MOAD Unbound 1

Museum of Art and Design
Miami Dade College

The Body Electric Spring 2021

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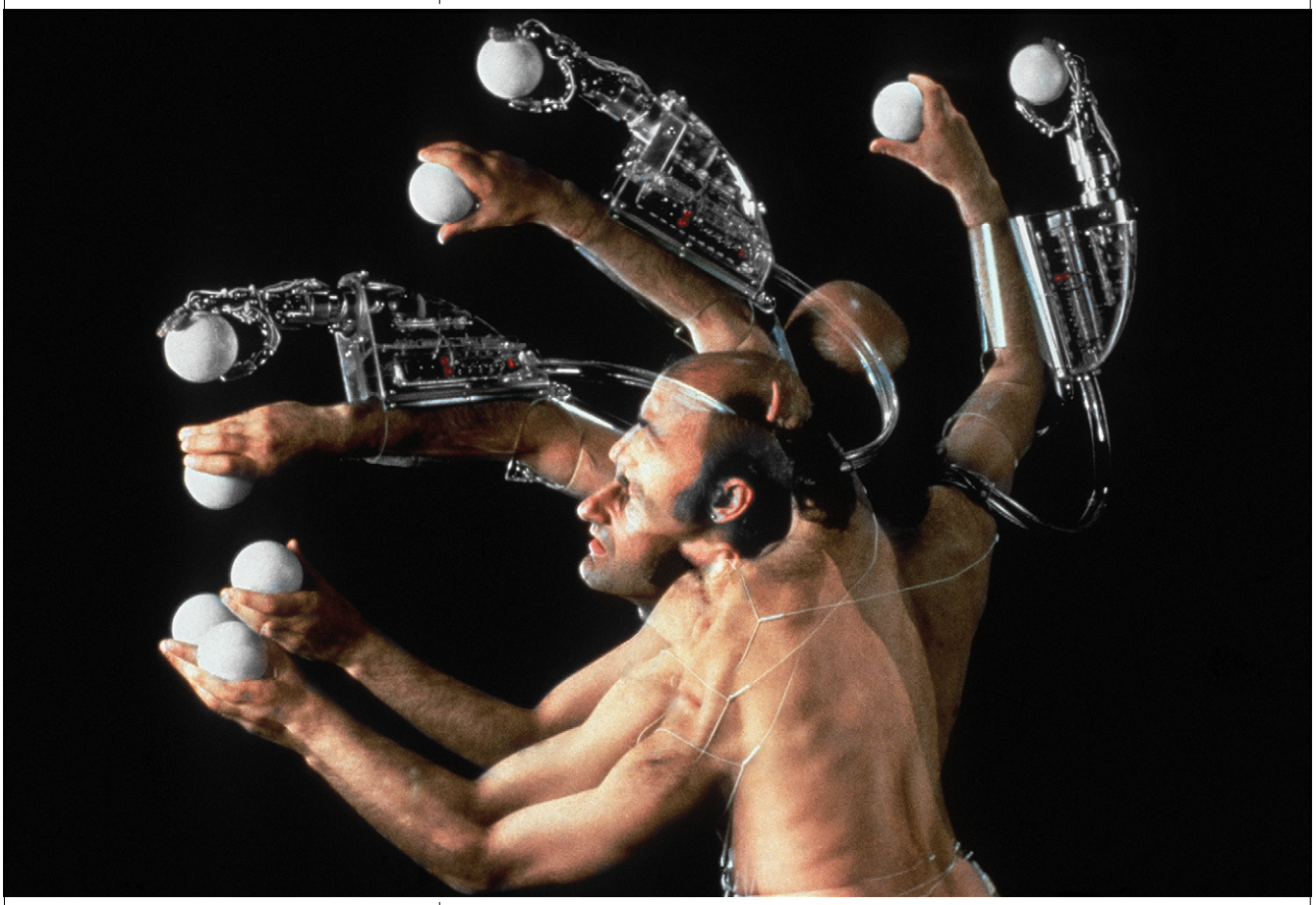


Sterlac, *Third hand*, 1980, performance view. Courtesy of the artist.

Director's Foreword

Welcome to *MOAD Unbound*, the Museum of Art and Design at MDC's new publication. *MOAD Unbound* aims to bring readers new insights and perspectives on the art and ideas featured in the Museum's exhibitions and programming, with essays and interviews by some of today's leading artists, curators, critics, art historians, and others. Published online, *MOAD Unbound* encourages deeper looks at the art, design, performances, and other events in the galleries or offsite as part of MOAD's Museum Without Boundaries initiative. This publication will explore the compelling issues raised by our shows that do not have an exhibition catalogue and investigate topics farther afield for those that do. *MOAD Unbound* offers you enhanced access to the creators and thinkers changing culture right now, whether you are able visit the Museum frequently or not at all. We want everyone to be a part of the conversation. Feel free to print out the issues at home to read at your leisure, save the PDFs to compile an archive of MOAD's ongoing dialogue, or just read each issue online. The possibilities are boundless!

The premier issue of *MOAD Unbound* focuses on the Museum's 2020–2021 exhibition, *The Body Electric*, which looks at our fraught relationship to technology, particularly the increasingly inescapable interface between our bodies and screens. The remarkably varied art in the exhibition examines the last fifty years of artists addressing the way technological mediation has come to dominate our interactions with the world, with each other, and with ourselves. The curator of the exhibition, Pavel S. Pyś, Curator of Visual Arts at the Walker Art Center, provides an incisive overview of the exhibition and the varied individual contributions of the artists included in it. We asked two pairs of these artists—Trisha Baga and Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Jes Fan and Tishan Hsu—to speak with each other about their respective practices and concerns; these conversations cast new light on the artists' works on view. Julieta González, independent curator and researcher, contributes a historical view, writing about Latin American artists in the 1970s and their foundational role in developing the nascent art form of video networks.

Many people played a part in making *MOAD Unbound* a reality. We wish to thank the authors of the texts that follow—Trisha Baga, Jes Fan, Julieta González, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Tishan Hsu, and Pavel S. Pys´—as well as all the artists whose groundbreaking works are illustrated. We are also grateful to Pavel for his generosity and assistance in facilitating the interviews between the artists. Thanks to our Editor and Consulting Curator, Joseph R. Wolin, and our Consulting Assistant Curator, Isabela Villanueva, whose efforts made this issue possible. And a special debt of gratitude goes to Gabriela Fontanillas, Álvaro Sotillo, and the team at VACA Visión Alternativa, whose innovative design makes *MOAD Unbound* a pleasure to read.

The Body Electric is organized by the Walker Art Center. The exhibition is made possible by generous support from the Carl & Marilynn Thoma Art Foundation. Additional support is provided by Ellen and Jan Breyer and the David and Leni Moore Family Foundation. *The Body Electric* is curated

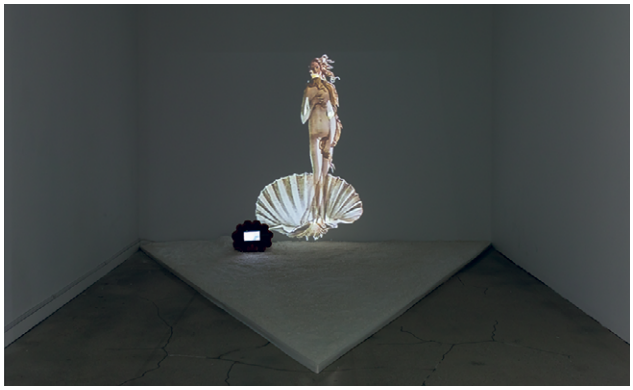
by Pavel S. Pyś, Curator, Visual Arts, Walker Art Center, with Jadine Collingwood, Curatorial Fellow. The presentation at MOAD is organized by Rina Carvajal, Executive Director and Chief Curator, with Isabela Villanueva, Consulting Assistant Curator, and is made possible by the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; and the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture. Additional support was received from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation as part of its Immersive Technologies in the Arts initiative.

RINA CARVAJAL
Executive Director and Chief Curator

The Body Electric

Pavel S. Pyś

"Long live the new flesh" James Woods's character, Max Renn, utters in the final scenes of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), a meditation on the merging of human desires, TV screens, and mass media. Throughout the film, flesh and screen are one. At one point, Renn's chest turns into a VCR; at another, a veiny skin envelops a gun protruding from the TV set. Permeating *Videodrome* is the mindless consumption of imagery and the constant cycle of violence, sex, and destruction—all negotiated vis-à-vis the screen. Almost four decades later, *Videodrome* gathers a renewed salience, given our relationship to the omnipresent screens of our lives —phones, tablets, computers, etc.—and the endless stream of scrolling and swiping through media content that seamlessly blends images of war, desire, and sex. What defines our relationship to the space of the screen? How do we negotiate ourselves and others via technology? How do artists respond to a shifting technological landscape in relation to identity and embodiment?



