

# TEATRO DELLA TERRA ALIENATA

I

Australian national pavilion at the XXII  
Milan Triennial, 2019

## GRANDEZA + BAJEZA

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## Keywords

*Ecology*  
*Land*  
*Reef*  
*Pavillion*  
*Environmental management*

As an ecosystemic effect of climate change, the largest living being on the planet – the great Coral Reef in Australia – started to lose its color in 2016. This episode serves as a lens to look not only at the way in which the heritage of humanity is affected by global warming but also at how governments deny this using false environmental protection strategies in parallel to the continuous promotion of fossil fuels.

The Australian Great Barrier Reef, considered the largest living organism on the planet, was declared a Unesco world heritage site in 1981,<sup>1</sup> adding to its ecosystem functions, symbolic occupations worthy of a global sign of desire. This reef is one of the few environments – alongside the Amazon rainforest, the Sahara desert or the Antarctic glaciers –, that manages to sneak into the global imaginary of the sublime. However, since 2016, the great barrier has decided to challenge Australia and the world with an animal protest of territorial scale in which two massive coral bleaching events undressed the idyllic underwater postcard of its treasured color. The barrier is dyed white<sup>2</sup> exposing both the fragile status of its ecosystems and the scandal of its unsustainable and fraudulent environmental management.

The limit of the Australian Barrier Reef's natural park simulates a divorce between the reef and its harvesting areas, while operating as a curtain between

**DE-TERRITORIALISATION**  
**CARTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS**

**EXTRACTION NODES**

- X1 - Gladstone Harbour
- X2 - Galilee Basin Mines
- X3 - Maokay & Hay Point
- X4 - Abbot Point
- X5 - Townsville

**TOURISTIC NODES**

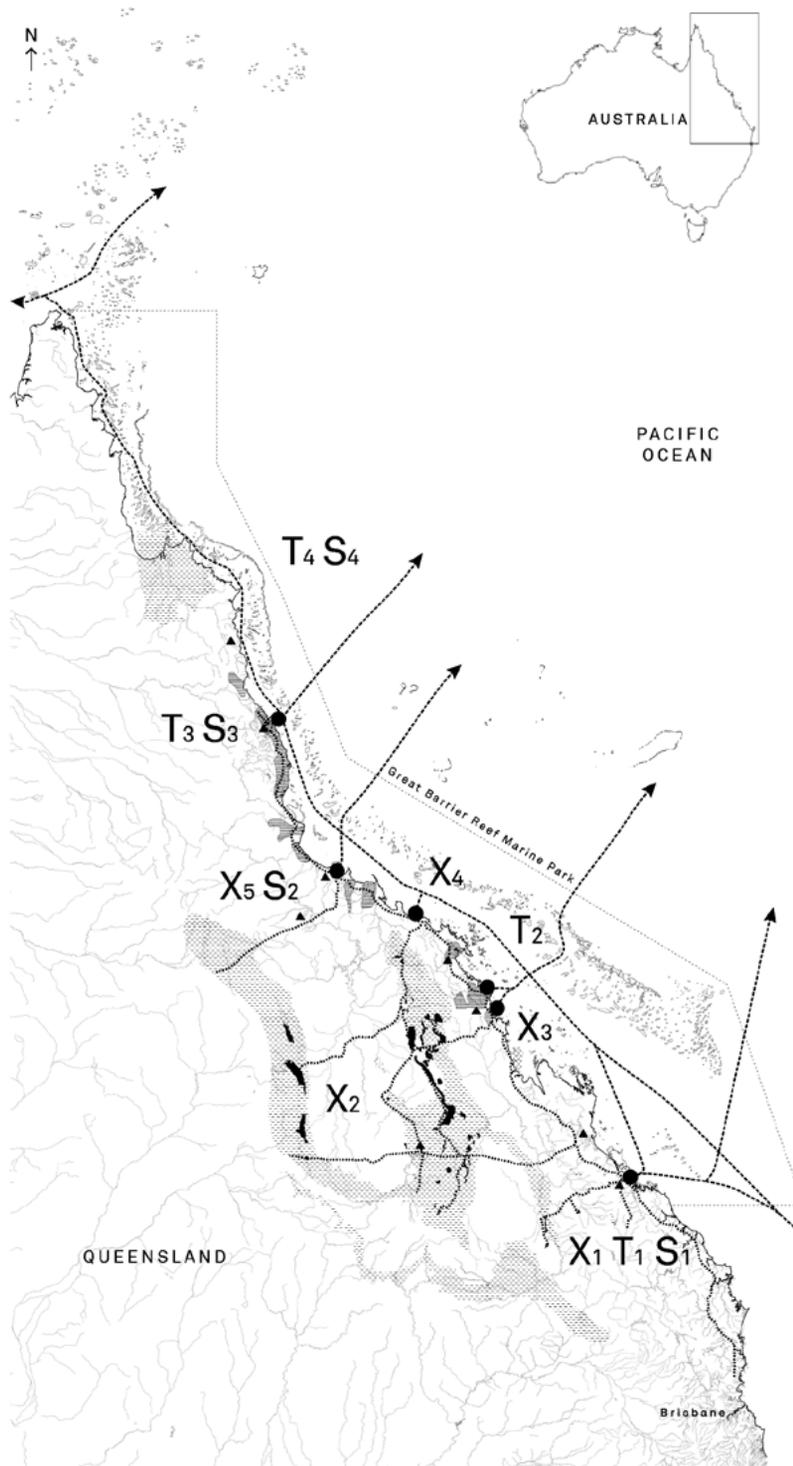
- T1 - Gladstone & Heron Island
- T2 - Whitsundays
- T3 - Cairns
- T4 - Lizard Island

