



AMODI STARBUKES

text by:
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THE BODY AS A POLITICAL FIELD

“Bodies are maps of power and identity.” (Donna Haraway,
A Cyborg Manifesto, 1991)

When we talk about the body, we talk about politics.

The human body's one of the strongest symbols and at the same time a mirror of our society. Our bodies alone can show our individual position in society, whether we are right in the middle or pushed to the margins. And one thing is clear: we are supposedly to blame for this position ourselves. Our bodies seem to be malleable, trimmable, and those who do not manage to make their bodies align with the norm are considered failures. Too fat, too old, too frail, not white enough.

When we talk about the body, we talk about politics.

A democracy needs different voices, and art often goes against conventions and narrow boundaries. With Embodied Structures, we celebrate this opposition, which is against toxic and entrenched structures, and join a chorus of numerous international voices that are asking whether what is needed is not just a rethink but rather a revolt. *Thou shalt not function* (Ariadne von Schirach), *Riot, don't diet!* (Elisabeth Lechner), *#BLACKLIVESMATTER* (Patrisse Khan-Cullors) or simply *NOPE* (A nope manifesto, E. Jane).

We need to unlearn embodied norms and rethink outdated structures. Art helps us in this learning process because it is often already a step ahead. It not only calls for revolt, it embodies revolt.

In her 1968 performance, *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit*, Valie EXPORT, as an active woman, walks her passive partner Peter Weibel like a dog on a leash in Vienna's first district. To document and expose the relationship of the sexes as a “game of domination,” she points out in public space the need to reshape an outdated social order and liberate women from the servitude of men. ●¹ If at that time this was considered a scandal or, at best, a *foolish artistic imagination*, she anticipates much of what we fortunately no longer have to disguise as an art performance but discuss quite openly today.

Feminism has taken on many new forms and has in any case – and even if that should be the lowest common denominator of all its manifestations – become socially acceptable. Only a few years ago, it was a public affront and perceived with disgust to consciously, and for heaven's sake perhaps even SELF-consciously, show a Fat, naked body in public. The body positivity movement, and especially the body neutrality movement, has thankfully done a lot in recent years to make different bodies visible and advocates that a body can simply be itself without being judged.

See online at <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/mappe-der-hundigkeit/> (accessed January 10, 2022).

●¹



- 4 Sophie Passmann, *Alte weiße Männer: Ein Schlichtungsversuch*, 2019.
- 5 Sorority, *No More Bullshit. Das Handbuch gegen sexistische Stammtschweisheiten*, 2021, <https://nomorebullshit.sorority.at/>.



- 2 Patrisse Khan-Cullors, *When They Call You A Terrorist* (German version: #BlackLivesMatter), 2018.
- 3 Tarana Burke, *Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement*, 2021.

VISIONS OF A BETTER FUTURE

In 2013, after George Zimmerman's acquittal for the killing of Trayvon Martin, a movement co-founded by the three Black community activists *Alicia Garza*, *Patrisse Khan Cullors* and *Opal Tometi* launched the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. It drew inspiration from the USAfrican American civil-rights movement, the Black Power movement, as well as the Black Feminism movement of the 1980s, Pan-Africanism, the anti-apartheid movement, hip-hop, and the lesbian and gay rights movement and Occupy Wall Street. In 2018, Patrisse Khan-Cullors wrote *When They Call You A Terrorist* (German version: #BlackLivesMatter) as one of the voices of this internationally growing movement. ● 2

#MeToo is a hashtag that had been spreading on social networks since mid-October 2017 in the wake of the Weinstein scandal. The phrase "Me too" goes back to the Black American activist *Tarana Burke*, who started using it in 2006, ● 3 and it became popular as a hashtag through the actress *Alyssa Milano*, who encouraged affected women to draw attention to the extent of sexual harassment and sexual assault with tweets. Since then, the hashtag has been used millions of times and has triggered a broad social debate worldwide. Feminists like *Sophie Passmann* and collectives like Sorority continue the discourse through their social media channels and contribute to a broader understanding of patriarchal social structures with their online activism and books such as *Alte Weiße Männer* ● 4 and *No More Bullshit*. ● 5