Ulrike Rosenbach, *Reflexionen über die Geburt der Venus II (Reflections on the Birth of Venus II)*, 1975/78, video installation (color, sound), 22:06 minutes/20:21 minutes. Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Oriol Tarridas. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

Though not organized chronologically, the exhibition *The Body Electric* is anchored in the mid-1960s with artists such as Nam June Paik, Marta Minujín, Charlotte Moorman, and Wolf Vostell, who were the first to employ the TV as both the subject and material of their work. Given today's continually cheapening technologies, it might be challenging now to appreciate the radicality of this generation's actions. In the 1960s, US television ownership reached new heights and the TV was at the very center of home life, at once a platform for entertainment and a conduit for ideology. For these artists, activating TVs with ephemeral actions played an integral role, subverting their symbolism while breaking down the disciplinary boundaries separating performing and visual arts. For Wolf Vostell, events were "weapons to politicize art"[1] and his happenings—in which TVs were routinely "desacralized" by being encased in concrete or buried—raised questions about the role that technology plays in everyday life. Though a sculpture today, Nam June Paik's *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969) was originally worn by Charlotte Moorman, literally fusing the technological with the human figure. Performance pioneer Ulrike Rosenbach also frequently turned to this exact interstice between technology and the performing body. Her installation *Reflections on the Birth of Venus* (1975/78) refers to a performance of the same title,

1 Wolf Vostell quoted in "Wolf Vostell," *Flash Art* 72/73 (March–April 1977): 34-39.

which can be seen in the life-size projection of the artist posing in front of a slide featuring the Italian Renaissance painting *The Birth of Venus* (circa 1485) by Sandro Botticelli. Accompanied in the installation by a triangle of salt on the floor and a video of lapping waves within a shell-shaped object, the projection explores female identity and, in the artist's words, speaks to the "cliché for the erotic adaptation of women to the sexual needs of a male world."[2] By exploring the space between the performing body and its mediated image, these artists opened new possibilities in regards to interdisciplinary practice, but also, crucially, in terms of representation.

For many of the artists in *The Body Electric*, the lens of the camera and the space of the screen offer avenues to explore the politics of the mediated image. Marta Minujín's *Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad* (*Simultaneity in Simultaneity*,1966) is a key early work in this regard, a performance realized as part of *A 3 Country Happening*, organized by Minujín with Allan Kaprow and Wolf Vostell, that took place simultaneously in Buenos Aires, New York, and Berlin. On October 13, 1966, Minujín gathered sixty famous figures (including critics, journalists, models, and intellectuals) within the auditorium of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella. Everyone was carefully documented through photographs and film, and the footage was screened for the same group the following week, on October 24, when the participants visited again, wearing the same clothes and taking the identical spots in the auditorium as the week prior. Footage of the second event, showing the protagonists seeing themselves on screen, was transmitted via various media—television, newspaper messages, telegrams, and radio—creating a powerful comment on the influence that mass media have on shaping our social interactions. As Minujín wrote much later, in 1994, "TV transforms people's life, changes you, emits waves and permeates you. It should be used for great things, but mediocrity conquered."[3]

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #92*, 1981, chromogenic color print, 24 × 48 inches (61 × 121.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

Simultaneity in Simultaneity aimed at charging the televisual with transformative possibility. Just as Minujín's glitterati preened for the broadcast, so have many artists used their own bodies as vehicles for private performances for the camera lens. Originally conceived for *Artforum* to mimic the centerfold of men's erotic magazines, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled #92* (1981) subverts the pinup by showing the artist in a disturbed emotional state, injecting her photograph with a sense of terror and foreboding rather than voyeuristic pleasure. Lorna Simpson's *LA '57-NY '09* (2009) offers another take on the pinup: the series juxtaposes appropriated amateur

2 Ulrike Rosenbach quoted in *Ulrike Rosenbach: Videokunst, Foto, Aktion/Performance, Feministische Kunst* (Cologne, 1982): 13.

3 Marta Minujín, quoted in *Marta Minujín: Happenings and Performances* (Buenos Aires: Ministry of Culture of the Administration of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, 2015): 85.

photos, taken in Los Angeles in 1957, with self-portraits in which Simpson faithfully replicates their settings and poses. Seen together, the images reveal a dialogue that spans more than five decades and questions how clothing, skin color, hair, and gender inform our understanding of identity. Whether turning to the amateur photograph or the printed magazine spread, Sherman and Simpson ask how we understand the female self in relation to mass media.

Lorna Simpson, *LA '57–NY '09*, 2009, twenty-five gelatin silver prints, 7 × 7 inches (17.8 × 17.8 cm) each. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. T.B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2010. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Karli Evans. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

Martine Syms, *Notes on Gesture* (still), 2015, video (color, sound), 10:27 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York.

Martine Syms has frequently cited the cultural historian Alison Landsberg in this regard, and in particular her conception of "prosthetic memory."[4] Landsberg's term proposes that, in today's media-saturated landscape, we understand our own identity in relation to a common "prosthetic memory" that transcends the boundaries of social class, gender, or race. This sense of memory is not rooted in lived experience, but instead in our shared social familiarity with cultural texts, such as films and books, but also GIFs and memes. Syms's *Notes on Gesture* (2015) addresses this idea through the visual language of looped GIFs. The video shows the artist Diamond Stingily repeating a number of authentic and dramatic gestures that each relate to African American women: "famous women, infamous women and unknown women,"[5] as Syms has said. Inspired by English philosopher John Bulwer's *Chirologia: Or the Naturall Language of the Hand*, a 1644 thesis on the communicative meaning of hand movements, Syms's video offers an inventory of gestures, questioning the assumptions we make about a person's appearance, behavior, and nonverbal communication. Throughout *The Body Electric*, groupings of artists demonstrate shared engagements with themes of transgender identity

4 See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

5 Martine Syms quoted in Amy Sherlock, "25 Artworks: 2011–15, 2015—Martine Syms, *Notes on Gesture*," *Frieze* (August 18, 2016), https://www.frieze.com/article/25-artworks-2011-15.

(Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst, Juliana Huxtable), femininity (Sanja Iveković, Anna Maria Maiolino, Ana Mendieta), visualizing queerness (Sadie Benning, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Claudio Perna), and race (Howardena Pindell, Lyle Ashton Harris), speaking to the ways we negotiate our sense of self in relation to media-driven systems of representation.

In 1986, the performance artist Stelarc wrote: "skin has become inadequate in interfacing with reality … technology has become the body's new membrane of existence."[6] While mostly clunky (think Google Glasses) or still at a conceptualization phase (e.g., the Cicret, a waterproof bracelet that projects your smartphone system onto your wrist, with the skin as a stand-in for the screen), advances in body hacking and wearables seek to make porous the boundary separating the body and technology. Many of the artists in *The Body Electric* dwell on the blurring of this boundary, moving from the place of the world into the screen and back again. Jes Fan describes Tishan Hsu's prescient works as portals: at once objects in themselves, yet also windows into virtual worlds. The linear surfaces of Hsu's paintings *Being Blue* and *Compressed Expansion* (both 1986) show what could be pieces of hardware, such as circuits or dashboards, marked with grainy streaked lines, akin to TV static. Yet, with yawning gaps and undulations, the works also immediately conjure the body, with its folds, orifices, and fleshy skin. Where do flesh and blood end, and zeros and ones begin? Lynn Hershman Leeson's first interactive video installation *Deep Contact* (1984–89) explores this divide, by inviting viewers to engage with Marion, the work's "guide," by pressing images of her body parts on a touchscreen, each corresponding to a different narrative possibility. The erotic association of intimacy with technology promises an ambiguous and voyeuristic encounter that raises questions about the objectification of femininity in digital media.

6 Stelarc, "Beyond the Body: Amplified Body, Laser Eyes, and Third Hand" (1986), reprinted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writing*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 427-30.

Pierre Huyghe, *Two Minutes Out of Time*, 2000, video (color, sound), 4 minutes; screen print on paper. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Butler Family Fund. Installation view, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, September 6, 2019–February 23, 2020.

