electrons are FREE

BONDING
LifeSpace
A portrait of our host
BONDING: electrons are FREE

Emily Fong and Alan Fairlamb
In conversation with WCAIR
Semay Wu and Ania Urbanowska

16th February - 8th April 2023
LifeSpace Science Art Research Gallery, Dundee, Scotland
Uod.ac.uk/bonding

What happens when an artist and a scientist meet through the time of Covid?

Two radical spirits bond to explore the common orbital of art and science from a unique perspective.

For one week in 2022, Emily Fong and Alan Fairlamb occupied LifeSpace 24/7, sampling and seeing the space in a new light by bonding with one another and their surroundings. Not unlike parasites themselves, they wished no harm, but desired to come to an accommodation with their ‘host.’ Engaging with the building as body, the pair underwent a unique process of manipulating the environment to suit their needs. Instead of working from home, they were ‘homing from work.’

Viewing the occupants of this body as specialised cells, they championed play as a serious creative and scientific method. Their aim was to expand the creative frame of reference into the surrounding laboratories whilst enabling the scientific mindset to breach the boundaries of the gallery through dialogue and spontaneous encounters.

You, unlike a parasite yourself, are invited to occupy this body. Experimentation stations have been created within the LifeSpace to encourage play, reflection, intimacy and healing. This experience is offered as a safe vessel for personal responses to, and public digestion of, the various ruptures that have resulted from the Covid19 pandemic, as well as a celebration of the new ways of working and interdisciplinary collaboration that have evolved from this unique moment in time.
CONTEMPLATION STATION

OBSERVATION/ACTION STATIONS (here there and everywhere)
DIGESTION STATION

RELAXATION STATION

electrons are FREE
OBSERVATION/ACTION STATIONS
(here there and everywhere)

- draw
- sound
- write
- release

CONTEMPLATION STATION
- listen
- look
- reflect
- repeat

DIGESTION STATION
- chew
- converse
- reverse
- disperse

RELAXATION STATION
- rest
- write
- read
- no need for speed
NOTES on sound from Semay Wu

Occupying the body of LifeSpace as a parasite expands on the sense of what a body could be; how its structural objects/organs and internal inhabitants contribute to the running and creativity of its expression. As a parasite, the idea of finding and making a home habitable to survive is also parallel to another deeply human theme. I feel that the interior space of a body is expansive, full of stories, of connected trajectories of durations. Borrowing a phrase from Yi Fu Tuan, a human geographer and philosopher, ‘Place as a pause in temporal current’, is revealing and potent. In the exhibition, BONDING: Electrons are free, you will find yourself pausing to digest, pausing to contemplate, pausing to relax, pausing to observe and activate, while moving in the space, connecting and bonding.

To create the sounds of the exhibition I invited the inhabitants to record the sounds of the building. I wanted to illuminate the tiniest and most intricate happenings that live and burrow into the walls, to the larger sustained hums, and disparate bangs of the engine heart that keeps the building in flow.

Armed with all these collected sounds, I have composed connected pieces that will accompany the digestion, relaxation, observation/activation and contemplation stations.

In the relaxation station, you will hear a collection of letters being read out by various people, titled, Dear Alan. They are letters that were written between Emily and Alan prior to, during and post occupation of Lifespace.

What is the sound of digestion, contemplation, relaxation and activation of the body, and how do we use the collectively recorded sounds to express these stories? What even is the sound of the parasite? Bringing new, unexpected events, or sound provocations or interventions that persist in the space over time into Lifespace, fills it with new collective memories and stories to hold dear.
1 A portrait of our host
2 Action cards
3 FAB coats
4 Partly digested material
5 Don’t look up
6 Laboratory Art Binge (L.A.B.)
7 Parasite soup
8 Dear Alan
9 Make a fish
10 Building as body
11 Contemplation
12 Caffeine
13 Safety net
14 Stairwell to Science
15 Parasitic Exercise Routine
16 Landscape as body
1
A portrait of our host
Emily Fong, 2023
Mural of LifeSpace body as building giving itself a big hug.
The little orange detail in the skull is the cribriform plate which supports
the olfactory bulb and is perforated for the passage of olfactory nerves
into the brain. Loss of smell being one of the symptoms of Covid19.

2
Action cards
Please feel FREE to take and return an action card.

3
FAB coats
Emily Fong and Alan Fairlamb’s FAB coats to be worn when operating
as parasites within the building. These coats aim to protect, inspire and
disguise them from the immune system of the body. Just as a parasite
can change its coat to evade detection, Alan and Emily must now
consider how to adapt their skins to function within this body.

4
Partly digested material
Found Objects
Collected from the Fife Coastal Path
Emily Fong, 2021

With the world the way it was in 2020, a residency at WCAIR was
physically impossible. Thus began an online relationship between
artist Emily Fong, scientist Alan Fairlamb and researchers from the
School of Life Sciences. A series of bonds formed through dialogue
and play. Emily and Alan spent their Tuesday nights together in
conversation exploring art, science and life. To digest the content of
these conversations, Emily would walk along the Fife Coastal Path.
Using her body as a microscope, she would zoom in on specimens and
document the process using a polaroid camera, sometimes collecting
material in a performative way to bring back into the studio and into
the conversation with Alan. Seeing the landscape as body, the partially
digested material was key to a series of six experimental workshops
titled the Laboratory Art Binge (L.A.B.) where researchers in groups of
three transformed it into sculpture.
The site of Emily and Alan’s breakfast and other digestive activities. The pair asked, how can we inspire the inhabitants of the building to look up and notice the beauty of the environment that surrounds them, rather than rushing through with heads down at fast pace?