In her activism and artistic work, the Viennese conceptual art-

- 6 See Asma Aiad, <https://www.asmaaiad.com/salam-oida> (accessed January 11, 2022).
- 7 See <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1397521434127/chat-mit-conchita-wurst> (accessed January 11, 2022).
- 8 See <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1397521434127/chat-mit-conchita-wurst> (accessed January 11, 2022).
- 9 Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism. A Manifesto*, 2020.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 11.



ist, activist, and youth worker *Asma Aiad* deals with anti-racism, feminism, and the deconstruction of stereotypes. Together with *Ines Mahmoud*, she founded *Salam Oida*, an initiative that celebrates Muslim culture and art in Austria online and in social media, and points out how to talk to each other and sensitize people to the issue of racism. In her various works such as *This is not a headscarf and the (in)visible Mosques*, she deals with her Muslim identity in Austria and Europe, and issues such as discrimination, representation, and art. ● 6

In 2014, the musician and drag artist *Conchita Wurst* won the Eurovision Song Contest. Since 2011, Thomas Neuwirth has been performing as the drag queen Conchita Wurst, a diva with a full beard. He explains her creation as a reaction and statement against discrimination based on homosexuality. ● 7

"I hope that something changes, and I will only keep my mouth shut when we don't have to talk about trivialities like sexuality anymore." ● 8 (Conchita Wurst)

A short time later in 2015, the appearance of the traffic light figures in Vienna changed, becoming queer couples.

Mavi Phoenix not only reflects on his feelings of becoming a trans man in 2021 and his role in society in his songs but also uses the stage as a musician to talk openly about his gender transformation.

Legacy Russell in 2020 wrote a manifesto for cyberfeminism: *finding liberation in the glitch between body, gender, and technology*, ● 9 celebrates GLITCH as "calculated failure [and refusal] to be hewn to the hegemonic line of a binary code," ● 10 and inspires many people around the globe.

Since 2013, Vienna Roller Derby's official all-male *Fearleaders* group has been known for its spectacular half-time shows, party performances, appearances at art events, etc. The Fearleaders Vienna support gender diversity and emancipation and subvert gender stereotypes by turning them upside down, exposing ridiculous and in the same way toxic masculine behavior with

● 13 Ina Holub, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/inaholub> (accessed January 11, 2022).

● 14 National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), <https://naafa.org/> (accessed January 11, 2022).



● 11 See Fearleaders, <https://www.fearleadersvienna.com/> (accessed January 11, 2022).

● 12 PCCC*, <https://www.wuk.at/programm/pccc-all-over-the-place/> (accessed January 11, 2022).

overstatement and irony. In their performances and with projects like their annual calendar, the Fearelli, they make a strong statement for equality and fundamental rights for every person* in our society. ● 11

PCCC*, Vienna's First Queer Comedy Club, which is run by Josef Jöchel and Denice Bourbon, follows the premise that every joke must be PC and has to always punch up, never kick down. When pronounced, the name PCCC* (Politically Correct Comedy Club) sounds like "pissy sissy." "Above all, we're interested in reclaiming the term 'politically correct,' which is instrumentalized by the right-wing," say the organizers. ● 12

The German writers and activists *Anushka Rees* and *Melody Michelberger* write about diet culture and also from a personal perspective in their books *Beyond Beautiful*, 2019, and *Body Politics*, 2021. The Austrian scientist Elisabeth Lechner followed in the same year with the book *Riot, don't diet!*, in which she summarizes her scientific research on body norms and, like the other two, presents numerous other current activists in this field. All of them offer a platform for numerous voices and show how much we are all affected by the topic of body politics.

For several years, Austrian fat acceptance and body positivity activist *Ina Holub* has raised her voice on Instagram and shown how absurd diet culture actually is and what it does to us, our bodies, and our psyche. She campaigns for more queer visibility and fat acceptance on social media. ● 13 Alongside numerous other international voices and in the tradition of NAAFA, ● 14 she thus contributes to the reclaiming of the term "fat," which has been negatively connoted by mainstream society.

Since 2012, the Black American author, yoga teacher, and entrepreneur *Jessamyn Stanley* has offered her followers home-friendly yoga and founded The Underbelly, a wellness brand that offers on-demand streaming yoga classes. ● 15 She is one of the best known of a growing number of activists who argue that a fat body and fitness are not at odds with each other.