A more sorrowful tone fills Pierre Huyghe's *Two Minutes Out of Time* (2000), in which the manga character Annlee describes her existence. Though originally likely destined to be merely a background character, she had been "waiting to be dropped into a story" and appears "animated… not by a story with a plot [but] haunted by your imagination." While at first her voice seems to be that of an adult, it quickly changes to the tense tone of a young girl, who describes viewing a painting of water lilies and

disappearing into a strange light (the voice, in reality, is an altered recording of a five-year-old girl, to whom Huyghe showed the manga picture and asked how she might respond if she knew that the character had only two minutes to live). It is odd how tender characters such as Annlee, or the somewhat hung-over protagonists of Ed Atkins's works, may appear to us. In Atkins's video *Happy Birthday!!* (2014), we come across a highly realistic CGI male character voiced by the artist. Mumbling through a seemingly arbitrary list of years, days, and time codes, he appears to be struggling to remember a significant past event. As he searches back in his "memories," various imagery appears collaged —swirling CGI animations, the night sky, a bedroom—and set against pathetic heart-wrenching music, such as Elvis Presley crooning "Always on My Mind." Atkins has described *Happy Birthday!!* as a work full of "terrible nostalgia,"[7] an achingly melancholic meditation on memory and mortality. It is impossible not to forge an empathic connection with Atkins's confused and dazed character, which, similarly to Annlee, is rooted in the real world. Its CGI likeness takes after a real-life model, and was purchased via TurboSquid, a website that supplies 3-D stock models used for computer games, adult entertainment, and architectural renderings. These works forge an uneasy relationship between a tangible real-world referent and the infinite possibilities of the screen.

7 Ed Atkins describing *Happy Birthday!!* in a promotional video for his solo exhibition at Kunsthaus Bregenz in 2019, *Vermittlungsfilm: KUB 2019.01 Ed Atkins* (posted February 13, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laVhwIV-Nyk.

Ed Atkins, *Happy Birthday!!* (still), 2014, HD video (color, sound), 6:32 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Trisha Baga takes these concerns with embodiment and disembodiment to an even greater cosmic and ethereal extent in her immersive installation *Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor* (2018), which originated with the artist seeking to train her Amazon Alexa virtual assistant to respond to the prompt "Mollusca." Crisscrossing between appropriated imagery from Hollywood movies (such as Ivan Reitman's *Evolution* and Robert Zemeckis's *Contact*) and video shot by the artist in Sicilian caves and Philippine rice paddies, the installation densely layers physical and digital spaces, projected images, and handmade objects to address themes of interspecies mingling, metamorphosis, contacting extra-terrestrial life, and pondering the future of the human species.

Featured in the presentation of *The Body Electric* at the Museum of Art and Design at Mami Dade College are works by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Hito Steyerl that address issues of surveillance, image production, visibility, and representation in the digital age. Lozano-Hemmer's disquieting *Surface Tension* (1991–2004) makes viewers become suddenly

acutely aware of their own bodies within the gallery environment. Through a computerized surveillance system, a huge projected eye follows the visitor, darting back and forth, an imposing watchful presence in the space. Like the Eye of Providence, it is inescapable yet hardly benevolent, instead suggesting a threat or a sinister witness. Who is watching you and why? These questions are equally important to Hito Steyerl's expansive installation *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File* (2013). Anchoring the installation is a single-channel video featuring five lessons in invisibility, in which Steyerl teaches us how to 1.) Make something invisible for a camera, 2.) Be invisible in plain sight, 3.) Become invisible by becoming a picture, 4.) Be invisible by disappearing, and 5.) Become invisible by merging into a world made of pictures. While playful, ironic, and humorous (the work's title appropriates the name of a *Monty Python's Flying Circus* sketch), the work dwells on pertinent issues of privacy, power, and control within an increasingly expansive digital environment. How are we unknowingly surveilled through our smartphones? How do our social-media activities contribute to systems of control and monitoring?

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Surface Tension*, 1992, plasma screen, computerized surveillance system, custom-made software. Installation view, La Gaîté Lyrique, Paris, September 30–November 13, 2011. Photo by Maxime Dufour.

Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (still), 2013, single-channel high-definition digital video and sound in architectural environment, 15:52 minutes. Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

The accelerated rate of technological change frequently outpaces the opportunity for ethical checks and considerations. "Nosedive" (2016), an episode of the dystopian science-fiction TV series *Black Mirror*, portrays a world where every social exchange is rated and contributes to a person's ranking. The episode shares much in common with the Chinese social credit system, wherein artificial intelligence and mass surveillance monitor and score citizens based on their social interactions

and consumer habits. Sondra Perry's *Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation* (2016) speaks directly to such questions of control and biases inherent in technology. The sculpture features a modified exercise bike workstation, fitted with three TV screens. This type of office furnishing queasily reinforces the glorification of capitalist productivity: the workers not only perform their role, but also work out, toning their fit bodies. On the screens, a story unfolds, narrated by Perry's own avatar. She describes the limitations of the software that rendered her being: "it could not replicate her fatness.... Sondra's body type was not an accessible pre-existing template." Any humour inherent in the avatar's deadpan delivery quickly dissipates upon considering the many problems that people of color face in relation to new technologies. Several recent studies have shown that facial recognition software used by US police disproportionally selects non-white individuals, while even mundane appliances, such as automatic soap dispensers, have been unable to recognize darker skin tones. The work of artists such as Perry (and Zach Blas), as well as activist sites (such as the World White Web, a website that draws attention to the dominance of imagery of white bodies on the Internet), gains a politicized significance in the context of the rise of such discriminatory and racist technologies.

Sondra Perry, *Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation*, 2016, video (color, sound), 9:05 minutes; bicycle workstation. Collection Walker Art Center, Minnepolis. Gift of Jim Cahn and Jeremy Collatz, 2019. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Karli Evans. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

Other artists, such as Sidsel Meineche Hansen, question the way in which new technologies change our approaches to sex and desire. Hansen's body of work titled *SECOND SEX WAR* (2016) was spurred by the 2014 ruling by the British Board of Film Classification that restricted the showing of a variety of acts (such as female ejaculation) in pornography produced in the UK. Responding to this decision, Hansen created *DICKGIRL 3D(X)*, a work that features EVA V3.0, a royalty-free avatar that the artist purchased through TurboSquid. The hypersexualized CGI animation shows the character fitted with genital props and interacting with an amorphous figure, her movements motion-captured from pornographic films. Hansen deliberately chose to generate *DICKGIRL 3D(X)* in VR to engage with "post-human porn production from within,"[8] harnessing the very technology in which the porn industry is currently most aggressively investing.

Commissioned especially for *The Body Electric*, Zach Blas's *Icosahredron* (2019) critiques rapidly advancing technologies of prediction. These include not only consumer analytics (e.g., the algorithms that generate

8 See the announcement for Hansen's exhibition at Gasworks, London (March 14, 2016), https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/44577/sidsel-meineche-hansen-second-sex-war/.

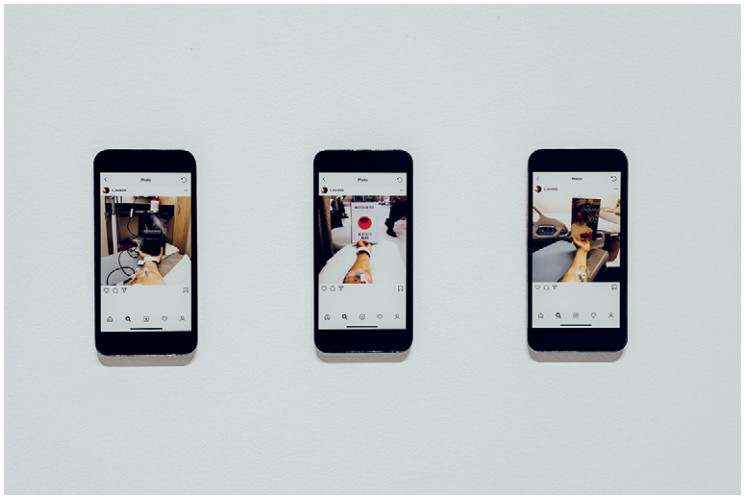
suggestions on your Amazon or Netflix accounts), but also predictive policing (think of the mutated human "precogs" of Philip K. Dick's "The Minority Report," who psychically visualize crimes before they happen). Blas has described the installation as a satirical take on what Peter Thiel's work desk might look like. Thiel, an entrepreneur and venture capitalist, is the co-founder of Palantir Technologies, a data analytics company that takes its name from a crystal ball in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which allows its user to both communicate from afar and see future events. The business also problematically lays Tolkien's fantastical geography over that of the real world, forging questionable correspondences—for example, between the Middle East and the evil realm of Mordor, effectively vilifying a majority-Muslim socio-political context. Blas nods to the way in which such companies structure their work around play, magic, and fantasy through the elements included in the installation: a glowing "philosopher's stone" (an alchemical substance that not only turns metals into gold, but guarantees its possessor immortality), as well as a crystal ball within which "lives" a free-floating artificially intelligent elf that predicts the future of prediction. The work's title, *Icosahedron*, references the twenty-sided die that can be found inside the fortune-telling Magic 8-Ball toy, and points to the interactive elf, which has been trained on a limited set of twenty texts by philosophers and fiction writers such as William Golding, Ayn Rand, and Yuval Noah Harari (their books can be found on the desk) to respond to the viewers' questions about the future. Though deeply engaged with contemporary politics (at the time of writing, Palantir Technologies faced protests over its software contracts with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency), *Isoahedron* is also a send-up. The work is purposefully infantile—given the limited number of source texts, its elf is actually quite dumb—a critique, in Blas's words, of the "childish masculinity and bravado"[9] of entrepreneurs like Thiel.