**SCIENTIFIC NODES**

- S1 - Heron Island
- S2 - Townsville
- S3 - Cairns
- S4 - Lizard Island

**KEY**

- Fossil Fuel Basin
- Mine
- Sugar Cane Plantation
- Railway
- Shipping Route
- Major Port
- Major Airport



two opposing realities. Far from the collective pristine imaginary, a complex technological and infrastructural framework colonizes the Great Barrier Reef and its harvesting areas, negotiating in a multiscaled way the coexistence of extractive industries of territorial capitalization with the expectations of a mass tourism, equally extractive, ascribed to picturesque imaginary. On the one hand, the extractive show operates with its back turned to the barrier's nature, manifesting as intensive monocultures of sugarcane, growing livestock industry, unstoppable deforestation and incessant extraction of

Desterritorialización. La Gran Barrera de Coral australiana y sus áreas de captación / *De-territorialisation. The Australian Great Barrier Reef and its catchment areas*  
 Imagen: equipo curatorial / *Image: curatorial team*



## THE ARSENAL

### PROSTHETICS

- 01 AquaLung 'Axiom' Buoyancy Control Device
- 02 AquaLung 'Military' Buoyancy Control Device
- 03 AquaLung 'Outlaw' Buoyancy Control Device
- 04 Aluminum Dive Tank with K-Valve
- 05 Double Cylinder HP100 SCUBA Tank
- 06 Diving Regulator
- 07 IKARI SM101Q Snorkel
- 08 IKARI SM101Q Mask
- 09 Full Face Snorkel System
- 10 GULL Classic Compo Dive Mask
- 11 Crossi Snorkel
- 12 Crossi Mask
- 13 Submersible Underwater Writing Pad
- 14 Wind-up 100m Tape Measure
- 15 Volador Diving Flashlight
- 16 Underwater GPS Navigator
- 17 Mallet Hammer
- 18 Waterproof Hard Carry Case Tool Box
- 19 Cobra HH125 Handheld VHF Marine Radio
- 20 Icom IC-M87 ATEX Marine VHF
- 21 Arena Powerskin R-EVO+ Open Water Pant
- 22 Pinnacle 3mm Spirit Titanium Mens Shorty Wetsuit
- 23 AquaLung Dive 7mm Mens Wetsuit
- 24 Paonew Watch Manual PSE 276G

