity'.

Atmospheric Conditions (2020) is a joint project between artist Jabulani Maseko and curator Sofia Steinvorth which responded to an invitation by the 4Cs - From Conflict to Conviviality through Creativity and Culture to develop a proposal for the online exhibition *4 + 4 Proposals for Making Sense of Today's Convivial Cultures*. Within this exhibition, conceptualized and commissioned in late March 2020 to address the sudden changes in the artistic and cultural field under the imposed lockdown on a large part of the world's population due to the Covid-19 pandemic, *Atmospheric Conditions* was the first of the four projects presented on the website of the 4Cs between April 6 and April 10, 2020.

Idea & Video Series

Jabulani Maseko

Cover: Jabulani Maseko. Still from
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Sofia Steinvorth

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