**When Attitudes become Platitudes, Live in the Cloud.**

**Dematerialization in the work of Christopher Kulendran Thomas**

**Abstract**

*New Eelam* is a cloud-based digital subscription housing project offering ideal homes to footloose ‘global citizens’ who practice high mobility, post-political utopianism and minimalist interior design. This article uncovers the political and cultural significance of this dream of dematerialized existence in the work of the artist, Christopher Kulendran Thomas. Mapping the dematerialization of the art object onto the dematerializations of cloud computing and minimalist lifestyles, it addresses two ongoing series: *When Platitudes Become Form* (2012—)and *New Eelam* (2016—). First, it explores how *New Eelam* conscripts its public into imagining itself as the morally and aesthetically superior advance-guard of a new world order. Then, it uses Kulendran Thomas’s submerged invocation of the 1969 exhibition, ‘Live in Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form’, to analyse how this experiment in ‘digital realty’ uses dematerialization to solicit urgent realisations about the relationships between the contemporary art market, mass migration and geopolitical reality.

**Keywords:** dematerialization, New Eelam, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, voiceover, artwash

The will to dematerialize is determining how we store data, design technology, spend money and imagine our ideal homes. Correlated with purity and progress alike, dematerialization is the dream we’re sold every day, in every way. This article sets out to reveal the political and cultural significance of dematerialization in the work of the artist, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, by addressing two of his ongoing series: *When Platitudes Become Form* (2012—)and *New Eelam* (2016—).[[1]](#endnote-1) *New Eelam* presents itself as a cloud-based digital subscription housing company, manifesting in the artworld as a large-scale multimedia project that comprises a website, ‘experience suites’ (life-size models of domestic interiors, configured for each new installation), and films. The analysis that follows will center on the vision of *New Eelam* articulated by the voiceover commentaries that animate two of these: the 24 ½ minute feature, *60 Million Americans Can’t Be Wrong*, in which Kulendran Thomas most fully lays out his techno-utopian manifesto for dematerialized existence “in the cloud”, and the promotional short, *Liquid Citizenship*. *60 Million Americans* is usually displayed on a flat screen embedded within an experience suite, where it is sometimes accompanied by *Liquid Citizenship*. In *When Platitudes Become Form*, works of art by contemporary Sri Lankan artists are reconfigured, adulterated and recontextualized by the artist. Components of *When Platitudes Become Form* are commonly integratedinto *New Eelam* installations, making it germane to consider their co-imbrication. In the artist’s press releases and statements, both projects are explicitly indexed to the artist’s family background, as the London-born son of two Sri Lankan parents who, amid escalating racial violence, fled the country’s civil war in the 1980s. However this history is invoked in such cursory and ambivalent ways as to render all references curiously ambiguous. Using one series to decode the other will divulge the underlying mission of *New Eelam*’s promotional propaganda.

By analyzing *New Eelam* as concept, as aesthetic, as brand and as art start-up, this article exposes fault-lines in the *New Eelam* worldview. It maps the dematerializing impulses of cloud computing and lifestyle minimalism onto the dematerialization of the art object in the 1969 Post-Minimalist exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form*,to uncover the valence of the work’s explicitly “post-political” positioning. In what follows, I will uncover how Kulendran Thomas performs overt complicity in order to make us “experience” the cloud-castles of neoliberal thinking and contend with the contemporary art that, in its circulation, “facilitates the development of a new multipolar distribution of geopolitical power whose predatory economies are often fueled by internal oppression, class war from above, and radical shock-and-awe policies” (Steyerl 2012c: 93-94).

**Reality Estate: Introducing the New Eelam Concept**

The entire *New Eelam* project exists to advertise (and, paradoxically, give material form to) the artist’s plan for a subscription housing system, based on the idea that “instead of either renting or owning a home, a flat-rate subscription to a ‘housing cloud’ would allow continual access to apartments around the world, so that global citizens can move around freely between cities” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 109-110). Like so many other dubious social propositions, the dream of mobility it describes is cast as the reinstatement of a lost natural order; we learn that “there was once a time, long ago, when there was nothing more natural for our ancestors than to move around, throughout the land” (Kulendran Thomas 2018). This ideal of frictionless mobility is, if not apocryphal, then certainly hard to recover. Nonetheless, in proposing relocation to the cloud, Kulendran Thomas is arguably identifying the only aspect of millennial existence that has not already undergone—or is not imagined to have undergone—such a deterritorialization.

In presenting *New Eelam* as a going concern, Kulendran Thomas is following art-entrepreneurs including the Rotorelief-patenting Duchamp, Claes Oldenburg of the Ray Gun Manufacturing Company, and Warhol—who declared that “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art” (Warhol 1975: 92).[[2]](#endnote-2) More recently, in a world that is capitalist all the way down, artists like Dena Yago of K-Hole and Sean Raspet of Soylent are electing to make “an artwork that is a commercial product and is involved with the processes of production, rather than making art that was simply ‘commenting on’ these kinds of things without participating in them” (Yago 2017). “Unlike many comparable examples of “so-called ‘corporate aesthetics’,” writes Jeppe Uggelvig, “there is nothing fictional about New Eelam–in fact, it already exists as a company in its early phases of prototyping its beta edition” (Uggelvig 2016). Others are less convinced. In any case, *New Eelam*’s website—with its already familiar design and layout— is set up with just enough of the gloss of a “real” real estate enterprise but not so much that it could constitute an outright, wholesale hoax. There is, as yet, no mechanism for harvesting those flat-rate subscription fees. We cannot, as yet, invest. Instead, we can subscribe to an email list, committing ourselves only speculatively to a service that does not yet exist. An ad without an indexically linked good is marketplace minimalism as reductio. This paring back also pushes us into the conceptualist realm—to paraphrase Ad Reinhardt—of ad-as-ad. John Berger’s account of advertising dwelt on its non-satiating futurity (Berger 1972: 146). Pushing us beyond this familiar proposition that the ad can never deliver on the thing itself—the existential transformation, the satisfaction—that it promises, *New Eelam* does not provide even the symbolic product-proxy. Before ever we get to the stage of finding that the successfully advertised object, once in hand, has not made us better, more loved or more content, Kulendran Thomas takes our details and suspends us on a purgatorial subscribers’ list that fails to deliver any news.