### PATROL

- 25 Doean Acidification Monitoring Buoy
- 26 NexSens Profiling Buoy
- 27 i3XO EcoMapper AUV
- 28 Wave Glider SV3
- 29 COTSbot AUV
- 30 Catlin SeaView SVII
- 31 Underwater LIDAR Laser
- 32 dji S900 Spreading Wings
- 33 dji Matrice M210 RTK Drone
- 34 dji Phantom 3 Standard Drone Camera
- 35 dji Hasselblad Drone
- 36 Drone DJI Mavic 2 Pro Parts
- 37 Sea Doo Seascooter RS2
- 38 Mantaboard
- 39 Bandito Sea Sled
- 40 Heavy Duty Tow Harness

### SURVEILLANCE

- 41 BlueROV2 Heavy Configuration Retrofit Kit
- 42 Sony A7 360 Rig
- 43 Underwater Housing with Fisheye Lights and Strobes
- 44 MDX-800 Mirrorless Housing with YS-01 Strobes
- 45 Underwater Camera Lens Dome Port Housing
- 46 Ikelite 8801.31 Nikon D3100 Underwater Housing
- 47 Canon 5D Mark IV
- 48 Nikon KeyMission 360 Action Camcorder
- 49 GoPro Hero 4 Black
- 50 iPhone 6
- 51 Paralenz Dive Camera
- 52 Extendable Selfie Handheld Stick Monopod
- 53 Anaconda Aquascope
- 54 Occlutali Plastic Bathyscope

Arsenal  
 Imagen: equipo curatorial /  
 Image: curatorial team

coal along with controversial methane gas fracking; on the other hand, the pilgrimages of scientists and tourists converge on the barrier, with the arsenal of monitoring and preservation technologies for the coral spectacle. Road networks, railways, sea, air and space routes continuously connect both realities with the world.

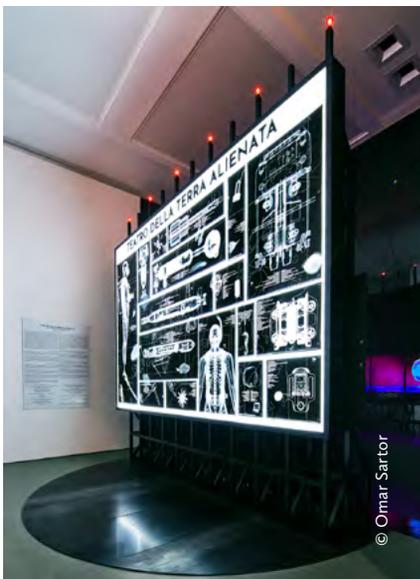
A dozen ports configure industrial activity enclaves as sabotage bites on the perceived fullness of the natural park. In places like Gladstone – the largest multi-commodity port in Queensland and the fourth largest coal export port in the world, located on the coast in front of the coral reef – international

corporations associated with mining exploitation and export employ the largest part of the population. These companies take care of parks and public spaces in areas adjacent to the port, which mitigate gesture or mere dissimulation of environmental impacts and devastation caused by industrial activity. Life in Gladstone is organized around export cycles, prioritizing the continuity of capital flow over the ecosystem survival of the barrier itself and the inhabitants of the area. As anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains in his book *Boomtown*, in Gladstone, even sunset is sponsored by the fossil fuel industry (Eriksen, 2018: 3).

Achille Mbembe, the famous necropolitics theorist, talks about how contemporary societies bureaucratize death on a global and regional scale. This sentence acquires an evidential force in the endless parade of freighters redrawing the Gladstone skyline. This funeral procession stealthily marches northward through open navigation channels in shallow water through constant dredging operations. Caught between the coast and the reef, the huge freighters advance through one of the narrowest and most monitored maritime spaces on the planet.<sup>3</sup> ReefVTS<sup>4</sup> monitors the delicate operation from the ground.