● 15 Jessamyn Stanley, <https://jessamynstanley.com/> (accessed January 11, 2022).

● 16 See Eily MagPie, interview, <https://www.1000things.at/blog/trainerin-elly-magpie-fitness-for-everybody/> (accessed January 11, 2022).

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● 17 Eily MagPie, <https://www.ellymagpie.fitness/werte> (accessed February 11, 2022).

● 18 Doris Uhlich, <https://www.dorisuhlich.at/en/biography> (accessed January 11, 2022).

● 19 See <https://www.d-arts.at/>

In 2020, the certified personal, health, and functional trainer Eily MagPie opened her inclusive fitness studio in Vienna as a safe space ● 16 that offers FITNESS FOR everyBODY and combats the prejudice that sport is an occupation for "thin" read people. ● 17

Since 2006, *Doris Uhlich* has been showing non-sexualized and unagitated dancing bodies in all forms in her choreographies, thus making an important contribution to the diversity of the international dance and performance scene. "For me, choreography means embodying my interest in people, to be precise: in people and the orders and systems which they construct, operate, to which they are exposed, and that become inscribed in them." ● 18 (Doris Uhlich)

"Diversity Work: When you have to try to make others comfortable with the fact of your own existence."

(Sara Ahmed, "Living a Feminist Life," in Elisabeth Lechner, *Riot, don't diet*)

German author, activist, and coach *Laura Gehlhaar* writes about her life as a wheelchair user and campaigns for more visibility and inclusion of people with disabilities in German society via Instagram, among other things.

In her research-based and collaborative practice and projects like "Crip Magazine," *Eva Egermann* engages with activist sub-cultural strategies, deconstructs binary constellations such as health/illness, ability/incapacity, vulnerability/strength, and aims at the artistic renegotiation of reality.

Vienna is more diverse than the Viennese cultural sector as such and since 2021 has now had the project office *D/Arts*, which has set out to further develop the cultural sector with discrimination-sensitive diversity development. The dialogue-based art project functions in a broad alliance as a platform for discourse, artistic production, and public relations work that aims to create a broader awareness of the need for this structural change. ● 19

UNLEARNING

All these voices make visible entrenched, toxic structures that we embody as a society and make clear, each in their own way, that we should unlearn many of those – mostly absurd – structures if we care about our mental health as individuals and as a society. They show that narrow social norms are in no case good for us but serve capitalist and privileged structures in all cases. They aim to open our eyes and invite us to expand our own understanding of such norms, to push the boundaries or even dissolve them, and to question and change our own habits.

“... we tend to blame each other or ourselves for the failures of the social structures in which we live, rather than criticizing the structures (like marriage) themselves.” (Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*)

Many social opinions and rules can be read from the human body. We have to be beautiful, slim, young, and healthy, and correspond to the majority (taste) accepted by the majority society in our very cultural circle. If we do not fall into this rather narrow spectrum, we have a problem. Not only are we ridiculed on a personal level – sometimes already as kids – but we also have a harder time being successful professionally and in public. Power structures can be seen in our bodies. Our bodies reflect the structure of our society, and the narrower the norm in which our bodies must function, the narrower our society as a whole.

Art, through its open structures and recognized position outside this norm, has often helped us to try out different and new ways of seeing and thinking. Ideally, such experiments, art figures or activist positions manage to inspire us in our “normal,” our everyday life and give us the opportunity to keep developing as a society after all. Therefore, art can be an important pillar when it comes to reflecting on society, addressing grievances, and giving new suggestions on how we as humans want to deal and live with each other.

