

# The Common Sense

## Melanie Gilligan

26 July – 26 August  
10am – 6pm daily

**15-channel site-specific  
video installation, 15 LED TVs,  
powder-coated steel tubes,  
wireless headphones.**

Melanie Gilligan's dystopian drama is set in an eerily familiar future. Over 15 short episodes it tracks the impact of an immersive technology that enables individuals to tap into the sensations of others. Worn on the roof of the mouth, 'The Patch' has reformulated not only social contact, but every aspect of human society. Will its invention lead to a more empathetic, collective future? Or will feelings be put to work in an intensified emotional economy?

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*The Common Sense* (2014/15) is structured into three phases. Occupying the centre of the room, the first begins inside a university classroom. During a lesson on the history of The Patch the students must use their devices to keep up with tuition fee repayments by performing remote tasks. Tutors are given performance feedback in real time and it is apparent that their positions are also precarious. The phase concludes with chaotic scenes as the device network inexplicably breaks down and the students struggle to deal with unmediated contact. Following this rupture, the narrative – and supporting frame – fractures into two parallel paths. To the right, the story follows the formation of protest movements. On the left, further evolutions take place that entrench the colonisation of minds and bodies.

Using sci-fi forms to interrogate contemporary capitalism, Gilligan amplifies emerging aspects of our own everyday experience. She describes *The Common Sense* as a narrative of societal shifts that unfold in a context of constant economic pressures. This is a world where the value of networks and personal contacts is everything, and constant measurement is the norm. Feelings – their capture, modification, use and exchange – are its lifeblood. While the demand to hold down multiple, casualised jobs strikes a chord with contemporary gig and platform economies, the demand to share has morphed into dormitory-style co-living arrangements and intrusive surveillance.

The series can also be understood as a speculation on the future of collectivity under capitalist conditions. Instead of presenting 'working together' (or the technology that supports it) as a solution to inequality and exploitation, Gilligan shows how it can be used to entrap, entrain, and intensify working conditions. Without a transformation of the underlying organisation of the economy, the existing order evolves and adapts.

#### ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY ART RESEARCH COLLECTION

*The Common Sense* (2014/15) is the first acquisition made for the University of Edinburgh's Contemporary Art Research Collection. Taking globalisation as its central theme, the collection analyses what the transformation of geographic, political, cultural and economic boundaries has meant in terms of artistic practice. In our first phase of activity this broad topic has been given an explicitly feminist inflection as we focus our attention on the scaffolding and shadows of the formal economy – those hidden dimensions of conventional production involving the maintenance, reproduction and socialisation of people. Recent acquisitions centre on sex worker rights (Petra Bauer and SCOT-PEP), maternal experience and care labour (Kate Davis), urban regeneration (Shona Macnaughton) and decolonisation (Alberta Whittle).

Further information on the research underpinning the collection can be found at:

[www.fabric.eca.ed.ac.uk](http://www.fabric.eca.ed.ac.uk)

#### ABOUT MELANIE GILLIGAN

Known for her futuristic experimental dramas and scripted performances, Melanie Gilligan's work offers chillingly incisive – and often humorous – narratives centred on the power of economic relations to shape lives. Her works include *Crisis in the Credit System* (2008), a four-part fictional mini-drama about the global financial crisis. Commissioned and produced by Artangel, it was made specifically for online distribution and viewing. *Popular Unrest* (2010) was shown in Edinburgh as part of the ECONOMY exhibition presented at Stills and the Centre for Contemporary Arts (Glasgow) in 2013. Critical writing is central to Gilligan's practice, and she has contributed to art magazines and journals such as *Texte zur Kunst* and *Artforum*.

Gilligan graduated from Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in 2002 and studied at the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program, 2004-2005. In 2009 she was the recipient of a Paul Hamlyn Award for Artists and, in 2010, the Present-Future Prize at Torino Artissima International Art Fair. Recent solo and group exhibitions include *Parts-Wholes*, The Wattis Institute, San Francisco (2017), *The Common Sense*, Trondheim Kunstmuseum (2016), *Tension & Conflict – Video Art after 2008*, Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon (2017/18), *The Little Things Could Be Dearer*, MoMA PS1 (2015), *British Art Show 8*, various venues across the U.K. (2015).

#### FURTHER READING RECOMMENDED BY THE ARTIST

**Theory:** Tithi Bhattacharya, 'How Not To Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class', *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 2015.

**Fiction:** Octavia E. Butler, *The Xenogenesis Trilogy*.

**Theory:** Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2014).

**Poetry:** Wendy Trevino, 'Popular Culture', *Social Text Online* (blog), May 2017, <https://socialtextjournal.org/popular-culture/>.

#### WORKSHOP | ARTISTS IN THE GIG ECONOMY

24 August  
2pm – 6pm  
FREE

How does the gig economy shape art production in Scotland? From Airbnb'd spare rooms to second shifts working for Deliveroo, in what ways are artists implicated in this precarious new economy?

With contributions from: Ed Compson (artist, Embassy Gallery), Dan Cookson (independent researcher), Al James (Newcastle University), Shona Macnaughton (artist), Ciaran McDonald (The Scottish Parliament), Ailie Rutherford (artist), Yasmin Sulaiman (Creative Edinburgh), Camara Taylor (artist) and Dave O'Brien, Karen Gregory, Kirsten Lloyd, Harry Weeks (The University of Edinburgh).

**To book a place go to:**  
<https://edin.ac/2Jtv5eh>

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