Laboratory Art Binge (L.A.B.)
Film by Ali Floyd
Editing by Ania Urbanowska
Workshop support by Ailsa Mackintosh
Design and Facilitation by Emily Fong, 2021

During the the covid19 pandemic, Emily designed and guided an experiment to strengthen the bonds between art and science and the inhabitants of the building. 18 researchers were invited to take part in a covert workshop in groups of 3. These specialised cells were tasked with transforming the partly digested material using their scientific knowledge and expertise.

L.A.B. 1
Friday 18th Feb 2022
Erika Pinto
Fiona Bellany
Lesley-Anne Pearson

L.A.B. 2
Friday 11th March 2022
Luccas Missfeldt Sanches
Arnold Forkuo
Henry Onyame

L.A.B. 3
Friday 22nd April 2022
Luma Magalhaes
Tracy Bayliss
Frederick Simeons

L.A.B. 4
Friday 29th April 2022
Beatriz Baragana
Laura Cleghorn

L.A.B. 5
Friday 6th May 2022
Claudia McGinnis
Vincent Postis
Gary Tarver

L.A.B. 6
Friday 27th May 2022
Simona Seizova
Suze Farrell
Michael Thomas
Parasite Soup
Watercolour and ink on paper
A painting in response to the science of Dr. Susan Wyllie
Emily Fong, 2021

In conversation with Susan, Emily thought a lot about her ‘modes of action,’ the ways she explores novel methods of looking at how medicines work in the realm of infectious diseases. The question was, can her modes of action inspire new ways of seeing?

Dear Alan
Letters and Songs
38 min loop
Semay Wu, Emily Fong, Alan Fairlamb, WCAIR, 2020-2023

Letters hand written between Emily and Alan, before during and after their occupation of LifeSpace. The letters were a way to maintain intimacy and connection during their enduring conversations which were held during the covid19 pandemic over Microsoft Teams. The writing practice continued during their occupation as a way to pause, reflect, document and share their experiences of occupying LifeSpace for over 100 continuous hours. Artist and composer, Semay Wu, has transformed these letters into 8 songs read by several voices:

1. Dear Alan   Kevin Read
2. Dear Alan   Charlotte Green
3. Dear Emily  Alan Fairlamb
4. Dear Alan   Justice Akwensi
5. Dear Alan   Luciana De Sousa Paradela
6. Dear Alan   Susan Wyllie
7. Dear Alan   Gary Anderson
8. Dear Alan   Emily Fong

Make a fish
Please enjoy making an origami fish and pinning it to the safety net. If you wish to write a letter and release it into the space, this too can be folded into a fish, not to be read, but to be collectively digested at a later stage.
10
Building as body
Composition of collectively sampled sounds
4-channel 2 hour loop
Semay Wu, 2023

Inviting the inhabitants of the body to record the sounds of the building, Semay wanted to illuminate the tiniest and most intricate happenings that live and burrow into the walls, to the larger sustained hums, and disparate bangs of the engine heart that keeps the building in flow.

11
Contemplation
Composition of sounds collected from outside the School of Life Sciences building and the harbour at Broughty Ferry
30 min loop
Semay Wu, 2023

12
Caffeine
Photographic series
“published” on the School of Life Sciences network
Alan Fairlamb, 2022

"Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought." - Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

“I was tidying up our breakfast dishes in the kitchen adjacent to our habitat, I became curious to know how the other souls in the building used the kitchen facilities. Opening the cupboard, I was struck by the diversity of colours, patterns and shapes of the mugs. This triggered a photographic exploration of kitchen cupboards on each floor of the Wellcome Trust building. On one floor I was interrupted in my work by a curious scientist. I showed her an image of the cupboard on the floor below. She said, “Oh, that’s my teddy bear Christmas mug! I got that when I was 21 and first started work here many years ago. I never really liked it, so I left it when I moved to a new lab in SLS.” When asked about the neatly arranged colourful mugs hanging on coat hooks in the kitchen, I was told these belonged to scientists who were no longer working here – a sort of scientific memorial.”
13
Safety net
Unexpected results
In Malawi, a project to distribute mosquito nets to prevent malaria had unexpected results. Without community consultation or supporting information local people sewed the nets together to fish the local lake. The fine mesh trapped small fish that would have escaped traditional nets. The lake was overfished and water snails – the vector for the schistosomiasis parasite – flourished. This resulted in an outbreak of shistosomiasis and no decrease in malaria cases.
Image Credit: RippleUK, 2019

14
Stairwell to Science
Photographic collage
Alan Fairlamb, 2022

Like many others, I have passed through this wonderful airy space without ever stopping to contemplate and admire this magnificent cathedral of science. As a “body of knowledge”, it represents the lungs, thorax and spinal column of our parasitic abode.

15
Parasitic Exercise Routine
Film
Working with the safety net during LifeSpace, Gallery Occupation.
Emily Fong and Alan Fairlamb, 2022

16
Landscape as body
Film
Happening, Fife Coastal Path
Polaroid documentation by Ai Greene
Emily Fong, 2021
Thank you to every single person who has contributed to this project. **For the time being** there are so many we have lost count.

It is worth noting here that this project could not have happened without the support and patience of the public engagement dream team that is Ali Floyd and Ailsa Mackintosh. Their enthusiasm and grace has enabled us to do beautiful things together.
The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

- M. Proust