In this context, while the expansion of the industrial activity of the region – particularly that of the coal industry – threatens the survival of the barrier, the bleaching of its great protagonist, the reef, shakes the consciences, threatening political and popular support to fossil fuels extraction and use.

The deterioration of the Great Barrier Reef is much more than a regional or sporadic act of human negligence. Here converge the most thorny dilemmas of our future from a cruel and slippery contemporaneity. In the book *Nueva ilustración radical*, the Spanish philosopher Marina Garcés speaks of the ‘posthumous condition’ in which the individual and planetary future is made and falls apart under the shadow of the ‘until when’ instead of the ‘where to’ (Garcés, 2017, 14). The



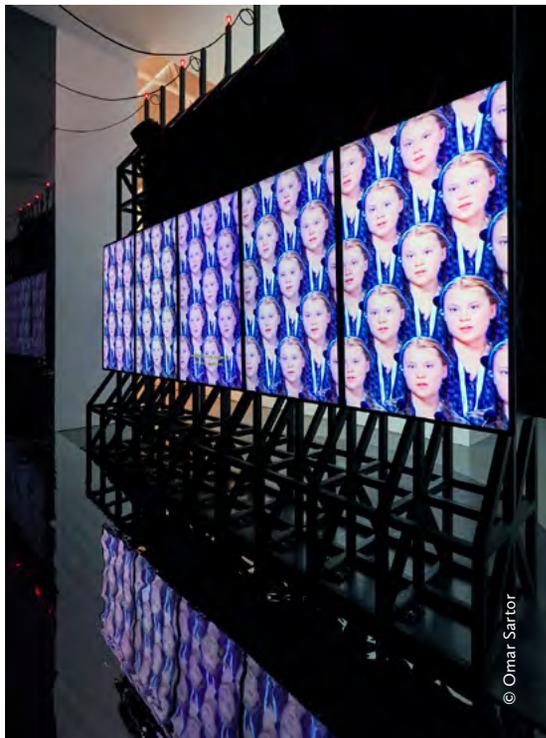
continuous sea and coast that forms the Great Barrier is a posthumous territory, where two realities face an uncertain future. To declare ourselves defiant to posthumous ideology is, for Garcés, the main task of contemporary critical thinking. “We need conceptual, historical, poetic and aesthetic tools that give us back the personal and collective capacity to fight dogmas and their political effects,” warns the philosopher. At the same time, from his Uranus apartment, Paul B. Preciado reminds us that “in the face of the contemporary techno-utopic theater, we need to imagine dissident theaters, where producing another performative force is possible. Create a new enunciation scene, de-identify oneself as to rebuild a subjectivity that the dominant performative has hurt” (Preciado, 2019: 124).<sup>5</sup>

Teatro della Terra Alienata, the Australian pavilion at the XXI Triennale in Milan, tells the myth of a coral barrier in intensive care, where an arsenal of monitoring and preservation technologies play a more propagandistic than effectively palliative role. Although innumerable studies confirm that the biggest threat of the reef is the economic-extractive apparatus itself, the government insists on putting light on the hunting of designated coral predator species, rather than dismantling the pace of the material exploitation apparatus. Technology builds here an effective theater of distractions, serving as a maximum wink at the service of a demobilizing hope.

The radiography of actors and complicities that serves as a prelude to the Theater involves a government surrendered to private interests, as shown by its public policies and the proselytizing gestures that acquire public relations campaign visions in favor of extractivism. Thus, labor anxieties of workers contracted by extractive industries are usually invoked to obtain their popular support at the polls. As an example, in 2018, the Australian government donated 443.3 million Australian dollars to a small non-governmental organization, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, partially outsourcing the preservation of the coral reef. This was largest investment in the history of the country in natural preservation projects. The sum was granted without following a public bidding process. Mining companies, banks, insurers and airlines support this private entity whose governing body is linked to highly polluting corporations such as AGL, BHP, Shell, and Peabody Energy, a company that financed climate change denial groups in the United States and celebrated President Trump’s decision to not sign the Paris climate agreement (Hasham, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

The Queensland state, a region adjacent to the barrier, has its future committed to the extractive economy; the lack of a diversified economy or work alternatives normalizes the current environmental violence scenario.