9 Zach Blas, quoted in Zach Blas and Jennifer Rhee, "Toying with the Future: AI, Fantasy, and Zach Blas's *Icosahedron*," *Walker Reader* (June 26, 2019), https://walkerart.org/magazine/icosahedron-zach-blas-jennifer-rhee.

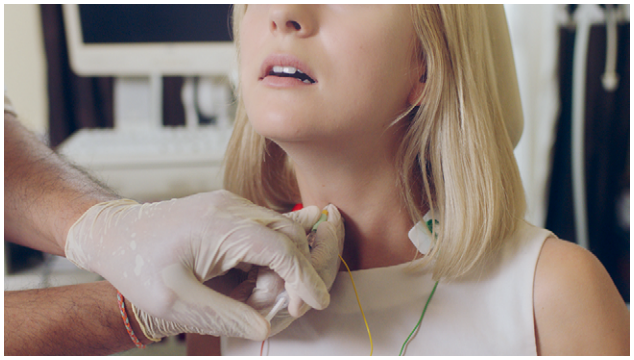
Sidsel Meineche Hansen, *SECOND SEX WARZONE* (still), 2016, DICKGIRL 3D(X) in video format, wood structure. Courtesy of the artist and Rodeo Gallery, London / Piraeus.

Some of the most recent works on view in *The Body Electric* explore notions of health and treatment. These are particularly pertinent issues today, given the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing politicization of healthcare, such as the wrangling over the Affordable Care Act in the US and the rising threat of privatization of the British National Health Service. It is unsurprising that artists increasingly turn to these topics at a time of heightened institutional scrutiny and crises such as the Purdue Pharma opioid addictions and the Flint, Michigan, water contamination scandal. Made for Instagram, Carolyn Lazard's series *In Sickness and*

Study (2015–ongoing) is informed by the artist's experience of living with chronic illness and autoimmune diseases. Each of the images shows Lazard holding whatever book the artist might be reading at the time, while receiving biweekly intravenous iron infusions.



Carolyn Lazard, *In Sickness and Study*, 2015–present, digital photographs, Plexiglas. Courtesy of the artist. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Liliana Mora. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.



Marianna Simnett, *The Needle and the Larynx* (still), 2016, HD video (color, sound), 15:17 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Serpentine Galleries.

While Lazard turns to blood to open conversations about how we understand issues of the "healthy" and "unhealthy" body, Jes Fan's *Systems II* (2018) explores the relationship between bodily substances and the gendered and racialized properties we ascribe to them. The sculpture isolates melanin (responsible for skin pigmentation), Depo-Testosterone (a synthetic steroid typically used in androgen replacement therapy), and estradiol (a type of estrogen hormone), which are then suspended within hand-blown glass vessels that droop and rest on a looped armature. Slathered with silicon, the support system appears fleshy, becoming a stand-in for a heavily reduced skeleton, or perhaps a circulatory or lymphatic system. A composite of discrete elements, *Systems II* is a sort of a body in parts, making visible those rarely seen substances that course through our veins, in no small way defining who we are. Marianna Simnett's *The Needle and the Larynx* (2016) also considers the gendered body, but through the format of a fantastical parable. Shot in agonizing slow motion, the video shows Simnett receiving Botox injections into her larynx, effectively paralyzing the muscle and lowering her voice, a procedure typically reserved for men who perceive their voices as not deep enough. For Simnett, the work "[melts] the borders of what it means to be female,"[10] meditating on how to transgress the conventions that shape our understanding of the body.

10 Marianna Simnett, quoted in Jessica Heron-Langton, "Watch This Film About Botox in the Larynx," *Dazed Digital* (March 11, 2018) https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/body/article/42075/1/the-needle-the-larynx.

While technology marches on at an irrepressible pace, *The Body Electric* views tech changes sceptically. Through intergenerational and international dialogue, the exhibition looks to common threads that ultimately point to key concerns shared by artists, despite having access to differing technology at often vastly different times. Certainly, Marshall McLuhan's mantra "the medium is the message"[11] still rings true—artists will always respond to the specificity of new technologies (whether photographic, televisual, digital, etc.), and seek to challenge and subvert their logic. Yet, regardless of how advanced technology might appear, *The Body Electric* posits the perennial timeliness of questions of identity, embodiment, race, gender, sexuality, and belonging, across time and generations.

11 See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

Inventing Inventions: A Conversation Between Trisha Baga and Lynn Hershman Leeson

TRISHA BAGA: For obvious reasons, everyone everywhere has been thinking more about viruses this year. The language often revolved around how COVID-19 is "programmed" to behave. So, for me at least, behavior as a product of programming rather than intention has been looming extra heavy in the back of my thoughts. A very basic question that artists are constantly asked is "what did they mean to say or do in the work." The answer usually says less than the work itself. Alternatively, I would like to ask if you can offer any insight into what you sense you are *programmed* to do in the context of generating art.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: I do not think of it as programming, as intuition. It is too fluid and our psyches are porous and always in flux. But I do think that intention helps define what enters the realm of the psyche, and for me it is using the psyche to generate work that focuses on or alleviates trauma using the tools of one's time or inventing the tools if they do not exist.

Trisha Baga, *Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor*, 2018, two-channel projection, 2-D and 3-D video, 37:18 minutes; ceramics and various materials. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Collectors' Council Emerging Artist Acquisition Program and the Julie and Babe Davis Acquisition Fund, 2019. Installation views. Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

TB: Your work often engages the viewers' imagination in a very direct way by giving them fragments of a semi, pseudo, or non-fiction narrative, and asking them to fill in the gaps. Can you talk about your choice to make compositions that consistently refer to the real world and its conditions, and what the role of truth is in relationship to metaphor? Parallel to this question is one about power dynamics in the work between you, your viewer, and the content.

LHL: It is impossible to define "truth" as it implies omniscient knowing. I am more interested in the blur between truth and fiction, using perceived reality to unravel a deeper essence, and having viewers bring their own unique experience to fill in gaps, referencing their own experience and culture.

TB: What do you think is the biggest failure of the scientific method?

LHL: Labeling something as failure without fully exploring it.

Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Deep Contact*, 1984–89, interactive touchscreen installation. Collection Carl & Marilynn Thoma Art Foundation. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Oriol Tarridas. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

TB: This harks back to the programming question: how does your cultural background inform your formal/compositional impulses?

LHL: It is a very subtle sense of comprehension in selecting elements that "stick" to a fundamental philosophy about survival. There is always a choice. Art/life is about inventing choices.

TB: I noticed you used the phrase "idiot savant" in an Art21 interview, and with some gusto. I bring this up because I love the word "idiot," and tend to overuse it when describing myself, my collaborators, and a certain mode or approach we individually and collectively savor. As you probably know, it comes from the ancient Greek *idios*, which means one's own, a private person—in contrast to a skilled and professional civilian. I interpret that to mean an intimately developed sense of materiality that is rooted in experience and presence and not-knowing—skill development that is too specific/internalized/incommunicable to be useful in the context of systems and industry. Simply put, every time I work in a new medium, I teach it to myself and it is sloppy and flawed and slow and leads me places I never meant to go, but it is there that I find the work. I love it, but it can also feel limiting and so I am drawn to how differently you work, which actually does engage with large systems of knowledge and authority, and in many ways, from outsourcing technical labor through to collaborating with the Swiss healthcare company Novartis.

Now, this may be a stupid question, but what does being an idiot mean to you?

LHL: "Idiot" means non-expert, someone who has instincts and then seeks out information based on that, finding or inventing tools or engaging experts to push boundaries and create something that is unique,

that none of the collaborators would have done on their own—inventions that surprise and delight authors, inventions that tell us what we are really thinking about, inventing inventions.

How important is humor to you in the work?

