

Pleasure

Solo exhibition at Entrée, Bergen

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My book *Mitre Marrows* published a couple years ago (2014), is loosely based on a narrative of two machines having sex and making a family. Since then I have been wanting to take my practice and research in making moving sculptures and installations and explore the area of sexuality as a symptom of our complicated relationship to technology. *Pleasure* is the first occasion in which I explore these subjects head-on.

Background

Much of my practice explores machines as both powerful and pathetic. Machines have been a way to demonstrate the achievements of an Empire while also pointing to themselves as weakened by their own essence. An example is found in my earlier sculpture *The Chariot of Greenwich* where a carefully engineered machine consumes itself. In my work *The Kinetoscope of Time*, audiences are placed inside an early cinema machine and explore it as a place of ghostliness, and where time loses its linearity. In other works like my *Tristan Chord* and *The Great Learning*, I develop mechanistic arrangements of weights and counterweights with the sole purpose of administering a single, lyrical fall.

Through these works I research how art can comment on industrialisation, digitalisation, and history by shedding light on our complicated and blurry relationship to progress. We have come to rely on technological advancement, but also fear and be repulsed by it.

The Rhythmic Machine

In Donna Haraway's Cyborg manifesto¹ the notion of the cyborg, and its blend of human and machine, is useful in that it does away with stiff classifications of gender, as well as divisions between human and animal. This loss of boundaries is politically powerful, but also leads to uncharted notions of intimacy and pleasure.

There is a broad tradition of literature, film and popular arts focused on technology-driven, futuristic definitions of sex (the novels of Philip Jose Farmer for instance). While in these stories and images technological sexuality is focused on anthropomorphic replacements of the human by a machine (sex cyborgs, prosthetics, humanoid lovers, etc), the reality is that the complexity of technology aims to challenge these anatomical logics to begin with. Sexuality is not just about the male and/or female body and organs, or about ways in which these can be replaced. It is the contention of this project that as technology rewires our personal, social and cultural landscape in ever more complex ways, so do basic human emotions, like sensuality and sexuality. A different order takes place in order to define the desires of a technologically-dependent society.

In this line of thought it is interesting to relate to Donna Haraway's ideas and to find other imageries and narratives that break this human/body-centric model. An example is found in Google's "Deep Dream"² software. This software takes input from human cultural world,

¹ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.

² <https://deepdreamgenerator.com>

and produces its own imagery based on its “interpretation” (see attached image). The results blend the world in ways that are recognisable and monstrous. They speak of the state of artificial intelligence as resonating strongly with us, but as capable of representational subversions that are difficult to administrate. Likewise the films of David Cronenberg such as *Existenz* (1999), where the animal, technological and human merge in absurd fantasies and objects.



Google's Deep Dream Image generator, 2014



Still from David Cronenberg's *Existenz* (1999)



Cover of Philip Jose Farmer's *Strange Compulsion*, 1953

These various fusions between human, animal, natural and mechanistic are liberating and chaotic, they add to current states of confusion where so much in our social, economic and political landscape seems to be in question, or in a state of reconfiguration. They have pleasure and violence. Our understanding and channeling of a reconfigured “self”, one that includes technology, is crucial as part of our intellectual and industrial development, one that includes an aesthetic recomposition where nature and culture clash into each other.

Another important aspect to consider is the fact that the one thing that technology has most effectively exploited is its tapping into our innate pleasure principle. It does that through temporal figures of repetition and anticipation. As Patricia Mellencamp explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*³, technology develops a set of rhythms and intensities that trap us in compulsive behaviours. Motion, rhythm, repetition and cyclical intensities are all

³ Mellencamp, Patricia. “TV Time and Catastrophe, or Beyond the Pleasure Principle of Television.” Ed Patricia Mellencamp. *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP: 1992. 240-266. Print.

part of this. While we focus mostly on the imagery of developing technologies, it is in their temporal fabric that lies our integration and dependence to them. We crave the refreshing on webpages, we anticipate the “likes” on whatever we post on social media, we need the steady acceleration of propulsion.

Pleasure Objects, Pleasure Motions

Pleasure is an exhibition where a collection of kinetic sculptures and videos refer to the ideas explained above and focuses on sensuality and sexuality as main vehicle. The objects allude to a blending of organic and mechanistic, and their assemblage will produce a landscape of cyclical rhythms.

The production of the pieces for the exhibition develop in particular 4 aspects:

1. Natural World: references to plants and animals as well as phallic and yonic shapes.
2. Intercourse and physical dynamics on a wide scale: motions related loosely to penetration but also enfolding and approximation. The intensities will be of broad range, from paced to violent.
3. Material: Use of a heat sensitive polymorph plastic which embodies the space between industrial strength and organic fragility. Metallic and wooden parts will also be included referencing historical mechanical solutions.
4. Rhythm: repetitive motions at varying intensities, from smooth rotation, to more violent impacts and repetitive instances.

Images

- Cover of Philip Jose Farmer's *Strange Compulsion*, 1953
- Google's *Deep Dream* Software, 2014
- Still from David Cronenberg's *Existenz*, 1999
- Test for objects in *Pleasure* No. 1,2,3

References

- Mellencamp, Patricia. "TV Time and Catastrophe, or Beyond the Pleasure Principle of Television." Ed Patricia Mellencamp. *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP: 1992. 240-266. Print.
- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.
- Becoming Inorganic, Teresa de Lauretis, *Critical Inquiry* 2003 29:4, 547-570
- Halberstam, Judith, and Ira Livingston. *Posthuman Bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. Print.

Links

Sculptre tests in motion

1. <https://vimeo.com/201830879> (password: **entree**)
2. <https://vimeo.com/201830776> (password: **entree**)

Tests for objects in *Pleasure*