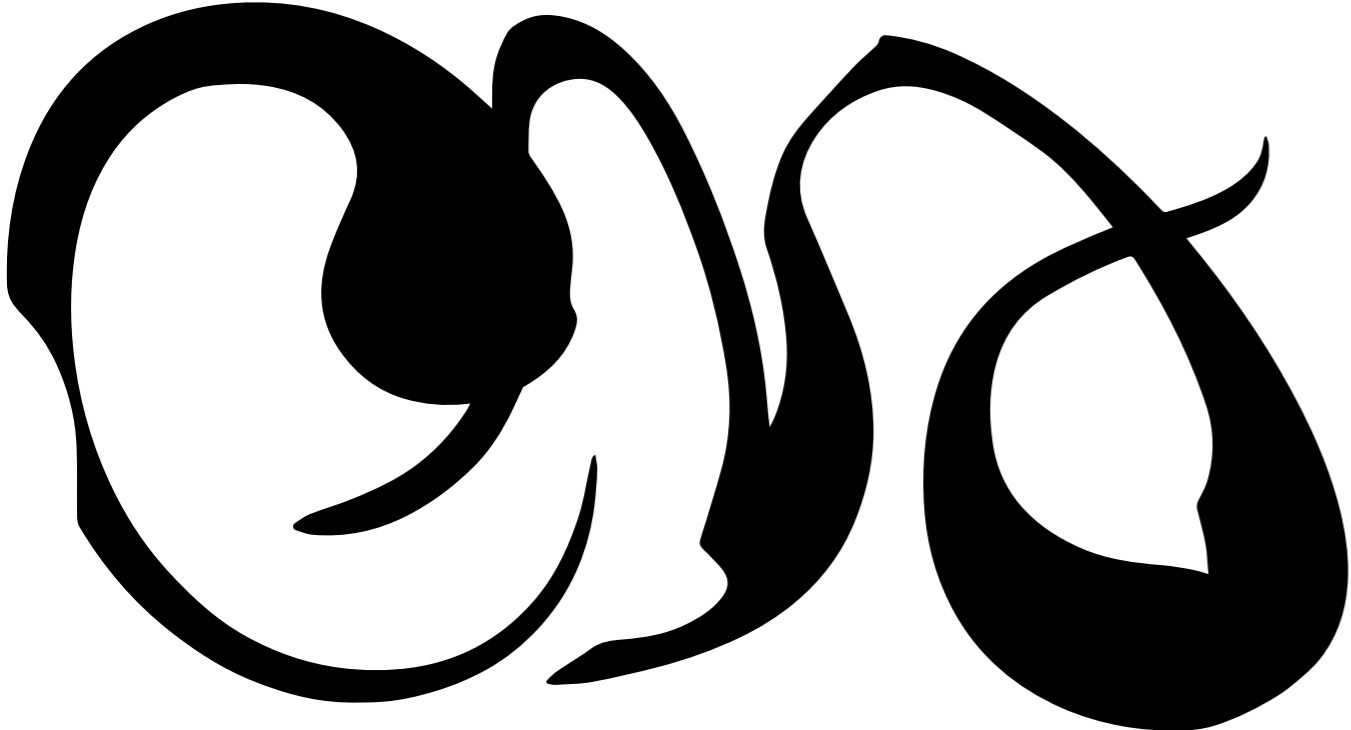
Therefore, with the focus of the CIVA Festival Embodied Structures, we join the body activists in saying “*Riot, don’t diet!*” or “*Lose hate, not weight!*” Because at this point, it is not just about the weight of a human body but rather a structural question of how we relate to each other as human beings as a whole.

“Accepting your body is not just about physicality, it’s about accepting who you are, not waiting to be the person you imagine yourself to be.” (Linda Bacon, *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight*)

With Embodied Structures, we want to take a closer look at the suggestions that art currently offers us to recognize and unlearn old structures and norms that are not good for us.

“Certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. [...] Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.” (Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 1991)





EMBODIED STRUCTURES

- 20 Legacy Russell, Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto, 2020, p.153.
- 21 Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism, 1979.
- 22 Shumon Basar, Douglas Coupland and Hans Ulrich Obrist, The Extreme Self: Age of You, 2021.
- 23 Sherry Turkle, Life on the Screen, 1995.

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- 24 Shumon Basar, Douglas Coupland and Hans Ulrich Obrist, The Extreme Self: Age of You, 2021.
- 25 In philosophy, the Cartesian Self is a concept developed by René Descartes within Mind-body dualism. In the Cartesian self, Descartes proposes a radical dualism in life where there is the subjective, inner mind on one hand and the objective, outer world on the other. See <https://psychologydictionary.org/cartesian-self/> (accessed February 07, 2022).