TB: Pretty important, though it is a product of my perspective more than my intention. I never set out to make something funny. But a lot of my compositional habits gravitate towards collapsing perspective and scale, and there is something about that move that tends to synthesize "funny" as a byproduct and I am down with that.

LHL: Have you ever thought of working directly with biological systems rather than metaphors?

TB: Does a community count as a biological system? Because it is important to me to maintain a community-based art practice alongside my solo one. Together with artists Pam Lins and Halsey Rodman, I started Ceramics Club about twelve years ago, while we were at Cooper Union. Our official statement is that we are "a group interested in using ceramics as a way to socially interact, make material, collaborate, and see what happens from there." We have invited a lot of different kinds of artists to collaborate with us and together we have generated a lot of ceramic work that we have shown and sold anonymously through the collective at relatively easygoing prices to raise money for various causes we support, such as Planned Parenthood, White Helmets, and Critical Resistance.

LHL: What is important about being anonymous?

TB: It protects the sale aspect of it from the art market, and the boring and damaging aspects of art collecting. There is something fun about having people buy something and they cannot tell if someone really famous made it, or a child, or someone in between.

Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Selections from Roberta*, 1972–79/1994, nylon blouse, bank checks, metal button, color photograph, photocopies, chromogenic prints, black-and-white photographs, audiotape (plastic cassette shell, 90 minutes), chromogenic print mounted on mat board, dental x-ray. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Justin Smith Purchase Fund, 1994. Installation view. Photo by Oriol Tarridas. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

LHL: When did you get interested in biological systems and why?

TB: To me, so much of art is about perception, and biological systems are the way in which we experience and interpret perception. While images and narratives are not actually biological organisms, a lot of my interest lies in how they behave as living things that co-evolve with humans. There is something about the condition of human longing that has consistently supported the reproduction of images and the evolution of image

technology through time. And there is something in the images and stories and technology we invent and reproduce that reflects upon that longing and urges an adaptation of human perception and behavior and so on. That symbiotic relationship, and the negative space that lies at the root of it, is what drives my work—more than science or humor or innovation.

LHL: What is the next project you are working on?

TB: I am working on a large projection for the facade of the Fridericianum that will play on November 3, the day of the US elections. It is called *HOPE*, after Obama's 2008 slogan and also after Hope Hicks, a PR advisor and senior counsel to the 45th, who is thought to have seeded the recent COVID-19 outbreak at the White House. The Fridericianum is in Kassel, Germany, and the building is cast in the role of the White House, to which it bears a physical resemblance. My hope is that beyond functioning as an artwork, it will reflect on the pain and institutional erosion caused by the last four years, and through a live stream, contribute at least a humble amount of constructive energy to American voters as it envisions the current administration a thing of the past.

I would like to understand invention more. You have brought it up repeatedly, and it makes me realize I habitually avoid that word, but not for any reasons I can easily grasp. I tend to think of it more as solving problems, perhaps as a way to personally frame that part of the process as always within a continuum. After you invent an invention, what do you consider its primary mode of existence? Do you think of it as an idea, an object, a proposal, a product, a tool, an entity, or something else entirely?

LHL: Inventions tend to be something I do when what I need in the world to finish a project does not yet exist. Like a touchscreen, artificial intelligence, a chat bot, or interactive installations, for instance, or virtual sets, which I patented in 1997. Once the project is done, I can use the technique/invention again later, but often I do not. It is not just an idea, but usually a new way of thinking.

TB: What is your next project?

LHL: Working with Harvard to eliminate plastic from water and a feature film, part three of my trilogy, begun in 1995, that includes *Conceiving Ada* (1997) and *Teknolust* (2002).

TB: How has your practice changed or adapted to the exceptionally unstable moment we live in right now?

LHL: By becoming more stable. Not traveling. Taking more time to do things. Drawing as a way of thinking.

This conversation took place by email in October 2020.

Our Phone Is Our Brain Now: A Conversation Between Jes Fan and Tishan Hsu

JES FAN: Let us begin with corners. Can you speak of their importance in your work?

TISHAN HSU: A key issue was the frame of the two-dimensional painting, traditionally understood as a pictorial window looking into a world. Rather than only an illusory space, I wanted to simultaneously assert the object itself. Once the corner was rounded, the "window" somehow became a thing, an object. In the sculpture, the rounded corner allowed a continuous topological surface to become organic, which was a metaphor for the technological and the organic being a seamless, connected interface expressed as surface.

JF: It no longer becomes an image. We are cognizant of the image being an object.

TH: Yes. I was also aware of ergonomics in design and felt that objects were going to increasingly respond to our human body, so there was a second implication with the curved corner.

LEFT:
Tishan Hsu, *Being Blue*, 1986, oil, alkyd, acrylic, enamel, cement, compound, wood, 60 × 60 × 4 inches (152.4 × 152.4 × 10.2 cm). Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami. Gift of James S. and Marisol G. Higgins.
RIGHT:
Tishan Hsu, *Compressed Expansion*, 1986, acrylic, alkyd, ceramic, and vinyl compound on wood, 85 × 47 inches (215.9 × 119.4 cm). Kimberley Fiterman-Duepner and Gregory Duepner Collection. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Karli Evans. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

JF: Which is true; our phone is our brain now.

TH: It's a paradox. I did not want to give up illusion for the object. I felt that objects were going to become the vehicles for a new, what is now virtual, Internet world. That perception came from my work in word processing, when I first came to New York. Sitting in front of that word processor, I was aware of this object that was physically in front of me, but then I went through that object into this vast illusionary space, different than the illusionary space in traditional Western painting.

JF: It is simultaneously a portal to another virtual world, but the portal is also an object.

TH: Yes.

JF: How has technological advancement influenced your work?

TH: Both the technology of new materials and new tools of technology enabled the work to keep evolving, and it still is. However, at a certain point,

working with the digital felt too controlled. I missed the tactile and the sense of risk and contingency I had had with painting and traditional materials. For me, this realization was emblematic of what I felt was going on in my life in which the technological advances were not replacing the slower, more difficult haptic experiences of my body. My expectation of technology changed and I felt that life was going to be a hybrid of our bodily existence and the technological, where one would not replace the other. As a result, I began to merge technology and the digital with physical materiality.

Jes Fan, still from the Art21 documentary *Jes Fan in Flux*, directed by Brian Redondo, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

Tishan Hsu. Courtesy of the artist.

JF: I am wondering about the role of being an outsider in your work—coming to art through architecture, living as an American in Cologne, feeling like not wanting to be an artist because of the stereotype of what being an artist means. I feel a lot of parallels, now being my tenth year of living in the US.

TH: I think the idea of the outsider has changed and morphed so much throughout my life in different contexts. It is hard for me to have that kind of perspective on my work since I am of it. A literature professor once told me that the whole of my work, rather than themes, could be about my identity as an Asian American, in addition to the other meanings it might have.

JF: I truly feel that in the work. In Chinese, the word for feeling and thinking is the same. They can both be expressed through the verb 覺得. But it is a very lived experience that translates through your work, a more mechanical appearance of the world, lingering between the human and the machine or an object.

TH: I see two stages in the evolution of my work. The first was trying to produce an image and a way of working that could capture this interface of embodied technology. The second was how to bring this imaginary into the world, to address more specific concerns in my lived life, but through this sense of a technological body. The second stage continues.

JF: There is something about technology that is inherently lonely. Most screens are meant for a singular experience.

TH: Yes. Our attachment to screens seems to bring more solitude and isolation, while seeming to connect, which I think is becoming dangerous. Loneliness and solitude are also an American paradigm, way before technology. I think we need to gain more control of technology and become more aware of what it is doing to us.

JF: In the history of painting, various techniques, like single-point perspective or chiaroscuro, aim to render the figure three-dimensional and realistic. I was thinking about the lack of these techniques in your paintings. You do not address perspective in your explorations of the bodily landscape. It is almost like a collapsing or a refusal of these types of conventional technologies.

TH: Pictorial technique was a central issue in the earliest stages. I can talk about references in the work to art history, but I was more broadly trying to explore how to visualize my experience of technological media with my body. I was asking, "could there be a way of moving away from abstraction, without going to the traditional figure/ground relationship, but still maintain the body? How could this figure/ground relationship address this new integration of technology with the body?" In a way, the ground is the figure in the work. That ground begins to connect the landscape, the body, and technology.

JF: It is an internal perspective.