The tonal ambivalence of *New Eelam* is confoundingly, tantalizingly difficult to resolve. As we engage with his work, Kulendran Thomas’s taut maintenance of ambiguity keeps us suspended in permanent uneasiness, fearful of missing a trick or misascribing intent. The project declares itself to be beyond critique, but is very hard to take at face value. Its complicity is so overt as to seem implausible—and yet nowhere, even at its most grotesque, does it depart from the familiar terms of our late capitalist reality. The project’s consistently re-cited backstory makes explicit the artist’s opposition to the foreign intelligence and investment-backed nationalist, populist coup that culminated in the “brutal annihilation” of the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka. Yet these deliberately placed references are just as deliberately overwhelmed by the project propaganda, which seems to glide on from genocide to interior design with chilling ease. In *60 Million Americans*, both this history of mass murder and ongoing refugee crises are invoked and then summarily dismissed from view (and contemplation). Even as it incites us to reflect on Sri Lankan politics present and past, the project refuses to engage with the issues it has raised; so absolute is the swerve enacted by both voiceover and image-stream, that we are left wondering if we have imagined it all. The project title memorializes the Neo-Marxist autonomy of the people of Eelam. Yet, *New Eelam* refuses to play along with rehearsing the contemporary artworld’s enmity for its habitual foes (capitalism, big business, globalization etc.) and the project abjures critical reflection on the Tamil peoples’ fate. So blank is its neutral capitulation that it rouses suspicion.

One response is to decide that this is, covertly, a durational work—with the project disclosing its politics only in time. Gregory Sholette has tracked the development of “ ‘art + realty’ hybrids” that exist to “mimic and perhaps intentionally mistranslate neoliberal enterprise culture,” (Sholette 2017: 102) and *New Eelam* might be considered to fit this description. Kulendran Thomas calls himself “an artist whose work manipulates the structural processes by which art produces reality” (Kulendran Thomas *Frieze* Bio). His own subscription to the principles of real-life realty is both absolute and threaded with the trickle-down fantasies of social practice that Vishmidt diagnoses in art’s entrepreneurialism activists (Vishmidt 2013). As the project develops, subscribers would become “co-owners of a growing portfolio of properties” (De Wachter 2017). Once expansion is underway, the generation of dividends would allow for “ultimately extending these necessities to people excluded from either” (Kulendran Thomas 2018). It is hard to adduce a similar process in play here, where mocking and mirroring are not separated by the passage of time, or the accretion of recognition. *New Eelam* is often classed with the post-internet art that is indicted for “[making] itself in the image of capital, and then [performing] post-internet art’s specific brand of weak, indirect criticality, where criticism of late capitalism should be inferred from an artist’s participation in, mimesis or re-presentation of, its strategies and forms of alienation, objectification and commodification” (Quaintance 2015). However, I think that what Kulendran Thomas is doing is actually much, much more interesting. In what follows, I want to demonstrate how, while *New Eelam* seems—on the surface— to glassily replicate the logic of post-ideological tech-driven enterprise, the artist gives us all we need to go beyond that initial reading. He does so formally: not in *what* he says and does, but in *how* he says and does it. The concept and rhetoric of New Eelam declares neoliberal endgame but its formal realisation undermines the work's complicity and uncovers its edge.

**Buying in to the New Eelam Brand**

In the absence or anticipation of the service it does not *yet* provide, what *New Eelam* does deliver is a concept, a philosophy and an image: in short, a brand. The basis of *New Eelam*’s allure as both lifestyle brand and branded lifestyle is elucidated by Naomi Klein who, in *No Logo*, effectively explains how “privatized public Utopias” channel nostalgia for notions of commons and community that are, in the real world, being rapidly eviscerated (Klein 2000: 158). In the same context of rampant neoliberalism, Sholette’s socially engaged art is “filling an unfulfilled social need by enacting community participation and horizontal collaboration, and by seeking to create micro-collectives and intentional communities” (Sholette 2017: 162). The intentional community invoked by *New Eelam* is one of “entire cloud countries” based on “citizenship by choice rather than by hereditary privilege” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 108). *New Eelam* hypostatizes the replacement of democracy with consumer choice by advertising a brand of lifestyle that permits its clients to supersede democratic rule. Citing recent Silicon Valley interest in Albert O. Hirschman’s theory of how the possibility of exit lends weight to the democratic voice of a resident population,[[3]](#endnote-3) *60 Million Americans* legitimizes the political viability of the choice to opt out of a society you deem to have gone astray. As Kulendran Thomas’s voiceover claims, the threat of mass exodus by “those prepared to exit from their influence” could hold governments to account (2017b: 114). It is not difficult to divine the source of its appeal to those whose companies and employers already exploit all available loopholes to avoid paying tax, complying with legislation and otherwise acknowledging the implications of democratic decision-making. New Eelam is offered as the new home for those walkaways that would choose instead to form a community in geodesic space. However it fails, conspicuously, to acknowledge that exit is no more an equal opportunities option than anything else in this world.

Because, as Berger notes, advertising “remains credible because the truthfulness of publicity is judged, not by the real fulfilment of its promises, but by the relevance of its fantasies to those of the spectator-buyer,” *New Eelam*’s fantasies are conceived and packaged to be relevant to exactly those global art audiences who will encounter it in situ (Berger 1972: 146). In the experience suite’s high-tech minimalism, they will recognize either the blueprints, or their mood-board aspirations for their own homes. The “look and feel” of the various *New Eelam* life-size domestic-space maquettes will be familiar to anyone (everyone) who has navigated such “spaces” in an IKEA context. Echoing *New Eelam*’s mission to assist subscribers in achieving dematerialized domesticity, IKEA’s “Notes on Living a Better Life at Home” observe that “home is becoming more and more fluid,” and the company resolves to help to accommodate this liquefaction process (IKEA Homepage). Both direct themselves to the young, the aspirational. Both offer modularity as the solution to (willed) mobility. *New Eelam* seduces its audiences, however, with something beyond IKEA; the experience suites promise an elite version of this ubiquity—one that is materially, spiritually and even morally superior.