The exhibition Embodied Structures deals with the concept of the body and its current role in sociopolitical and cultural discourses. Through seven international positions, it proposes a story of glitch, non-binary and prosthetic bodies, avatars, cyborgs, and data bodies, talks about our willingness to exhibit ourselves online and to even assign concrete values to our data alter egos, and how the awareness of our body changes through the phygital. It rejects binary structures and instead establishes concepts of gender fluidity or the Post-Anthropocene, where the body can be a vehicle for new world building and collective consciousness.

USURP THE BODY, BECOME YOUR AVATAR, BE THE GLITCH. ●20

“it becomes increasingly difficult to talk about bodies and technologies as separate entities” (Eugene Thacker)

From a “culture of narcissism” ●21 to the “Age of You,” ●22 computers have become our second selves and the internet our mirror. Online, we are linked almost simultaneously with a constantly growing network of people and spaces, and this is affecting and changing, among other things, the very nature of our identities. ●23 *“We haven’t just changed the structures of self-identity. [...] We’ve changed the meaning of ourselves.”* ●24 While some critical and popular discussions deny the corporeality of cyberspace – defining the virtual as a space of disembodiment – we believe the body should not be forgotten in the discourse around online and virtual realities. Technologies have the ability to provide a space for the reworking and rethinking of the Cartesian understanding of the self ●25 for one in which embodiment is not only a necessity

● 26 Ingrid Richardson and Carly Harper, *Corporeal Virtuality: The Impossibility of a Fleshless Ontology*. 2001

● 27 Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures," in M. Benedikt (ed.), *Cyberspace: First Steps*, 1994, pp. 81-118.



● 28 "self-body" as in the combination and interdependence of "the Self" and "the Body". See: Kathy Cleland, "Image Avatars: self-other encounters in a mediated world", 2008.

● 29 i.e. app.spatial.io

but is an essential condition of being, knowing, experiencing, and perceiving the world. ● 26 *"Forgetting about the body is an old Cartesian trick, one that has unpleasant consequences for those whose bodies are silenced and whose speech is silenced by the act of our forgetting; that is to say, those upon whose labor the act of forgetting the body is founded – usually women and minorities."* ● 27

As we navigate the allegedly freeing worlds of cyberspace, our virtual self-body ● 28 is instead easily trapped in promises of self-reparation and self-enhancement. The idea that through our avatars we can become someone "better," someone "perfect" detached us and put us in contrast with our physical self and bodies, creating new insecurities, anxieties, and preoccupations. As of today, many cyberspaces only offer human-like male or female bodies to choose from, ● 29 excluding many voices and identities. But *"cyberspace is a breeding ground for mutations,"* ● 30 and we are resilient and find strategies to explore new understandings and navigate new self-bodies. "We use the 'body' to give material form to an idea that has no form, an assemblage that is abstract." ● 31 In cyberspace, we subvert by remixing and experimenting, constructing a multiple and complex self that extends beyond heteronormativity, physicality, and corporate virtuality. As *"the body is an idea that is cosmic"* ● 32 and fragmentation is the truth of existence, ● 33 our avatars become an assemblage of physical and virtual selves, a symbiotic amalgamation of human and machine, vehicles to move, to abstract, to expand.

"So, go ahead – tear it all open. [...] Usurp the body. Become your avatar. Be the glitch." ● 34