The pavilion embraces the antagonism between two scenic-atmospheric universes, that of technological distraction and that of the proposal for the future, and separates them with an advertising panel dressed in radiographic black. The structure of the poster



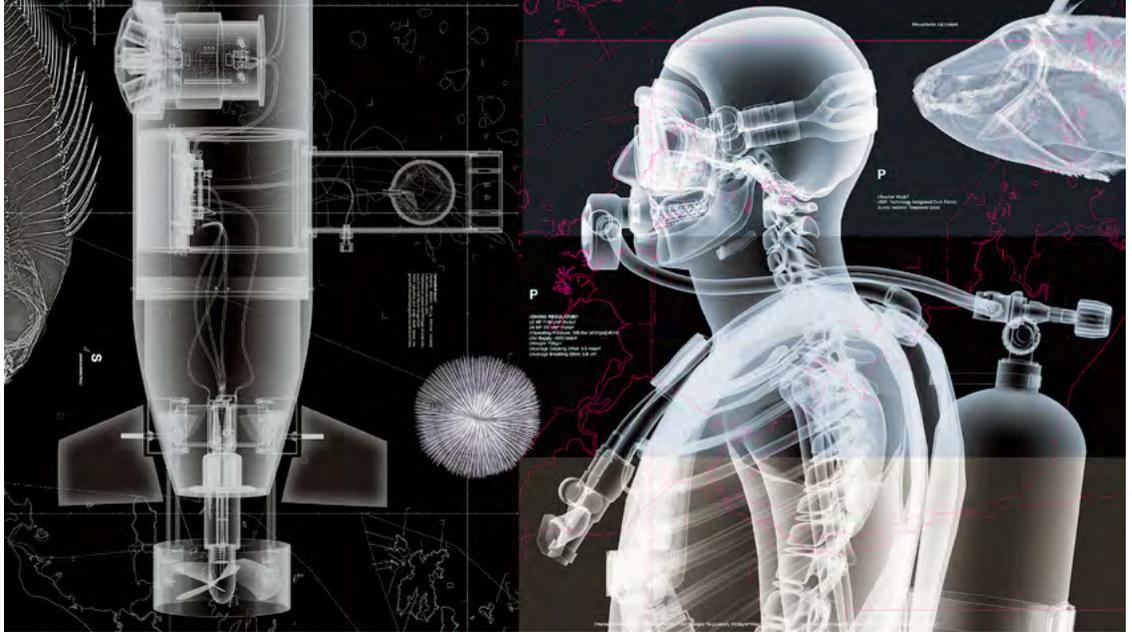
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refers, simultaneously, to the banners that built the depoliticized epic of the heroic miner along the Queensland roads, and to the theater marquees that announce the next premiere, while hybridizing the antiseptic language of the X-ray inspection room, with the dirty mineral extraction infrastructure responsible for the agonizing coral body.

The anteroom of the theater is a space of clinical and spectacular luminosity. It sheds light and invites you to decipher, from the parody of the scientific eye, the environmental tragedy, its actors and their complicities. The set of narrative radiographs that receives the visitor embodies the current technocratic and necropolitical management of the Australian coral reef with declarative notes of violence normalized by the 'techno-utopic' apparatus. This arsenal of fraudulent technologies, presented at a 1:1 scale, appropriates the language of neoliberal dataism to denounce the unstoppable death drive of late capitalism. The technological and prosthetic diver body appears along with some of the species that these technologies interact with or exercise their violence upon.