*New Eelam*’s “chic international relativement standardisé” (Launay 2016) is an aesthetic that derives from a line of inference that could be traced from Constructivism, through the Bauhaus, the International Style, into the furniture of Judd, and back out into mass produced design, still, somehow, with its residue of radical social progressivism intact. The middle-class mania for Skandi-style—whether in its affordable form at IKEA or in the artisanally produced objects worshipped by the post-Pawson lifestyle minimalists—is inflected by the fact that those same citizen-consumers also (and in the context of the complete evisceration of once-robust social care structures) regard the enviably functional social models still prevailing in Scandinavia with wonder, awe and an uncomfortable envy that can be assuaged, in small part, by appropriating “Danish design” at home. The NHS may fall, but this lamp demonstrates your progressive, humanist values and will last forever. This affective import is discernible in the language used to describe these “clean,” “bare,” “modern and yet classic,” even “womblike,” implicitly wholesome interiors. Of course, modernist architecture carries an alternative, and less savoury set of connotations, too. In *60 Million Americans* aerial footage of white, neo-international style apartment blocks adorned with abundantly green, prosperous planting play again the voiceover’s damning indictment of how, in Sri Lanka, the contemporary art market “became a symbol of economic prosperity and thereby served as retrospective justification for the very violence upon which that prosperity was founded” (Kulendran Thomas 2018). The voiceover goes on to describe what happened to the people of Eelam in the course of an ethnic cleansing that began militarily but continued economically (2018). The un-remarked-upon visual association of this style of building project with the film’s critique of genocidal violence enacted upon the Tamil people lingers beyond this sequence. It might reframe our view of that otherwise emphatically neutral, modern, progressive interior—particularly as these are the same apartment blocks we see when the voiceover comes to the crux of its pitch to ask, in blank-face optimism: “So could this means of production, the home, be reorganized through collective access rather than individual ownership?” (2018).

**New Eelam’s Ideal Homes**

In many of the *New Eelam* show homes, the “blank horror and emptiness of the bourgeois interior” is dominated by a grey modular couch that is always placed in communication with at least one screen (Steyerl 2012b: 62). At Stockholm’s Tensta konsthall, the couch was replaced by an unforgivingly flat platform bed-couch that demands either strong core muscles or a fully horizontal position. Perhaps a supine, screen-oriented existence is an inevitable outcome of the decision to walk out of the democratic pact of engagement. Furniture is provided by NEW TENDENCY, a Berlin company of designers, whose Bauhaus-tradition-trained credentials are explicitly articulated on their website.[[4]](#endnote-4) Notwithstanding their training, current prices indicate that this design collective do not subscribe to the deeper Bauhaus logic of mass producible modernism, designed to be affordable to the masses.[[5]](#endnote-5) Of course, the incorporation of goods attributed to this high-minded, commercial company also ensures that the company receives further advertising from its incorporation within the artwork-as-ad.

Between the screens, sculptures—either open geometric structures or solid biomorphic forms—seem to promise a contemplative existence. At the Hamburger Bahnhof and the 11th Gwangju Biennale the show-home was presented sitting on an underlit chrome platform, resembling a low stage. This spring-like base dramatically enhances the sense that to enter the installation is to enter a potentially hallowed space, one that is structurally and atmospherically differentiated from that of the gallery and/or the world. Under the floor, diamond-shape joists and bright lights give the impression that the whole “experience suite” interior is about to blast off, into the future. A tepid palette prevails: deeply restful grey and peach, with blue accents from two tanks and a large screen, displaying the ultra-simple *New Eelam* logo: a long horizontal rectangle over a polo-mint circle. In its spare geometric simplicity, this icon, ubiquitous throughout *New Eelam*, might once have summoned Constructivism, El Lissitzky or the Bauhaus; now, after so many designers’ appropriations and homages, it most immediately suggests a mobile phone. However, much as they seem to delight in bland neutrality, sustained scrutiny of Kulendran Thomas’s pristine installation photos of the experience-suites reveal something startling. Spending time looking at rather than inhabiting the installations delivers the realisation of just how concertedly composed and curated they are. The longer we gaze, the more these look like surreptitious specific objects: three-dimensional constructions in which materials assert themselves obdurately, and “the whole thing is made according to complex purposes, and these are not scattered but asserted by one form” (Judd 2005: 184-185). Once we’ve apprehended this, it seems implausible that we should be allowed inside at all – and this realisation that our situation within the work might be blinding us to its import should, I think, push us to examine the experience suites much more carefully. It might just propel us to zoom out, to try to see the wood for the trees.

**[Fig. 1]**

Only plants are abundant here—spilling demurely through the tiers of shelving units, their leaves filtering the air for any potential human co-habitants, and the occasional fish. At the Gwangju Biennale, a printed tension fabric served as the wall/screen. With its soft-focus panorama of cumulus and cirrus clouds in lilacs and mauves, it’s a cloudscape that might equally grace the cover of a meditation CD or mindfulness manual—except, of course, for the fact that its paradisiac qualities are overlaid with another iteration of that large *New Eelam* logo. We are witness to the branding of the blue (and pink and purple) sky itself. At the 2016 Berlin Biennale, three banners occupied the overhead space within the high-ceilinged Akademie der Künste. Two of these depicted not Warhol’s merry pillow-proliferation, but a single pillow superimposed so as to float above a dramatically-lit tree canopy. Life in *New Eelam* does look rather solitary. These ideal environments are not meant to be experienced as family—or even couples’— homes. Nor are they the neo-(liberal)-communes of its real-life counterpart, “Roam,” which offers a “network of global co-living spaces” (Roam Homepage). Just as ‘co-working’ has long ceased to entail any degree of social involvement with one’s co-workers, so, we presume, ‘co-living’ can be similarly devoid of the hell of other people.

Back in Berlin, the pair of lonesomely solo pillows flanked another banner, which show three perfectly exotic stargazer lilies in a clear glass vase. There’s a lot of oddly isolated plant-life in the doctrinaire minimalist life, making these banners perfectly aligned with the iconography of cover-art preferred by contemporary minimalist lifestyle publishers.[[6]](#endnote-6) In the experience-suites, leaves tumble in carefully composed spills over shelves and down rails: standing in for other potential life forms. Apparently these are “hydroponic home-farming ecosystems in which fish fertilize vegetation that in turn cleans” (Tensta konsthall 2017), though there’s little visible to suggest anything edible is being farmed here. Even if they cannot be consumed in any way except aesthetically, the plants function as a kind of organic virtue-signaling—their every leaf a pennant flying in commemoration of *New Eelam*’s vague environmental well-meaningness. Now that eco-awareness has moved from the margins of earnest outsiderdom to being recognized as a crucial component of developing brand likability, gestures of this kind abound in the domain of the *New Eelam* target audience. Your local cafe hosts a “living wall” of plant-life while unconcernedly dispensing unrecyclable take-away cups to a customer-base too upwardly mobile to sit and drink on location. And yet, these planting initiatives, like those on show in *New Eelam*, also figure as metaphors of a kind of eco-extractivism.