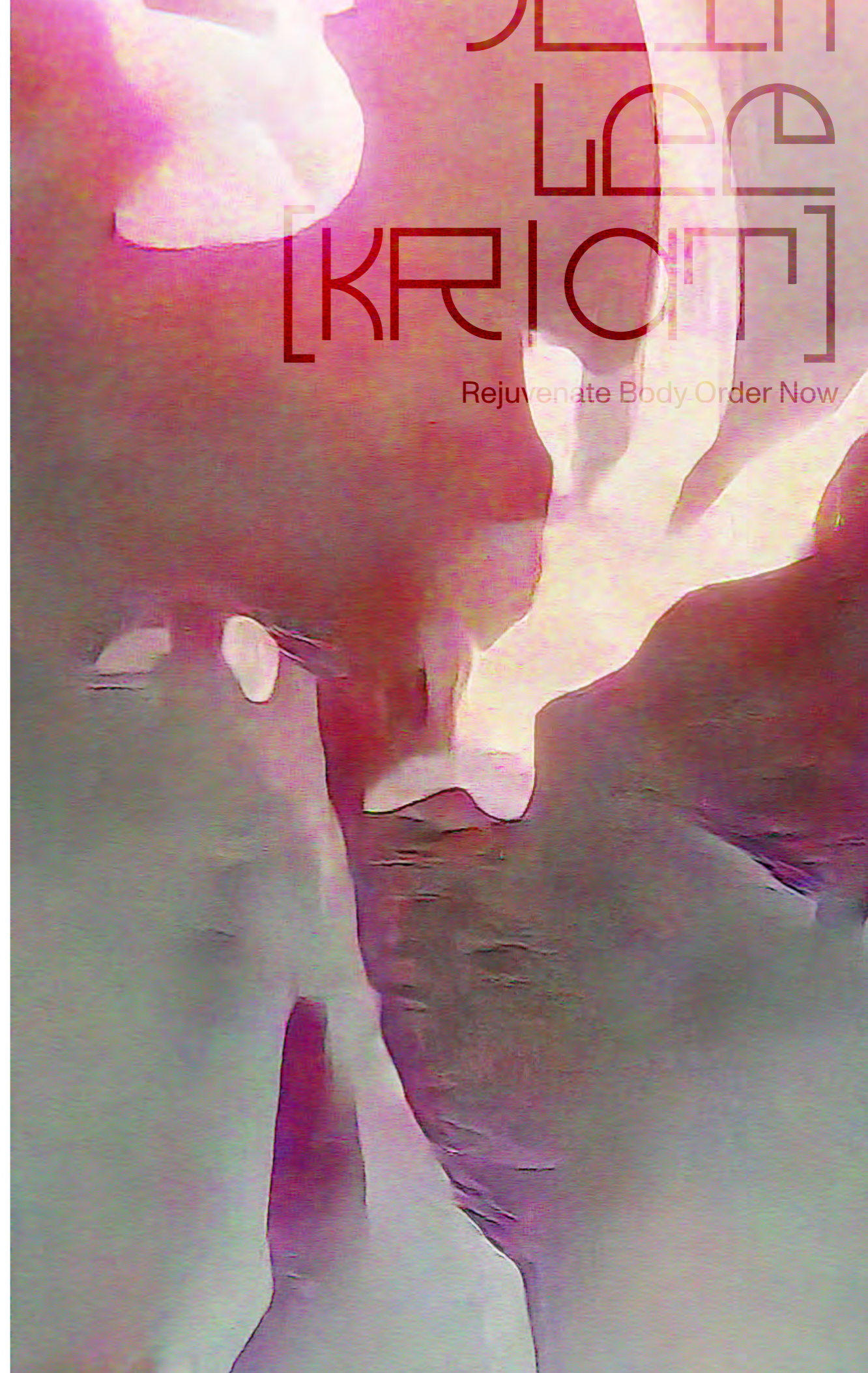
● 30 Mary Aiken, "The Cyber Effect," 2016, p. 23.

● 31 Legacy Russell, "Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto," 2020, p. 8.

● 32 Ibid., p.41.

● 33 Carolyn J. Dean, "The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject," 2016.

● 34 Legacy Russell, "Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto," 2020, p. 153.



● 35 J. C. R. Licklider, "Man-Computer Symbiosis – IRE Transactions on Human Factors in Electronics," volume HFE-1, March 1960, p. 4-11.

● 36 Carolyn Black, "Art and the Body Obsolete," See: <https://medium.com/@flowcontemparts/art-and-the-body-obsolete-4046ec672a92>.



● 37 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 1999.

● 38 Johanna Thorell, Yein Lee, *Rejuvenate Body Order Now*, artwork text.

● 39 Ibid.

● 40 Ibid.



"Why should our bodies end at the skin?" (D. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*)

Perhaps now more than ever, our boundaries can no longer be defined by skin. In 1960, J. C. R. Licklider already predicted a time of symbiotic relationship between man and machine. ● 35 In the past decades, artists like Orlan and Stelarc already declared the [physical] body obsolete and genetically inadequate as it could no longer cope with the complexity and quantity of information accumulated. ● 36 As technology creates new processes for redefining identity, ● 37 the body made of flesh and bones has in fact become inadequate to survive the new computerized world, calling for a new type of body that can transcend its corporeality and can be pervaded by technology to a point of becoming an intrinsic element of it.