On the opposite side, there is a kaleidoscopic movie theater in which the audiovisual collage is projected, a delusional universe of critical imagination celebrating the proliferation of other things, as well as the post-patriarchal resignification of concepts such as territory, nature, nation, desire, citizenship, algorithm



Arsenal  
 Imagen: equipo curatorial /  
 Image: curatorial team

or technology, among others. The film hybridizes in five acts the genres of mockumentary, epic theater, news and political fiction to narrate the territorial alienation of the great coral reef and its harvesting areas from Australian national sovereignty. The take, executed by the UN IPCC in collaboration with the fictitious International Xenofeminist Corporation – inspired by the Xenofeminist Manifesto of Laboria Cuboniks<sup>7</sup> – justifies the gesture's violence in defense of the territory and its populations against the self-destructive addiction of extractive capitalism and the inability of the Australian government to respond to the urgency of the environmental crisis.

In Act 1, the demonized crown-of-thorns seastar or *Acanthaster planci*, a type of starfish that loves the conditions created by global warming, is shown feeding on coral without remorse, unfolding its toxic stomach on the reef. The innocent creature devours the reef leaving white scars, while enjoying the hot and increasingly acidic water.<sup>8</sup> Its rapid reproduction in recent years has turned this animal into one of the biggest threats to coral survival and the biggest nightmare of tourism companies. The feast of agricultural sediments feeds their young, increasing the disgusted population in areas where coral suffers the most. While the barrier dies, the crown of thorns thrives,<sup>9</sup> kills and dies without elegance<sup>10</sup> or guilt.

Autonomous underwater vehicles such as the COTSbot,<sup>11</sup> developed by the University of Queensland, patrol the barrier seabed searching for this pest species. As soon as the frontal sensor detects the specimens, its mechanical arm proceeds to inject the lethal solution that ends up exterminating the criminalized animal. With this 'foundational' murder, a metaphor for the planet's action on the human plague, it opens the five-act fantasy that narrates the future as a present fact from a radical change of political and economic paradigm.

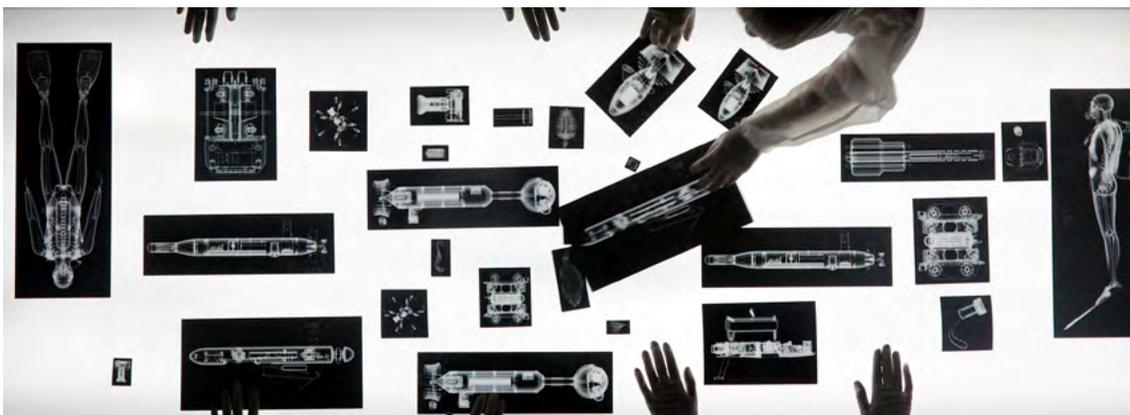
Teatro Della Terra Alienata is a project of political imagination that transforms the daily frustration of its authors before the global post-political panorama into acts of creative rebellion. The work embraces the

intellectual freshness and ideological relevance of the *Xenofeminist Manifesto*. Thus, in 30 minutes of film, the formation of a temporary government over the alienated region is imagined, managed by the fictional *Xenofeminist International Corporation*<sup>®</sup>, which would revolve around an enjoyment economy, open borders and slow down life. The second half of the film navigates this territory through an intense interview with Kimba Gallagher – CEO of the corporation – who describes the take as part of a post-extractive political, economic and social project and vindicator of contemplation and enjoyment, as the greatest individual and collective aspirations.