**[Fig. 2]**

Pulling against the effect of these exquisite botanical stylings, in several of the *New Eelam* configurations, columns of aluminium mesh introduce a further dissonance. Looking like nothing so much as cooling towers that house massive servers, these structures suggest that the entire edifice really is powered (like so many other digital enterprises) by data—condensing itself into (im)material existence via the cloud. As Kulendran Thomas himself observed in 2014, we engage with “today’s most ubiquitous networked media platforms [...] as their very materials for all sorts of algorithmically data-processed purposes that remain mostly invisible” (Kulendran Thomas 2014). The experience suite renders visible this obfuscation. When these surreptitiously cage-like modules are encountered in the ultra-bright space of the wall-less suite, they echo the similarly unnervingly subtle wire-imprinted walls of Doris Salcedo’s *Neither*.[[7]](#endnote-7) Under this reading, that opaque black light bulb in its transparent hood looks like a microphone in masquerade. Though everything about the structure should suggest openness, clear passage, unencumbered mobility, carceral implications carry through in this private, domestic space without walls, without shelter, without anywhere in which to hide. Meanwhile, in the corporate world beyond the gallery, as Sholette remarks, “ ‘Flexibility,’ ‘nomadism’ and ‘spontaneity’ are the hallmarks of management” (Sholette 2017: 170). At the 2018 *I Was Raised On the Internet* installation at MCA Chicago, there was no mesh to be seen. Instead, the shelving unit was arranged in such a way (with more of its face panels removed) as to create an open 3D structure that is strongly evocative of LeWitt’s skeleton-framed modular cubes. In the context of an exhibition dedicated to exploring how the internet has altered our experience, this room whose walls have been replaced with see-through indicators of the walls-that-were materially evokes our collective, compelled expulsion into a post-privacy environment predicated on “a new kind of social contract that was no longer based on individual rights—for example to privacy or property.” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 105). Again, there’s nothing new here: nothing to which we are not already subscribed.

**[Fig. 3]**

Notwithstanding its idealization of uninhibited, unbordered movement, there is no attempt to suggest that subscribers to *New Eelam* might want to live in any of the world’s less familiar or less immediately congenial neighborhoods. Footage in the *Liquid Citizenship* film identifies Berlin, London, San Francisco. A digital map plots a course (on a smartphone) from to New York to London to Berlin: hardly unmapped territories for the contemporary art-hipster. In this, it intersects again with Roam, whose current locations are Miami, Bali, Tokyo, San Francisco and London. Nor is there any suggestion of New Eelamites attempting to achieve real integration with the locals or environment, even in readymade hipster-colonized zones. Instead, with “your personal settings and services coming with you from city to city” (Kulendran Thomas 2017a) there’s no need even to transcend the borders of one’s comfort zone. In an astute essay on how Air BnB drives the aesthetic homogenization of interior design across the world, Kyle Chayka writes of how, “[e]ven as it markets unique places as consumable goods, it helps its users travel without actually having to change their environment, or leave the warm embrace of AirSpace”: a by-now homogenized, global aesthetic of hipster comfort (Chayka 2016). Just as *New Eelam* implicitly positions itself at a level up from Air BnB, so the *New Eelam* aesthetic looks like the apotheosis or desired destiny of Airspace. Nicely neutral, replete with polite mid-century modern, Scandinavian and industrial references, and wired for high-speed broadband, Airspace facilitates exotic travel without the vicissitudes of unfamiliarity. Since its “social turn”, art’s uncontainable expansion into new zones of activity, its mania for “absorbing and re-presenting in its own domain that which was not previously deemed an instance of art” (Vishmidt 2013) has been conceived both as a “claiming [of] new territory for practice” (Price 2002) and as a voracious “colonization of neighbouring fields” (Madison 2017: 174-175). In its nannyish promise to make it “so that the whole world could be home” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 114), *New Eelam*’s neoliberal imperialism is also curiously Victorian in timbre. In light of Kulendran Thomas’s sustained commitment to interrogating globalization and, moreover, his earlier observations on the structural effects of hipsters on neighbourhoods (Kulendran Thomas 2014), the will “to move around between cities, as you wish” (Kulendran Thomas 2016) demands to be read as the 21st century way to establish an empire on which the sun never sets.

**StARTtup**

**[Fig. 4]**

The *New Eelam* installation at *The Present in Drag* (Berlin, 2016) included a bar-like wall with three high black geometrical ATLAS stools before a narrow concrete shelf, each of which is seated in front of a small white-framed screen, with accompanying white headphones. Again: blonde wood, white walls (if any), and this time with some gently washed-out gestural marks in acrylic on canvas “softening” the space. These same marks recur in various iterations, sometimes as part of the artist’s interventions upon the works reconfigured for *When....* The space of the experience suite looks like any Starbucks or other 21st-century coffeehouse that has been reconfigured from social space to public-but-private hub for communing with one’s own screen. Like them, it has been designed (with headphones pre-installed) to enable the consumer’s full auditory, haptic and visual isolation—or abstraction—from their immediate physical context. The difference here, however, is that the interface devices—and, accordingly, the “content” they stream—have not been brought in by the punters. To pull up a stool to the counter is to deliver one’s attention to advertising from *New Eelam* itself. To interact with these emphatically nonspecific spaces is to enter an immersive advertising experience, to enact a perfect feedback loop, and to project oneself into a caricature of 21st-century silo mentality. All that can be watched in *New Eelam* is *New Eelam* content. One inhabits this utopia as though from within a digital hamster ball: untouched by the world outside, subscribers roll along in quarantined isolation.

For minimalists and New Eelamites alike, it is technology that enables mobility and, ultimately, dematerialized existence. Sifting the slew of recent books promising to impart the secrets of minimal living delivers again and again, an image of a “clean”ly empty, domestic white cube, in which is displayed, in pristine, mass-produced singularity, an Apple laptop[[8]](#endnote-8): the lance of Steyerl’s contemporary freelancer (Steyerl 2012a: 126). What we are supposed to see here is a symbol of bare, stripped-back self-denial. Yet the device is presumably connected to Wi-Fi, and what could be more maximal than the Internet? The image performs a superficial demonstration of lessness, but the Wi-Fi-enabled room is ahum with proliferant, entropically expanding muchness. In *60 Million Americans*, Kulendran Thomas asserts that Marx’s belief was that “technology rather than politics is the primary driver of historical change” (Kulendran Thomas 2017a). As the *Liquid Citizenship* micro-film spins the viewer smoothly across a range of locations, what remains stable is the omnipresence of either phone or laptop—the means by which “some of the world’s most charismatic cities”—can be accessed (Kulendran Thomas 2016). Prophet of lifestyle minimalism, Fumio Sasaki, excels in splicing together dematerializing minimalism as purification, brand worship, moral superiority and spiritual enlightenment. In his *Goodbye, Things: On Minimalist Living*, Sasaki writes of worshipping (to the point of sartorially imitating) Steve Jobs as the minimalist who set out to make “products that would change the world” (Sasaki 2017: 201). Apparently untroubled by the dubious orientalism that runs through much of the minimalist lifestyle movement, he intuits no dissonance when he writes that a “simple Zen-like apartment is home to some of the latest gadgets”; nor, indeed, when he observes that “Google and Facebook are pretty heavily into Zen and meditation” (Sasaki 2017: 8). The redemption once promised by art is now achievable via technology. Like the zeppelin-tracking desert dwellers we see in *60 Million Americans*, the project is technology-transfixed. Within *New Eelam*, humans have not simply developed new technologies; what we are witnessing is “the evolution of our species through connected technology” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 97).