Egg-like synthetic membranes, ● 38 3D-printed humanoid bones combined with cables, repurposed tech devices, and plastic waste on metallic prostheses are the very essence of Yein Lee's sculptural series *Rejuvenate Body Order Now*.

The sculptures look at prostheses as biotech extensions ● 39 as well as ornaments for the modification, rejuvenation, and enhancement of the human body, reflecting on how "self-reparation or self-enhancement are no longer medical issues but simply a matter of mechanical engineering." ● 40

Artificial appendixes, technological prostheses, self-enhancement and alteration, postorganic bodies: the once fictional notion of cyborg has become very much real and rooted in our sociopolitical and economic context. ● 41 Our contemporary "productive body" ● 42 and its relation to systems of production is essential to understand the condition of both the human and posthuman being.

Rejuvenate Body Order Now reflects on the human body as a permeable and open system ● 43 as well as how the biotech body and cyberbody can no longer be separated by a consumer-oriented neoliberal logic in which the body is just the next must-have product. ● 44 Yein Lee's prosthesis body ultimately becomes a dystopic "dream of biotech augmentation" ● 45: as long as the posthuman subject is a consumer in the web of market interests, the physical body cannot be freed from its constraining categories.

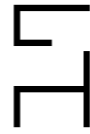
● 41 Kathy Cleland, *Prosthetic Bodies and Virtual Cyborg*, 2010.

● 42 Didier Deleule and François Guery, *The Productive Body*, 1973.

● 43 Johanna Thorell, Yein Lee, *Rejuvenate Body Order Now*, artwork text.

● 44 Ibid.

● 45 Ibid.



Yein Lee, born in South Korea in 1988, lives and works in Vienna. After studying visual arts in Seoul, she continued her education in painting and sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Her practice combines elements of technology, physical organisms, and fantastic conceptions to create hybrid visions of the bodily realm. Investigating relations of social dissonance in her extended surroundings, found objects are combined with cast pieces and painterly gestural liveness. A field of discussion is created by targeting complexities of societal behavior. Her work has recently been presented in group exhibitions at the Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; Galerie im Körnerpark, Berlin; Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna; Christine Mayer Gallery, Munich; The Pool, Istanbul; Loggia, Vienna; EXILE, Vienna, among others. (Text by Johanna Thorell)



REBEL MARTIN [OFT]

GLITCHBODIES

- 46 Kathy Cleland, "Prosthetic Bodies and Virtual Cyborgs," *Second Nature*, no. 3, 2010, p. 75.
- 47 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 1999.
- 48 Kathy Cleland, "Prosthetic Bodies and Virtual Cyborgs," *Second Nature*, no. 3, 2010, pp. 74-101.



- 49 Kathy Cleland, *Image Avatars: self-other encounters in a mediated world*, 2008
- 50 Jeremy Bailenson and Jim Blascovich, *Infinite Reality: Avatars, Eternal Life, New Worlds, and the Dawn of the Virtual Revolution*, 2011.
- 51 Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, 2020.

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- 52 Boris Magrini, "Radical Gaming – The Language of Video Games in Media Art," HEK (Haus der Elektronischen Künste) Sabine Himmelsbach, Boris Magrini (ed.), *Radical Gaming Immersion, Simulation, Subversion*, 2021, p. 11.
- 53 Judith K. Brodsky, *Dismantling Patriarchy, Bit by Bit*, 2022, pp. 143.
- 54 Rebecca Merlic, artwork text.