As a whole, the *Teatro della Terra Alienata* rejects the atomization of the environmental debate and its encapsulation in both 19<sup>th</sup>-century (nation-state) and neoliberal devices (the individualization of guilt, the ‘problem-solving expert’) to embrace mutual infections, the pause, the failure, the professional amateurism and, above all, the revitalization of political imagination.

Between the months of March and September of 2019, the xxii edition of the Milan Triennale, entitled *Broken Nature: Design Takes on Human Survival*, took place. During the formal opening ceremony, the organizing committee announced the award for the best national pavilion to the Australian delegation, directed by the architects and academics of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Amaia Sánchez Velasco, Jorge Valiente Oriol, Gonzalo Valiente and Miguel Rodríguez-Casellas. The pavilion is an architectural installation and curatorial collage that combines the artistic creation of its directors with material donated by six international artists (Shoufay Derz, Cigdem Aydemir, Janet Laurence, Liam Benson, Patricia Reed and Madison Bycroft), as well as student projects extracted from the architecture unit *Factory of Hyper Ecologies* – an educational and research anti-think-tank from whose questions arose the pavilion’s theoretical framework – directed by Amaia Sánchez Velasco at UTS between 2016 and 2018.<sup>12</sup>

The conditions – both of the barrier status<sup>13</sup> and the political climate in Australia – have only worsened since the closure of the international sample. In June 2019, after nine years of controversy, the Queensland region government approved the environmental impact



Teatro. Film Clip



**A** Teatro. Film Clip

**B** Expulsiones /  
*Expulsions*. Shoufay Derz,  
Amaia Sánchez Velasco.



mina de carbón de Australia<sup>14</sup>, a tan sólo 400 km del parque natural patrimonio de la Unesco. En el contexto de la crisis climática, este acto no hace más que corroborar la posición del actual gobierno liberal australiano en relación a sus políticas ambientales, alineadas con los gobiernos de Trump, Bolsonaro y demás retrógrados negacionistas del cambio climático. En tanto, Australia sufre una de las sequías más pronunciadas de su historia, mientras que organizaciones como la Australian Environmental Foundation<sup>15</sup> financia conferencias impartidas por científicos negacionistas que desmienten el impacto de los monocultivos de caña, el exceso de sedimentación y la contaminación de los ríos por los pesticidas sobre la barrera.

En el informe del IPCC de las Naciones Unidas, publicado en 2018<sup>16</sup>, son los científicos – a quienes se entregó hace décadas la mesiánica labor de buscar soluciones preventivas y paliativas – los que hoy nos piden a gritos que paremos la maquinaria de explotación planetaria 24/7 y que nos sentemos a imaginar futuros desde la libertad del ejercicio poético y radical. **ARQ**

statement submitted by the Adani multinational group to open the largest coal mine in Australia,<sup>14</sup> just 400 km from the heritage natural park of the Unesco. In the context of the climate crisis, this act only confirms the position of the current Australian liberal government in relation to its environmental policies, aligned with the governments of Trump, Bolsonaro and other retrograde climate change deniers. Meanwhile, Australia suffers one of the most pronounced droughts in its history, while organizations such as the Australian Environmental Foundation<sup>15</sup> funds conferences given by scientists that deny the impact of cane monocultures, excess sedimentation and pollution of rivers by pesticides on the barrier.