TH: Yes. The process was intuitive and it is difficult to articulate in language. If you look at the world topographically, the landscape, the body, and the striped, rolling waves of the TV screen when the images fails, all have a common physical property that partially described my cognitive visual reality. By not defaulting to the traditional figure/ground of the body in the world or to an abstraction, where the body is implied at best, I sensed that there might be a way of bringing the body back in some more literal way, in the sense of skin, protrusions, eyes and/or mouth. At the same time, the work would acknowledge itself as an object. I wanted to propose a paradoxical change in how bodies are inhabiting the world. I think that is happening now to a much greater degree. I see that in younger people, who are totally connected to their phones and computers. Cognitively and haptically, they seem to occupy a different realm here.

JF: And emotionally also.

TH: Yes. This is new stuff that we cannot go to historical imaging or text to address.

JF: Perhaps it is necessary to come to these issues of technology from the outside, as someone not immersed in it. You do not have Instagram, social media; you are observing from the outside. There is something about you being in the word-processing room and observing through the portal, but also looking into the art world and seeing those alignments.

TH: In the earlier work, I used more traditional media. However, gradually using digital technologies in the work, and with my own increasing use of the cell phone and computer, I could feel my body becoming immersed in technology. It is harder to remain an outsider to technology. The earliest work is a different perspective on the same thing, rather than one medium replacing the other. At a certain point, I rebelled against the control of technology on my work and in my life. More recently, I have been recapturing some of the effects of traditional media in how I choose to work with digital media as a way of maintaining physicality, chance, and contingency, which is so much about life. My cognitive world is almost becoming a hybrid with software. You are right: I do not use social media very much, but, to me, using the computer, cell phone, and living in this wired world provides more than enough immersion to address this shift I have been describing. I have migrated to the inside.

Jes Fan, *Systems II* (and detail), 2018, composite resin, glass, melanin, estradiol, Depo-Testosterone, silicone, wood, 52 × 25 1/4 × 20 inches (132 × 64 × 51 cm). Private Collection. Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Oriol Tarridas. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

JF: It is funny because I think you are of the generation that marked the very beginning of the experience of being enveloped in the computer screen. And I am the last generation that remembers life without the computer screen. So, in a way, we each bookend the beginning and the end of a really important cultural shift. I acutely observe the way that my brother emotes or thinks. He is seven years younger than me and the kind of damage that is done with social media—constantly scrolling through someone's death, then someone's birthday celebration, then someone's vacation, another person's death, and then another person's arrest—I feel like he is more callous in a way. His attention span is so limited. The present is very fragmented and there is no historicity.

TH: I feel like history and time itself is changing. I think we are only beginning to understand this. This pandemic has opened up a lot of issues. Who would have imagined that we would be forced to connect and communicate through our technologies as a result of a threat to our molecular bodies? There is a strange circularity of molecular bodies potentially affecting other molecular bodies, which then, from fear, connect through the technology of the screen to return to other bodies. This seamless connecting, coming from technology, travel, and speed, has also been a driving effect for the work. This body/technology interface also affects power and its expression through our bodies. That the connectivity of technology precipitated unprecedented political movements like BLM is an example.

JF: And how uneasy it is, actually, when you are in the same room as someone, in the flesh.

TH: I find that experience uncanny—just the fact that we are having this discussion on Zoom and I feel like we have actually met, though we have not met at all. I understand the screen is going to soon be even less present than it is to our awareness, with even less noise or static. There will be no gap.

JF: No gaps at all, not even enough for tiles. Just flat.

TH: I was in a Zoom meeting the other day and thought, "This is what we used to see in *Star Wars* movies, where they pushed a button and then boom, the screen of someone on another planet appears to talk to." We are getting closer to that. I am losing the sense of distance through Zoom. In contrast to six months ago, it is becoming familiar and I tend to make assumptions about the person I just Zoomed with. I have a Zoom call and then I am in real space and I can already feel it; it is beginning to merge in this kind of hybrid sense of bodily reality.

This conversation took place on Zoom on October 6, 2020.

Open Circuits: Brief Notes on Latin America and Transnational Video Networks in the 1970s

Julieta González

> The Space-station was originally conceived as a refueling depot for ships leaving the Earth. As such it may fill an important though transient role in the conquest of space, during the period when chemical fuels are employed.... However, there is at least one purpose for which the station is ideally suited and indeed has no practical alternative. This is the provision of world-wide ultra-high-frequency radio services, including television.
>
> ARTHUR C. CLARKE, "The Space-Station: Its Radio Applications," 1945[1]

> Television is the most powerful instrument of communication ever devised. It reaches into the living room, watches the Earth, and extends into space. Linked with the computer, it provides instant information. Linked with the telephone, it provides instant visual contact Television no longer depicts nature; Television is nature. It is the most important medium yet to challenge the artist, the writer, the journalist, the educator, the thinker. As a tool, it will surpass the book and the film.
>
> DOUGLAS DAVIS, proposal for *Open Circuits: Art at the Beginning of the Electronic Age*, 1972[2]

In 1945, twelve years before Sputnik, the first satellite, was launched into space, Arthur C. Clarke published an article in the British journal *Wireless World* describing a future scenario of telecommunications connected by satellites orbiting the Earth that would enable real-time radio and television transmissions. Illustrating the article were images of satellite hubs interconnecting different points of the Earth.[3] Similar images resurface in the drawings of pioneering video artists Wolf Vostell and Juan Downey, such as Vostell's for the poster *A 3 Country Happening* (1966) or Downey's *Invisible Energy in Chile Plays a Concert in New York* (1969). At the center of these diagrammatic drawings, satellites triangulate different geographic locations, linked by the transmission of electromagnetic waves. The *3 Country Happening* promoted by Vostell was to establish simultaneous communication between three artists, Marta Minujín in Buenos Aires, Allan Kaprow in New York, and Vostell in Berlin, while each performed a happening in their location. Minujín's contribution, *Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad (Simultaneity in Simultaneity)*, was the most complex, a veritable experiment in media ecology, which involved feedback dynamics between the participants, using different media, such as television, radio, photography, and film.[4] Though not a video work per se, the playback and feedback aspects of the experience, as well as its self-referential nature in terms of a reflection of the effect of media technologies on human beings, prefigured some of the most relevant traits of later experimentation with video in the 1970s.

Works such as these mobilized the potential of networked communications as integral to artistic practices in the 1970s and prefigure the transnational networks that emerged during this decade around video.[5] The global interconnectedness suggested by these drawings, in fact, enabled the opening of these circuits and the insertion of artists from the peripheries in them. This brief essay attempts to map the inscription of

1 Arthur C. Clarke, "The Space-Station: Its Radio Applications" (May 25, 1945), *Spaceflight* 10 (March 3, 1968): 85–86. Reprinted in *Exploring the Unknown: Selected Documents in the History of the U.S. Civil Space Program, Volume III: Using Space*, ed. John M. Logsdon with Roger D. Launius, David H. Onkst, and Stephen J. Garber (Washington, D.C.: NASA, 1998): 12–15; online at https://ntrs.nasa.gov/api/citations/19980202741/downloads/19980202741.pdf.

2 Douglas Davis, "*Open Circuits*: Statement of Purpose," typewritten proposal for an exhibition titled *Open Circuits: Art at the Beginning of the Electronic Age* (1972), http://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/proposal.pdf.

3 Arthur C. Clarke, "Extra-Terrestrial Relays: Can Rocket Stations Give World-Wide Radio Coverage?," *Wireless World* (October 1945): 305–08. Reprinted in *Exploring the Unknown*: 16–22.

4 In the end, Kaprow and Vostell were not able to participate via satellite as planned. For a detailed account of the happening, see Michael Kirby, "Marta Minujin's 'Simultaneity in Simultaneity,'" *The Drama Review:TDR* 12, no. 3 (1968): 149–52.

5 Although outside the scope of this essay, it must be said that the collective public dimension of happenings and performance art events paved the way for many of these networks. An important example in New York was Charlotte Moorman's Avant-Garde Festival, which ran from 1963 to 1980. In Argentina, the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella was at the center of experimentation with mass media and television in the late 1960s, from Marta Minujín to David Lamelas. Roberto Jacoby, Raúl Escari, and Eduardo Costa co-authored the manifesto *Un arte de los medios de comunicación* (*A Media Art*) in 1966.

Latin American artists in some of these transnational circuits, and the artists', at times, pivotal role in the circuits' articulation.

Juan Downey, *Invisible Energy in Chile Plays a Concert in New York*, 1969, acrylic, graphite and collage on cardboard mounted in panel, 49 1/4 × 39 inches (125 × 99 cm). Courtesy of the Juan Downey Foundation.