As Kulendran Thomas elsewhere observes, contemporary art and neoliberal enterprise share a “very particular (and pretty much identical) type of subjectivity – both interpellating the viewer / consumer / citizen as a liberated, autonomous individual” (Kulendran Thomas 2014). Accordingly, the voiceover blends the epiphanic optimism and overt utopian excitement of the startup with the vaguely feel-good collusive philosophizing of so much contemporary art. *New Eelam* will offer a “continually revolving property portfolio”; the model will “benefit from network effects” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b 110-111). Mirroring the genre conventions of the tech startup origin story, the project’s inception is framed both as the opportunistic “hack” solution to the hero-entrepreneur’s experience of a ubiquitous problem and as potential route to the realization of a much more grandiose ambition. While the startup IPO press release speaks in an impossibly assured future tense, the artist statement models a twitchy conditional tense that flings potential everywhere but avoids making itself a hostage to fortune. Expertly meshing these rhetorical tics, Kulendran Thomas’s voiceover in *60 Million Americans* builds hyperbolically, only to close on a careful conditional claim that: “it *could* become ever more feasible for alternatives to emerge beyond geographical borders, formed by citizens of the cloud for whom the whole world could be home” (2017b: 114).

**Fictions and Fault Lines**

In an era characterized by mass migration, artists are inevitably compelled to consider questions of shelter and emergency housing.[[9]](#endnote-9) Opening with montaged images of walls, borders and people desperately trying to cross them, *60 million Americans* launches its sales pitch with an earnest nod to those who lack the kind of citizenship that guarantees basic human rights. Then, having established its ethical credentials, by signaling exactly the kind of “criticality” that is “now taught, learned, rehearsed and played out to create value – crucial in fact at the top end of the art market” (Kulendran Thomas 2014),[[10]](#endnote-10) the film proceeds to interpolate a very different class of client-base. The service it sells is no “solution” to the problems of enforced migration. Instead, what is being offered to subscribers is the means by which to live more comfortably, smoothly and ultimately cheaply as a special class of hypermobile global elite. Although the swerve ought to make us queasy, this substitution-shift is carried off with an eerie formal smoothness. However the artist sutures his clips together, a chasm persists between globetrotting and asylum-seeking. Pivoting off that unlikely parallel, *60 million Americans* encourages us to align ourselves with the innovators, “the Silicon Valley blockchain entrepreneur Balaji Srinivasan,” Sergey Brin and Larry Page (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 102). The voiceover rather belabors its descriptions of the humble backgrounds out of which sprang these geniuses. Although the voiceover presents them as rags-to-riches heroes, these men are still the beneficiaries of exactly the types of blue-chip educations that most definitely do open doors into worlds of unimaginable promise and opportunity. The road from Stanford to Silicon Valley is well trodden, and it’s not especially wide. Impressive though they are, these very origin stories and others of their ilk have long been used as the improbable proof of the American Capitalist meritocratic pudding, used to defend and prop up damaging and economically divisive social structures.

It is in its wider economic dogwhistling that the *New Eelam* proposition is most provocatively problematic. Its promise of a “more liquid form of citizenship beyond borders; citizenship by choice rather than hereditary privilege” expressly ignores the fact that this idealized vision of a world beyond the workplace, a world of constant and unconstrained hypermobility, presumes a very particular, and particularly privileged subject (2017b: 108). The “global citizens” invoked by Kulendran Thomas are rarely found in the wild outside of a few choice, “charismatic” locations. The assertion that “more and more jobs are automated” brooks no argument, but the ensuing suggestion that “the future of work looks increasingly like what artists do” pulls the lens towards a much more specific and more privileged demographic (2017b: 109). Those for whom “it’s perhaps the home—rather than the factory or office—that’s becoming a primary site of production for an increasingly post-labour economy” are the privileged, highly educated, global nomads given to calling themselves “creatives” (2017b: 109). This kind of work—demanding no equipment beyond a laptop and, of course, internet access—is exactly the sort of “intellectual labor” typically performed by those whose birth-circumstances have permitted them the opportunity to gain non-vocational humanities educations and, compounding the issue further still, underpaid internships and other sorts of expensive “experience.” The work that will sustain New Eelamites is intellectual labor of the most mystical order: “You could be wherever you need to be, to be inspired by whatever fires your imagination” (Kulendran Thomas 2016). This “you” is not co-extensive with the much larger group of workers deemed replaceable by machines, those for whom the automation of jobs promises only poverty and the kind of precarity that kills. Even confining our attention to the global West, the most low-paid and unprivileged jobs still demand that workers are physically present somewhere, and not just in order to maintain the discipline and surveillance culture of compelling workers to clock in and out. The care jobs that are not frequently filled by Stanford men require the physical co-presence of the worker’s body with the ailing, aging and mess-producing bodies they must tend.

**Freedom and Freefall**

As we should by now already understand, one worker’s flexibility is another worker’s freefall. The world of work that has freed itself from the workplace, from geographic fixity entirely, is also potentially a world of zero-hours contracts, zero pensions, zero coverage for pregnancy, disability or ill health. Kulendran Thomas slides round these sticky, tricky outcomes of our voracious appetite for a world of goods and services provided only when and where we need them: convenience here compels great inconvenience (destructive precarity, mental fragility, physical ill-health) elsewhere. As Jussi Parikka compels us to remember, like the “hardware” that persists (often toxically) beyond our desire for it, “hardwork” remains entangled in the infrastructures of even the most “immaterial” of industries (Parikka 2014: 77). The convenience of a Prime delivery of what I want to my door within twenty-four hours relies on the unpausing physical exertion of a worker who may not even be allowed the convenience of a bathroom break. Steyerl writes cogently on the freelancer as counterpart to the mercenary, and, significantly, she identifies Saskia Sassen’s “Global City” as the natural habitat they share (Steyerl 2012a: 130). However, contra the idealization—in *New Eelam* and throughout the contemporary neoliberal universe—of the freedoms of freelancing, Steyerl also identifies how “the only freedoms that we share around the globe today” are those she calls negative freedoms: “the freedom from social security, the freedom from the means of making a living, the freedom from accountability and sustainability, the freedom from free education, healthcare, pensions and public culture, the loss of standards of public responsibility, and in many places, the freedom from the rule of law” (Steyerl 2012a: 122-123).