In the report of the IPCC of the United Nations, published in 2018,<sup>16</sup> it is the scientists – to whom the messianic work of seeking preventive and palliative solutions was handed down decades ago – who are now shouting for us to stop the 24/7 machinery for planetary exploitation and to sit down to imagine futures from the poetic and radical exercise of freedom. **ARQ**

## Notas / Notes

- 1 The Australian Great Barrier Reef is considered the largest living organism on the planet, being home to a quarter of the marine species and extending along 344,468 km<sup>2</sup>. See: <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/154>>.
- 2 Coral bleaching is a phenomenon that occurs when the coral is stressed by changes in temperature, light or in nutrients quantity. They expel the algae that inhabit their tissues in a symbiotic way, which causes loss of color in the reefs. Bleached corals are not dead, some even survive. However, the absence of food in the bleaching processes can cause death permanently. See: [https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral\\_bleach.html](https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral_bleach.html)
- 3 The coral reef is the most intensely monitored oceanic stretch of the planet. A marine trade route where more than 30 billion dollars circulate per year. See: <https://youtu.be/-gBjpYfdRuo>
- 4 Reefvts: Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Vessel Traffic Service. In 1990, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) classified the Great Barrier Reef as the first PSSA: a particularly sensitive sea area. Reefvts is a government organization founded in 2004 in charge of regulating and monitoring marine navigation to reduce the risk of accidents that could cause damage to the Unesco protected natural park. See: <https://youtu.be/-gBjpYfdRuo>
- 5 Paul B. Preciado speaks about the Anthropocene and extends necropolitical technologies to the entire planet: capitalist and colonial practices, coal and oil cultures and the transformation of ecosystems into exploitable resources, but also how they gave rise to a surge of animal and plant extinctions, and the progressive global warming.
- 6 See (Doherty, 2019); (Flannery, 2014).

- 7 CUBONIKS, Latoria. "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation." See: <https://www.laboriacuboniks.net>
- 8 Increase in water acidification due to carbon dioxide absorption. See: <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/threats-to-the-reef/climate-change/ocean-acidification>
- 9 Expansion of the crown of thorns population in the Great Barrier Reef, 2019. See: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-05/great-barrier-reef-crown-of-thorns-starfish-major-outbreak/9305580>
- 10 This phrase refers to the curatorial approach of the XII Triennial of Milan: *Broken Nature: Design Takes on Human Survival*. See: <http://www.brokennature.org> <https://www.triennale.org/en/events/broken-nature>
- 11 COTSbot and RangerBot are autonomous underwater vehicles (AUV's) developed by Matt Dunbabin and Feras Dayoub of the University of Queensland School of Science and Engineering. See: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-starfish-killing-artificially-intelligent-robot-is-set-to-patrol-the-great-barrier-reef> <https://research.qut.edu.au/ras/research/rangerbot>
- 12 Charles Curtin and Isaac Harrison were students of the Factory of Hyperecologies (study led by Amaia Sanchez Velasco at the UTS School of Architecture) and worked on the development of the pavilion project as research assistants.
- 13 Official status report of the coral reef, 2019. See: <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/outlook-report-2019>
- 14 The multinational Adani receives approval of the environmental impact statement to open the Carmichael mine in Queensland, 2019. See: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-13/adani-carmichael-coal-mine-approved-water-management-galilee/11203208>
- 15 See (Smee, 2019); (Rae, 2019).
- 16 IPCC, intergovernmental panel on climate change. See: [https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15\\_spm\\_final.pdf](https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf)

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## GRANDEZA + BAJEZA

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Constituted by Amaia Sánchez Velasco (1985) and brothers Jorge (1984) and Gonzalo Valiente (1982), together with the architect-writer Miguel Rodríguez Casellas (1966) – BAJEZA –, share much more than an interest in teaching, and a workplace, the UTS of Sydney. Within different perspectives, they have all experienced the new geographies of neoliberal violence and the need to re-politicize the way architecture is thought and exercised. Far from addressing those commonplaces of reinvention and entrepreneurship, or technological determinism that coined innovation as the only way to relevance, the group explores material and discursive qualities of design as a key tool for emancipation.