

INTERMISSION, LAYOVER

TAVIA NYONG'O ON BRIAN FUATA'S PERFORMANCE,
INTERMISSION (SEINI_TRANSMIT), AT SUMER



There is a certain cheek to titling your performance *Intermission*, by custom the period when the audience is released from the intensity of the performance, relieved of their job, and can temporarily dissolve back into the couples, groups and singletons they were before the event started. During the intermission, you can go to the bathroom, get a drink, step outside for a smoke. You might even start a provisional conversation about what you are seeing, talk about how it is going, perhaps even arrive at some snap judgement about whether you want to skip out on the second act and grab an early dinner instead. Intermission, in sum, is a gift performance that gives back to the audience in exchange for signing up for the ride. To name the performance itself *Intermission (seini_transmit)*, then, is to invert the expected social contract, to suggest that the performance has begun before it has officially started, and will resume once this ephemeral transmission—this pirate radio broadcast—is over and out.

I was in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland at the invitation of Artspace Aotearoa's Kaitohu Director Ruth Buchanan. I had come to give a lecture on my curatorial work, among other visits, and in my Artspace audience that night was Brian Fuata. In a sign of how close-knit the scene is, by the next day I was hearing that Fuata, a Sydney-based artist of Sāmoan descent, had incorporated

something of my talk into his open rehearsal process, along with other ephemeral events along K Road, such as a fleeting conversation about an upcoming UB40 show, and their maudlin dad-rock classic 'Red, Red, Wine', news of which gave me a bit of excited anxiety. The first rule of live art club is: *You are part of the performance*. As someone who arrived in town to absorb and take in, I was now radiating something as well.

Fuata's residency in Tāmaki Makaurau overlapped with mine, and stepping into *Intermission (seini_transmit)* on Saturday night I felt a tingle down my spine that I have learned to call "the joy of being there." Obviously derived from its negative—FOMO, the fear of missing out—the joy of being there is a heightened feeling you get when the stars align, so to speak, and a radio signal that has always been transmitting comes into focus. The audience was hailed into the space on arrival (one member even got a hug), and invited to line up in a squared circle around the artist and his collaborators. Through repetition, gesture, citation, glitch, and repartee with artist and one half of DJ duo Ngāsti, Tyson Campbell, the performance built up in rounds of intensity and collapse, suspension and hum. Campbell's backchat fed into Fuata's monologue, as did Ngāsti's live soundscape. And literally stepping into the performance was

legendary documentary photographer John M. Miller, whose kneepads had caught my eye at a Coastal Signs opening just prior, where we had started a conversation. Inverting the typical role of performance documentation (where the photographer is on the sidelines for better sightlines), in *Intermission (seini_transmit)*, Miller was himself performing, shooting Fuata at close range and at one point almost tripping over Campbell.

A general idea began to emerge: what it takes for the ritual of live art to recompose itself in the post-pandemic, pre-apocalyptic here and now. Reflecting on the histories and futurities of Black and Indigenous artists, one could invert that and reflect on a post-apocalyptic here and now—honouring our survival of catastrophes that were meant to drive us from these lands—and, pre-pandemic—forecasting the dark days ahead that we discern in visionary speculative fiction such as Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, the 2019 Brazilian film *Bacurau* (dir. Juliano Dornelles and Kleber Mendonça Filho) and Alex Rivera's 2009 film *Sleep Dealer*. Even my first time in Aotearoa, having passed the biosecurity gauntlet and been briefed on the recent rightward turn of the government, I immediately felt the need to tread lightly and seek supportive circles, while also understanding the role we all have to call ase, spirit,

down into the performance.

I began to think of a certain blackfem cadence—a blackfem sound, to adopt and adapt Matthew Morrison's indispensable genealogy of 'black sound'—that works as a global transmitter of being otherwise in the infernal technocapitalist dynamo. When this sound snaps into focus—and it can be seen as easily as heard, and felt and tasted—I know where I am even if I have no idea where that is. It is a form of echolocation in chaosmosis. I find myself still musing, still processing, somewhere between the call and response of Blackness and Indigeneity, between Turtle Island and the Moana. Fuata's *Intermission (seini_transmit)* deftly blurs the lines between performance and the interstitial spaces we often overlook, demanding the audience become active participants in the creation of its meaning (but not too active! One audience member stuck in a loop of automatic laughter was asked to leave a prior performance).

By collapsing the boundaries between the rites of live art and the motion of everyday life, Fuata posits the present as a site of continuous transmission.

Tavia Nyong'o visited Aotearoa in August 2024 as a Creative New Zealand Te Manu Ka Tau international guest at Artspace Aotearoa, a kaupapa delivered in partnership with the Office for Contemporary Art Aotearoa.

Brian Fuata, *Intermission (seini_transmit)*, 10 August 2024, live performance, featuring Ngāsti (Aroha Scott & Tyson Campbell), observed by John Miller, Sumer, Tāmaki Makaurau. Video stills taken from documentation by Dan du Bern / Sumer