Beyond the work(non)place, the life that can accommodate constant flitting between bubbles in networked cities must be recognized as a life without familial or other care responsibilities: no obligations to aging parents whose medical situations demand that they remain within range of a particular clinic; no responsibilities to school-age children who demand proximity to a class-room, a curriculum or, we might hope, friends. None of this—the unwieldy flipside of the liquid, unbordered, free moving lifestyle promised to the brave frontierspeople of *New Eelam*—registers in the advertising. Peter Osborne argues that the historical concept of “the contemporary” “involves a projection of unity onto the differential totality of the times of human lives,” and Hito Steyerl, paraphrasing Osborne, writes of how contemporary art “projects a fictional unity onto a variety of different ideas of time and space, thus providing a common surface where there was none.” (Osborne 2013: 22; Steyerl 2017a: 78). In its shiningly innocent total obliviousness, *New Eelam*’s fictive common surface of universal circumstances and shared concerns is one that presupposes the desires and needs of contemporary subjects who have evolved beyond attachment to other (specific) humans, as well as to retrograde notions of citizenship, society, responsibility. On the evidence, the New Eelamite life without (beyond) possessions is also a life without (beyond) relationships, society. Never mind, though, as even in a world of total social atomization, subscribing to the right global housing service ensures that you can always “Show up and find community anywhere” (Roam Homepage).

When Steyerl describes a “zone for permanent transit... a package for opportunistic statelessness” as “somewhat extraterritorial,” she is writing about duty free (“freeport”) art storage spaces—but the profile is strangely apt for the apartments through which will pass a stream of the envisioned New Eelamites (Steyerl 2017a: 79-80). As the burgeoning freeport-developers and their clients know very well, it’s very hard to pay tax if you don’t have an address. In light of the fore-going discussion of social ties, maybe we need to bring a new inflection to bear on the remit of the term “Duty Free”? The liquid citizens of *New Eelam* are promised dematerialized freedom from containment that the film—quoting Marx’s line, “all that is solid melts into air”–figures again and again as images of smoke and steam (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 113). Yet these are no benign, naturally occurring vapours. Instead, they emanate from industrial chimneystacks, explosions, demolitions and tear gas deployment. What melts into air may float free, but is probably noxious, definitely irritating and possibly carcinogenic or corrosive.

**All that is not solid**

Dematerialization preoccupied the artworld in the late 60s and 70s; it preoccupies the tech world now. Beyond shared rhetorical resonances, the contemporary art world and the tech world share other economic characteristics. They are united, too, in their capacity to deny, occlude and distance themselves from their material realities. Cloud computing itself—even as we use it in our obsolescent bricks-and-mortar home— obfuscates its need for the material resources it consumes. It denies the fact that, as Jussi Parikka so persuasively argues, “deep time resources of the earth are what makes technology happen” (Parikka 2014: 11). More specifically: we need to understand the technology that produces the cloud in terms of “toxic materiality”, as well as to acknowledge that “(cloud computing is still to a large extent powered by carbon emission–heavy energy production)” (Parikka 2014: 62; 48). Parikka reminds us “of the environmentally disastrous consequences of planned obsolescence of electronic media, the energy costs of digital culture, and, for instance, the neocolonial arrangements of material and energy extraction across the globe” (Parikka 2014: 10). This issue is only going to become more pressing, especially if we are to follow master-minimalist’s example of photographing everything we own, discarding our possessions and then storing immense numbers of images in the cloud for posterity (Sasaki 2017: 51; 94; 217). The outsourcing of cognitive functions is not free of material repercussions. Visually, but not verbally, *60 Million Americans* acknowledges this threat when it surreptitiously cross-cuts fetishistic footage of shiny new smartphones being produced with images of the solar panels in a desert that inevitably connote massive server farms. The minimalist obsession with escaping materiality extends, inevitably, from the home to that which it houses, as the spiritual purity and asceticism of Zen Buddhism are redirected into the new bodily-mortification-as-morality of millennial Körperkultur (Sasaki 2017: 25, 36, 39, 98, 172, 190).

The dematerialized dream of “[a] new Eelam for all, with its idea liberated from its land” leads us towards Travis Diehl’s characterization of the tech brand’s ideal “pure product” as being both “idea without object” and “mind without body.” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 109; Diehl 2018). For today’s tech companies, Diehl explains, “the ultimate goal [is] brand without substance—the pure product” (Diehl 2018). As a result, “tech entrepreneurs do all they can to conceal any physical infrastructure behind the product’s front-end interface. And the more insubstantial the back-end, the better—the more fully imbricated they can become—tending toward the ultimate goal of brand without substance—the pure product” (Diehl 2018). However, notwithstanding all such efforts, and as Saskia Sassen has demonstrated, even the most liquid instruments devised by digital finance remain inextricable from material conditions: fuel, raw materials, waste, bodies, geopolitics (Sassen 2008: 342). However we abstract, reify, quarantine, ghettoize or refuse to see these realities, the hypermobility of digital real estate still depends upon the complex material substrate it denies. The weight of evidence explains their techworld’s determination to distance itself from the dirty matter of its material and enduring effects on the world. In an essay on Raspet’s Soylent formulations, Diehl posits this drive towards dematerialization as the inevitable extension of the course of Greenbergian modernism, suggesting that: “The trajectory of material to immaterial restates the directionality of the historical avant-garde’s increasing abstraction, increasing autonomy, and increasing denial” (Diehl 2018). Crucially, Diehl associates this notion of “idea without object” with “mind without body”—which, ultimately, is going to lead us back to Conceptual Art.