LEFT:
Allan Kaprow, Marta Minujin, and Wolf Vostell, *A 3 Country Happening*, 1966, offset lithograph on paper, 17 7/8 × 16 7/8 inches (45.4 × 42.9 cm) sheet. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

RIGHT:
Marta Minujin. *Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad (Simultaneity in Simultaneity)*, 1966, performance view (projected), Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of the artist and the Institute for Studies on Latin American Arts (ISLAA). Installation view, Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, November 5, 2020–May 30, 2021. Photo by Oriol Tarridas. © Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College.

Media Ecologies: The Medium Is the Message

Marshall McLuhan's dictum "the medium is the message" shaped much of the thinking around media in the 1960s. One of McLuhan's theses was that "the message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."[6] The change of scale introduced by information technologies indeed brought about ontological and epistemological shifts that resulted, in the realm of art, in the emergence of dematerialized practices that relied on the exchange of information. Perhaps unlike anyone else, artists realized the potential of the medium as the message and produced media environments that highlighted the effects that the media would have on society at large.

In fact, during the late 1960s and the early 1970s the terms "media ecology" and "media environment" widely circulated in publications devoted to video and television, such as *Radical Software*. Media ecology aimed to understand the influence media exerted on society and everyday life.

6 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964): 8.

Neil Postman, who first used the term when he set up a graduate program on Media Ecology at New York University in 1968, used the analogy of a petri dish for growing cell cultures to describe a medium as a "a technology within which a culture grows … it gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking," and media ecology as the study of the "ways in which the interaction between media and human beings gives a culture its character, and … help a culture maintain symbolic balance."[7] McLuhan's ideas were effectively deployed in Minujin's *Simultaneity in Simultaneity*, a dizzying and convoluted orchestration of different media —television, telex, radio, film, photography— a recursive media environment organized to convey the message that the medium was, in fact, the message.

Marta Minujin. *Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad (Simultaneity in Simultaneity)*, 1966, performance view, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of the artist and the Institute for Studies on Latin American Arts (ISLAA).

In a similar way, the idea of the media environment permeated many early video installations. Notable examples include Paul Ryan's *Everyman's Moebius Strip* and Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle*, both presented in New York at the Howard Wise Gallery's landmark 1969 exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium*. Relying mainly on feedback, both works highlighted the topological nature of the feedback loop, what Ryan described as "infolding." For Ryan, the act of watching oneself watching oneself was tantamount to "seeing your real self, your 'inside."[8] The multi-monitor wall installation *Wipe Cycle* also featured live and delayed feedback images of the public and the gallery. It also included footage from broadcast television, in order to generate a sense of "information overload," that would "escape the automatic 'information' experience of commercial television without totally divesting it of its usual content."[9] Moreover, the topological infolding of the spectator within the media torrent, through the effect of live feedback, was, for Schneider and Gillette, "an attempt to demonstrate that you're as much a piece of information as tomorrow morning's headlines —as a viewer you take a satellite relationship to the information. And the satellite which is you is incorporated into the thing which is being sent back to the satellite— in other words, rearranging one's experience of information reception."[10]

This immaterial but nevertheless "built" environment of media became a field of agency for many video artists who sought to reorganize the structure of information. Coupled with the topological possibilities of

7 Neil Postman, "The Humanism of Media Ecology," Inaugural Media Ecology Association Convention (keynote address, Fordham University, New York, NY, June 16–17, 2000); reprinted in *Proceedings of the Media Ecology Association* 1 (2000): 10–16; online at https://www.media-ecology.org/resources/Documents/Proceedings/v1/v1-02-Postman.pdf.

8 Paul Ryan, "Everyman's Moebius Strip," in *TV as a Creative Medium* (New York: Howard Wise Gallery, 1969); online at http://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/tvasacreativemedium_exhibitionbrochure.pdf.

9 Frank Gillette, "Wipe Cycle," in *TV as a Creative Medium*.

10 Frank Gillette, quoted in Jud Yalkut, "Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider: Parts I and II of an Interview," *Radical Software* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 10; online at https://www.radicalsoftware.org/volume1nr1/pdf/VOLUME1NR1_art03.pdf. The interview was originally published in *The East Village Other* 4, no. 35 (July 30, 1969) [Part I] and *The East Village Other* 4, no. 36 (August 6, 1969) [Part II].

feedback, which acted upon the spectator's spatio-temporal perception, video technology's inherent reflexivity could produce an active and aware spectator: "seeing the feedback … breeds the notion that we're all potential actors —effectors of the environment— that we can do amazing things. It's a matter of reshaping ourselves perhaps."[11]

From Guerrilla Television to Trans-Americas

Only by treating technology as ecology can we cure the split between ourselves and our extensions. We need to get good tools into good hands—not reject all tools because they have been misused to benefit only the few.

Editors, first issue of *Radical Software*, 1970[12]

The notion of reflexivity was an extremely important one for video artists in the 1970s, linked to the shift from first-order to second-order cybernetics, information as action, the creation of an empowered observer, and the idea of autonomy implied by self-organizing, autopoietic systems. The journal *Radical Software* became a vehicle for the circulation of these ideas and constituted a circuit in itself.[13] Ryan was one *Radical Software*'s most prolific writers, and his texts highlighted the ideas of technology as an ecology and television (video) as a tool for social transformation, which were at the heart of the journal's undertaking.

Cover of *Radical Software* 2, number 5 (1973).

To creatively and nonviolently reclaim the information channels, wresting them from the monopoly of broadcast television and corporate television networks, was at the core of what came to be known as guerrilla television. Inspired by the leftist guerrilla movements in the 1960s, many of which were involved in decolonization struggles in the Third World, artists who understood their role as catalysts for social change employed guerrilla tactics in their practices.[14] The field of video was particularly fertile for these social experiments that transcended grassroots community television. Taking a cue from "Cybernetic Guerrilla Warfare," an essay by Ryan published in *Radical Software*, journalist Michael Shamberg, a

11 Ibid.

12 The untitled and unsigned introduction to the new magazine was printed above the masthead of the first issue, *Radical Software* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1970); online at https://www.radicalsoftware.org/volume1nr1/pdf/VOLUME1NR1_0002.pdf.

13 *Radical Software* was published between 1970 and 1974 by the Raindance Corporation, an "alternative think tank" set up in 1969 by artists Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, journalist Michael Shamberg, philosopher Victor Gioscia, and writer Marco Vassi. The journal was edited by Beryl Korot and Phillys Gershuny. The name Raindance was an ironic reference to the Rand Corporation, a global policy research and development non-profit initially founded by Douglas Aircraft to provide technological support to the United States Air Force; Rand played a significant role in shaping US military strategy during the Cold War. The run of *Radical Software* is available online at https://www.radicalsoftware.org/e/index.html.

14 Drawing inspiration from guerrilla movements was not the exclusive province of artists working with video and television. Germano Celant cast the Arte Povera artists into the guerrilla paradigm, and, in New York, collectives such as the Guerrilla Art Action Group and the Guerrilla Girls emerged, among many other examples.

founder of the Raindance Corporation, *Radical Software*'s publisher, wrote *Guerilla Televsion*, a "manual" that aimed to restructure America's "media ecology" and reweave its fabric by reincorporating the "informationally disenfranchised," those who had been excluded by one-directional and antidemocratic information structures designed to "minimize feedback."[15] Under the umbrella of guerrilla television, a host of alternative media initiatives emerged, from Videofreex to the later independent cable networks such as Cable Soho, the Artists Television Network (founded by Douglas Davis and Jaime Davidovich), and Shamberg's own Top Value Television (TVTV), among many others.

In 1973, the cover of *Radical Software* featured a unique and transnational experiment in guerrilla television, one that would extend throughout the Americas and seek to unite the different indigenous peoples of the continent through video, Chilean artist Juan Downey's *Video Trans Americas*. Downey would carry out this project in three expeditions in his Video Trans America van (much like the Videofreex media buses or Ant Farm's Media Van) from New York to Central and South America between 1973 and 1976. Consistent with Shamberg's ideas, Downey's *Video Trans Americas* provided a radical reformulation of the previously existing communicational structures that, to his thinking, were set in place by centuries of colonial oppression and had eroded culture, languages, and customs. In the process, those communicational structures had alienated indigenous cultures from their own traditions and isolated one culture from another, resulting in a disenfranchisement that was not only informational but structural and historical.[16]

Downey's undertaking was part of his "call for social change: a revolution within the detection, processing and dispersal of information," "diversity of signal in multi-directional networks!" and "a society with strong communications networks of multi-directional potentials as opposed to our present-day pyramidal oppressive hierarchy that misinforms the base in order to remain at the apex."[17] Beyond the context of "media America," Downey's *Video Trans America* was specifically carried out against the backdrop of what Jorge Glusberg, founder of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC) in Argentina, described as the "Latin American problem." Downey was critical of the situation of dependency of the region and the renovation of the colonial project under the guise of *desarrollismo* (developmentalism) and the accompanying economic policies that gave free rein to the extractivism of transnational corporations. *Video Trans America* had reformulated the role of the artist for Downey as a "cultural communicant" and an "activating aesthetic anthropologist with visual means of expression: video-tape."[18] Video feedback's intrinsic reflexivity would thus be a step forward in the struggle towards the autonomy, self-representation, and self-organization of the Latin American peoples and their indigenous cultures.