**Being realistic**

While *New Eelam* denies its own materiality, it unapologetically avows its predication upon capitalism. The concept presumes capitalism as its context. Kulendran Thomas’s idea that “[maybe real long-term structural transformation might be more likely to be achieved by making something that works better rather than by requiring ideological choice” is a perfect proposition for the design-led logic of the post-ideological, design-driven techworld (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 114). In the wake of avant-gardist revolution and rupture, we have problem solving, “hacks,” “apps,” and tweaking to make things, “work better.” For Latour, “[d]esign is a task that follows to make [...] something more lively, more commercial, more usable, more user’s friendly, more acceptable, more sustainable, and so on, depending on the various constraints to which the project has to answer” (Latour 2008). It is design that produces the remedial smoothness, the inescapable seamlessness of a world that keeps reforming, repairing itself around you, in which we can no longer feel the cracks, the ruptures between ideas, a world in which *New Eeelam* as a new economic model could be “grown without friction from within capitalism” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 113). Design, argues Latour, connotes humility and modesty. Containing within it “nothing foundational,” it is “an antidote to hubris and to the search for absolute certainty, absolute beginnings, and radical departures” (Holert 2010). It is where art goes when it wants to be post-ideological.

*New Eelam*’s product-design-as-solution presumes a starting point in what Mark Fisher calls capitalist realism. Kulendran Thomas explicitly alludes to how “other neo-Marxist revolutions around the world attempted to establish utopian societies based on equality for all their citizens.” Then, having aligned its mission with these noble ideals, he goes on to observe that: “However *in reality* [my emphasis] these revolutions were led by authoritarian regimes that attempted to establish these societies by force” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 113). We can discern what Fisher describes as “pragmatic adjustment” (Fisher 2017: 162) in Kulendran Thomas’s subsequent proposal that “instead of opposing incumbent systems by force, perhaps a new economic model could be grown without friction by starting with *the reality* [my emphasis, again] of the existing system and rewiring it to evolve in an entirely different dimension” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 113-114). Fisher teaches that it is the disavowal of capitalism’s ontological status as ideology that creates the conditions in which capitalist realism thrives (Fisher 2017: 161). In Kulendran Thomas’s explicitly post-ideological, post-political project, he signals just enough realist regret for the failure of the radical social programmes and neo-Marxist revolutions of the twentieth century to suggest that he wishes it were otherwise, just enough to provide the Barthesian innoculation that makes it possible to swallow capitalism as given. This is what makes *New Eelam* palatable to the audience that is either (or both) the target of its advertising and the target of its submerged critique.

**Artwash and Antisepsis: *When Platitudes Become Form***

With Conceptual Art, we get the dematerialization of the art object: art as idea as idea, no longer tied to material things. Many artists hoped that if art could escape objecthood, it would no longer be fated to exist as a commodity. Art could, as a result, escape the market. The exhibition that both accelerated and actualised this dematerialization was Harald Szeeman’s *Live in Your Head When Attitudes Become Form (Works, Processes, Concepts, Situations, Information)*, a.k.a*. When Attitudes Become Form*. In Szeeman’s original statement, he insists that: “The artists represented in this present exhibition are in no way object-makers. On the contrary, they aspire to freedom from the object” (Szeeman 1969). Freedom from objecthood was supposed to bring freedom from the market. However, as Lippard ultimately concluded (Lippard 1997b: 263), and Art & Language more bluntly observed of the exhibition, “[a]s a countercultural idea about art that was of political and economic implication by virtue of its lack of commodity status, it was simply laughable” (Art & Language 2006: 114). Szeeman excelled at first colonizing countercultural art forms, and then selling the concept of dematerialization to artists, audiences and, ultimately, a re-configured art market. Dematerialization occurred, but art and money stayed hand-in-hand. They just slid into a new and (ever more lucrative) dance. By way of a conclusion, I want to consider what is at stake when that exhibition turns up (albeit spectrally) in *When Platitudes Become Form*: the source of the artworks that Kulendran Thomas embeds within *New Eelam*.

In 2013 Hito Steyerl remarked that “Not many people dare talk about post-mass-murder, gentrification-driven art booms in, for example, Turkey or Sri Lanka” (Steyerl 2017c: 138). But a year earlier, in *When Platitudes Become Form* (2012—), Christopher Kulendran Thomas set out to do just that. In transposing attitudes into platitudes, the artist does much more than solicit a momentary smirk of recognition from his art-literate audience. What I want to suggest is that in onomastically summoning the 1969 exhibition, Kulendran Thomas calls us to attend to the art world’s historic and enduring capacity for self-congratulatory self-deception, particularly when it comes to inconvenient and unpalatable truths about money.

In the decades since 1969, ‘contemporary’ art has continued to develop in heavily conceptual directions. If not fully divorced, then art and object remained conspicuously alienated—and yet art is still very much a money game. The fact that art is still entangled with money might not shock or trouble. Except that at its worst, as Steyerl and others have convincingly demonstrated, the contemporary artworld works as a kind of antiseptic footbath through which the bloody money of disaster capitalism can pass on its way to being washed clean—on its way to becoming artwash (Steyerl 2017b: 188). More specifically, as we learn in *60 Million Americans*, in post-2009 Sri Lanka, a “flourishing regional art scene ended up corroborating the outward performance of a free society by which Sri Lanka’s president evaded international accountability” (Kulendran Thomas 2017b: 99). In a global media context within which “culture” is still, invidiously, mis-translated as “civilisation,” a vibrant contemporary art market plays well. When, in the aftermath of horror, mere rapid economic expansion business-as-business might be deemed crass, art “lends primordial accumulation a whiff of postconceptual razzmatazz” (Steyerl 2012c: 93-94). In Sri Lanka, as Kulendran Thomas explains, genocidal violence against the Tamil population was very quickly succeeded by a dramatic and strategic cultivation of the art market. Both art and sportswear manufacturing expanded exponentially in this period in which contemporary art functioned as “a kind of layer or proxy which pretends that everything is still ok” (Steyerl 2017a: 89). With the advent of the artwashing of mass murder into “cultural vibrancy”, art’s imbrication with the market progressed from grubby to positively, inexpiably sordid.

In *When Platitudes Become Form*, Kulendran Thomas purchases contemporary works of art by artists operating within the Sri Lankan gallery system and reconfigures them via a “metabolistic” (Lind 2016: 44) practice of translation. Kulendran Thomas explains how, by buying artworks through the Sri Lankan gallery system, “I physically translate what counts as ‘contemporary’ in Sri Lanka into what is expected of the ‘contemporary’ at the heart of art-imperial power and then exploit the difference to set something else in motion, something that might exceed the parameters of contemporary art” (Kulendran Thomas 2013). In short, he takes Sri Lankan artists’ works, and makes them saleable on the global contemporary art market. To do so, he deploys an arsenal of hyper-ubiquitous ultra-contemporary materials: expanding foam, neon pink Perspex, plastic sheeting, ath-leisure apparel, reclaimed denim.[[11]](#endnote-11) Figurative paintings, drawings and sculptures are set within surrounds or under lenses that provoke us to consider them from an altogether different perspective—to perform a wholly other kind of analysis, one that considers the art-object within a partially conceptual paradigm that prevails in contemporary art in the West. Much like the plant-life in the experience suites, these artwork-specimens are extracted from Sri Lankan art-ecologies, transported into new settings within the *Platitudes*, and transfigured. The artist describes how, in this work, “[t]he patronizing openness of instrumentalized cultural exchange is explicitly perverted here by the colonial trading patterns that it usually masks” (Gynp 2013).

In analyzing the actions he performs on the work of these contemporary artists whose market value rides on the rapidly improving fortunes of a country engaged in exactly the rapidly expanding bubble-practices identified by Steyerl, it is important that the works Kulendran Thomas buys for this “project” are purchased in the art marketplace (via their galleries) rather than via any kind of artist-to-artist circumvention. Equally crucially, the objects he buys are not subsumed smoothly into what he makes of them. Instead, the elements sit out proud from each other, often caught together under netting, as though their separate time zones might otherwise jostle them apart. As these very different materials, formal strategies and conventions are juxtaposed within one work, we are enjoined to become attentive to the gap between these very different “nows”: now suddenly brought into unlikely, uneasy collapse, right at the moment where they serve to function as tokens within an art game that is sustained for its capacity to lend the impression of a smooth and edifying capitalist takeover. This is the same capitalist takeover that installs Western humanist values with its left hand while it builds new factories with its right. A clash that is first experienced aesthetically is suddenly apprehended politically. If, as Peter Osborne suggests, the concept of the contemporary projects a surface of sameness across sites of difference, then *When Platitudes Become Form* launches a projectile at that problematic veneer of unified art time-and-space. The “site of impact” onto which the Sri Lankan contemporary art market has been projected is, as Kulendran Thomas renders absolutely clear, the concept of a Sri-Lankan nation from which the Tamil minority population have been expelled and exterminated. Right at the moment of art’s transubstantiation from thing to process, object to verb, the work in *Attitudes* disavowed its commodity status and denied its relation to the market. Kulendran Thomas’s *Platitudes* snatches contemporary Sri Lankan art in the act of a much more significant kind of transformation: the moment when art is transformed into a screen that diverts our view from genocide.

**Exit Denied: In Conclusion, There Is No Way Out**

As the art that decorates the experience suites we enter in the gallery and see in the films, *When Platitudes Become Form* is incorporated into *New Eelam*: either as self-referencing gimmick, or as the gesture that indicates a way out. The *Platitudes* art that hangs on the walls of this “postcapitalist startup” (Lind 2016: 44) distracts us away from that strange mesh, the absence of shelter, the propaganda that would be wall to wall if the experience suites were fully walled. Being thus cannibalized, *Platitudes* enfolds all of its implications into the larger *New Eelam* project. The dematerialization enacted on the art object in *Attitudes* is mapped onto the process Kulendran Thomas performs upon real estate and, as a consequence, citizenship itself.

*When Attitudes Become Form* represents the moment of art’s most audacious public resistance to its commodity status. But notwithstanding its audacity, and its low-fi, gritty glamour, it failed to release art from the market. Art is still for investing; we just do it differently—in ways that have real and disturbing effects far beyond the artworld. Summoning the utopian moment of 1960s radicalism, Kulendran Thomas’s vision for *New Eelam* invites us to share in, to enter into, to literally subscribe to an analogously attractive 21st-century utopianism— and then, perhaps, to catch ourselves. Embedding the history of *Attitudes* within *Platitudes* and *Platitudes* (matryoshka-like) within *New* *Eelam*—the work directs us to apprehend instructive parallels. It pushes us to recognise the parallel between an art that tries—via dematerialization—to escape the market, and a new economic model that tries—by the same means—to escape material reality and social responsibility. When we engage with *New Eelam*, we experience the seduction and hope of the promise of escaping the material realm. The work conscripts us into imagining ourselves as the morally superior advance-guard of a new world order; but then, against its own grain, leads us to recognition of how *New Eelam*, and the future it proffers, wilfully obfuscate the fact that, even our most cloudy (vaporous) and cloudy (murky) technologies operate within and through “material conditions and practices, place-boundedness, and thick social environments” (Sassen 2008: 342). No matter how much we minimalize, we can no more escape those material conditions—which is to say imparities, atrocities, gross actualities—than art can escape its imbrication with money at its grubbiest. However it sits in the belly of the beast, art is, was and ever shall mean business.

**Contributor’s Note**

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1. Kulendran Thomas works in collaboration with Creative Director, Annika Kuhlman. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. On art-entrepreneurialism as “garden of ruins”, see Price 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Hirschman 1990. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Beyond the Bauhaus, the company name also invokes the international Neue Tendenzen group of the 1960s and 70s. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. At the time of writing, NEW TENDENCY’s “contemporary functional and formal interpretation of Donald Judd’s minimal original” corporate table was retailing at €6,426.00 and the list price for their non-standard standard lamp was €1,570. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See the covers of Regina Wong’s *Make Space: A Minimalist's Guide to the Good and the Extraordinary*; Alice Richards’s *Living the Minimalist Lifestyle*; Jennifer Gilbert’s *Minimalist Lifestyle—Minimalism 101—Declutter your Life for Ultimate Productivity*; Simon Ruddy’s *Minimalist Living: A Minimalism Guide to A Non-Materialistic Life* On the proliferation of live plants in contemporary art, see Furtado 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Use of netting also recurs frequently in *When Platitudes Become* Form, in works such as: *Couple with Mandolin* (2015) by Jayantha Pushpakumara and *Bi-Fiction* by Muvindu Binoy and *Untitled VI* by Nuwan Nalaka, both purchased from Art Space Sri Lanka and reconfigured by Kulendran Thomas. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See the cover and pp. 9,10, 12 of Sasaki 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For a high-profile example among so many others, see the installation of Hiwa K’s *When We Were Inhaling Images* outside the Halle at documenta 14, 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. It is worth noting here that Kulendran Thomas (2014) specifically indicts Conceptual Art with having generated this immediately absorbed and academicized criticality that is “an elitist commodity that provides easy listening for the failed political Left.” [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. On sportswear in art, see Federova 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)