In this framework, it is pertinent to understand the exchange of information and ideas during this period between Downey and the CAyC, with which he collaborated on several occasions. Founded in 1969 by Glusberg, an industrialist, and a group of a dozen artists in Buenos Aires, the Grupo de los Trece,[19] CAyC was an organization whose particular alliance between art and technology substantially differed from the countercul-

15 Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

16 Downey wrote that "Many of America's cultures exist today in total isolation, unaware of their overall variety and of commonly shared myths. This automobile trip is designed to develop a holistic perspective among the various populations inhabiting the American continents, thus generating cultural interaction. A videotaped account from New York to the southern tip of Latin America. A form of infolding in space while evolving in time. Playing back a culture in the context of another, the culture itself in its own context, and, finally, editing all the interactions of time, space and context into one work of art. Cultural information (art, architecture, cooking, dance, landscape, language, etc.) will be mainly exchanged by means of videotape shot along the way and played back in the different villages, for the people to see others and themselves. The role of the artist is here conceived as a cultural communicant, as an activating aesthetic anthropologist with visual means of expression: videotape." J. Downey, "Travelogues of *Video Trans Americas*, 1973–75," *Journal of the Centre for Advanced TV Studies* 4 (1976): 22.

17 Juan Downey, "Architecture, Video, Telepathy: A Communications Utopia," *International Review of Video and Mass Media, Journal of the Centre for Advanced TV Studies, at Fantasy Factory Video Resource Centre* 5, no. 1 (1977): 1–4.

18 Juan Downey, "Video Trans Americas," *Radical Software* 2, no. 5 (Winter 1973): 4; online at https://radicalsoftware.org/volume2nr5/pdf/VOLUME2NR5_0006.pdf.

19 The original members of the group were Jacques Bedel, Luis Fernándo Benedit, Gregorio Dujovny, Carlos Ginsburg, Jorge Glusberg, Victor Grippo, Jorge González Mir, Vicente Lucas Marotta, Luis Pazos, Alfredo Portillos, Juan Carlos Romero, Julio Teich, and Horacio Zabala. Leopoldo Maler and Clorindo Testa joined later.

tural one in the United States, marked as it was by the political unrest that accompanied the spread of dictatorial regimes throughout the region, including Argentina, Brazil, and later Chile. The conception of information as a form of agency was fundamental for the CAyC, which, though initially embracing the constructive-semantic imperatives of the kinetic, computational model of the early 1960s, eventually moved towards a radicalized agenda of direct action and intervention. The Grupo de los Trece's agenda, developed under the auspices of the CAyC, was to promote "projects and exhibitions, where art, technology and community interests are connected," evincing "the new unity of … art, science and social environment."[20]

20 "Qué es el CAYC/What Is the CAYC," in *Argentina Inter-medios* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1969).

Juan Downey, *Video Trans Americas*, 1973–76, oil, acrylic, graphite, and collage on wood, 95 5/8 × 48 inches (243 × 122 cm). Courtesy of the Juan Downey Foundation.

The CAyC's modes of operation were certainly indebted to guerrilla tactics, small punctual interventions, and low-cost exhibitions and communications material (the ubiquitous CAyC flyers). Though its activities were not exclusively restricted to video, CAyC became an important, if not the most relevant, transnational video network in Latin America, through its cooperative Ediciones Tercer Mundo and its *Open Encounters on Video*, a series of exhibitions and screenings that it organized in different parts of the world, including London, Paris, Ferrara, Caracas, and Buenos Aires. For Glusberg, video was an essential tool for artists working in Latin America in the midst of economic crises, dictatorships, hyperinflation, and other problems. The *Open Encounters* were a means of dialogue and exchange between different latitudes, but also of using video to address the underdeveloped world's asymmetrical relations to developed countries.

Alternative television and video networks not only aimed to transform the structure of information, they also changed the museum and gallery landscape, bringing feedback experiences into the gallery space and merging with dance, music, and sculpture to invent the genres of video performance and video installation. A few notable examples were the first exhibitions at Howard Wise Gallery in New York, which Wise closed to establish the nonprofit video distributor Electronic Arts Intermix in 1970; the program at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, run by director Jim Harithas and video curator David Ross; and, on the West Coast, the Dilexi Series, organized by Dilexi Gallery and KQED Channel 9 in the Bay Area. Museums also formed video departments and incorporated the medium into their collections.

The work of Latin American artists circulated freely in these networks, individually or through the CAyC. The Argentine collective Grupo Frontera created a feedback environment in curator Kynaston McShine's 1970 landmark *Information* exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1974, Glusberg participated a major conference on video at MoMA, *Open Circuits: An International Conference on the Future of Television*, co-organized by Davis,[21] where, through Ediciones Tercer Mundo, he presented a selection of video from Argentina. Originally conceived as an exhibition, the conference aimed to assess the state of video and alternative media at the time. In 1977, Davis co-edited an MIT Press publication that gathered the proceedings from the event, which ranged from a belief in video as an ideological tool for the Third World, in the case of Glusberg, to a general sense of failure and pessimism, in the case of media theorist Hans Magnus Enzensberger.[22]

Cuarto Encuentro Internacional Abierto de Video (Buenos Aires: CAyC, 1975). Catalogue of the *Fourth International Open Encounter on Video*.

This radius of influence reached Caracas, Venezuela, where the artist Claudio Perna and journalist and videomaker Margarita D'Amico organized the first video exhibition in 1975 at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas. It featured artists Davis, Downey, Ant Farm, Antoni Muntadas, Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, and Charlotte Moorman, who performed her famous collaboration with Paik, *TV Bra for Living*

21 The title *Open Circuits* was borrowed from Nam June Paik, who had stated that "we are in open circuits." The conference had its origins in Davis's exhibition proposal *Open Circuits: Art at the Beginning of the Electronic Age.*

22 *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, ed. Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977).

Sculpture.[23] After the success of this first video exhibition, the museum hosted a second event in 1977, this time inviting the CAyC and Glusberg to hold their *Open Encounter on Video* in the museum.

1977 Video: Encuentro Internacional de Video (Caracas: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas, 1977). Catalogue of the *Sixth International Encounter on Video*.

Douglas Davis, *The Last Nine Minutes* (performance view), still from the film documenting the *Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast*, 1977. Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix.

Caracas once again became a temporary video hub later that year, as the chosen broadcast location for Davis's contribution to the *Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast*, a component of the contemporary art exhibition *Documenta*, held in Kassel, Germany, every five years. The 1977 edition, curated by Manfred Schneckenburger, came to be known as the "media *Documenta*" and featured an extensive video program, which viewers could even watch from their own homes. For the opening of *Documenta*, a live broadcast was organized, during which Davis, Paik, and Joseph Beuys would each present a nine-minute program. In Kassel, Paik and Moorman performed *TV Bra* and other works, and Beuys gave a speech in which he referenced Paik and Moorman's performance, which he was seeing live, and reflected on artistic freedom and what he described as "social sculpture … art that no longer refers solely to the modern world, to the artist, but comprehends a notion of art relating to everyone and to the very question and problem of the social organism in which people live."[24] In Caracas, Davis performed *The Last Nine Minutes*, a title referring to the duration of the live broadcast but also, in the words of the artist, to "the last 9 minutes you and I will ever share together at this moment in the world when an artist can finally use the satellite to reach out and … destroy your TV screen … in order to touch you, to make human, not media touch."[25]

23 A recording of this performance may be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5WSoK5_Qao&feature=emb_logo.

24 A translation of Beuys's speech is online at http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/rede-in-der/.

25 Douglas Davis, quoted in Jeremy Turner, "Outer Space: The Past, Present and Future of Telematic Art-07," Open Space (2004), https://openspace.ca/douglas-davis-interview-2004.

Like Davis, Beuys and Paik directly addressed the viewer and broke the fourth wall, a gesture that eliminates the separation between performer and audience. Using video to forge human relations between individuals and not just broadcast to indistinct masses was, perhaps, one of the primary aims behind guerrilla television and the circuits it opened around the world.

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