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a body." (Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*)

Digital technology globally affects our culture, society, and economy. Our intimate relationships with the internet have created a deep change in the nature of our subjectivity and our experiences. ● 46 As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin write in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, "New media offers new opportunities for self-definition," ● 47 and as the body extends through prosthetic technologies as well as networked media, we experience a new form of cyborg body, a virtual one made of a complex assemblage of the physical and the digital: the avatar. ● 48

There have been various definitions of avatar in the last decades that went deeper into the complexity of the relation between our virtual and physical selves. Kathy Cleland introduced the idea of the avatar as the "uncanny other" ● 49 in which the virtual self is both part and not part of us. Jeremy Bailenson and Jim Blascovich define an avatar as "a perceivable" digital representation in virtual environments, something so close to us we can even touch or feel despite its intangible nature. ● 50

Referring to another work present in the exhibition, Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, ● 51 in Rebecca Merlic's *GLITCHBODIES*, the avatar becomes a collective and politically charged body. Video games have undoubtedly become the most widespread form of entertainment, ● 52 and their impact on representational stereotypes is huge. With *GLITCHBODIES*, Rebecca Merlic responds to sociopolitical factors as well as to the very male-dominated world of video games ● 53 by creating an interactive digital space, a fluid journey through infinite individual, gender, and realities. Rebecca Merlic's game provides a safe platform for non-heteronormative gender positions sharing the notion of queer as political attitude, ● 54 providing new perspective for the player while celebrating its protagonists with motherly care. Created through collaborations and rituals, *GLITCHBODIES* protagonists are not singular points of view, but they live in connection with each other, they understand themselves as a series of experiences, and these successions of relationships constitute their networked identity and



collective body. It is a network made of multitude bodies and identities, and therefore free from conventions and constraints (of binary, of hierarchy, of gender) and hence political. As our boundaries become dispersed throughout cyberspace, the very understanding of what is considered to be a “body” is in question.



Rebecca Merlic, born in Germany in 1989, lives between Tokyo, Munich, and Vienna. She graduated with distinction at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and specialized in analog and digital art as well as architecture. Her work is strongly influenced by alternative patterns in society and transgression in socioeconomic conventions as well as new forms of artistic and architectural production employing new technologies. While obtaining her master's, she was able to study at Atsushi Kitagawara Lab at Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai).

She received the Marianne von Willemer Prize 2020 for digital media; holds the Pixel, Bytes & Film residency supported by the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport and ORF III; and works as a university assistant in the core team of Experiment Game Cultures at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.

Her interactive game show “TheCityAsAHouse” 都市が家になるとき was on display at The International Media Art Festival CYFEST: COSMOS and CHAOS in St. Petersburg, Ars Electronica, the Athens Digital Arts Festival, and the Austrian Cultural Forum in Tokyo.

LEGOLOGY

RUSSELL

[US]

#GLITCHFEMINISM





“01 GLITCH REFUSES
02 GLITCH IS COSMIC
03 GLITCH THROWS SHADE
04 GLITCH GHOSTS
05 GLITCH IS ERROR
06 GLITCH ENCRYPTS
07 GLITCH IS ANTI-BODY
08 GLITCH IS SKIN
09 GLITCH IS VIRUS
10 GLITCH MOBILIZES
11 GLITCH IS REMIX
12 GLITCH SURVIVES”

● 55 (Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism. A Manifesto*, 2020.)

Legacy Russell’s video essay *#GLITCHFEMINISM* (2018) is an extension of, and proxy to, the writer and curator’s live performance lecture of the same name. With Russell-in-avatar, the work charts out and unpacks key foundational notes around Russell’s originating concept of Glitch Feminism, first theorized in 2012. Russell’s book that expands on this theoretical and art historical framework, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, was published to critical acclaim in 2020.



Legacy Russell is a curator and writer. Born and raised in New York City, she is the Executive Director & Chief Curator of The Kitchen. Formerly, she was the Associate Curator of Exhibitions at The Studio Museum in Harlem. Russell holds an MRes with Distinction in Art History from Goldsmiths, University of London, with a focus in Visual Culture. Her academic, curatorial, and creative work focuses on gender, performance, digital selfdom, internet idolatry, and new media ritual. Russell’s written work, interviews, and essays have been published internationally. She is the recipient of the Thoma Foundation 2019 Arts Writing Award in Digital Art and the 2021 Creative Capital Award, and was a 2020 Rauschenberg Residency Fellow. Her first book is *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020). Her second book, *BLACK MEME*, is forthcoming via Verso Books.



- 56 Micha Cárdenas, *The Transreal Political Aesthetics of Crossing Realities*, 2012.
- 57 Kathy Cleland, *Prosthetic Bodies and Virtual Cyborg*, 2010, p. 77.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

CRISTIAN ANUTOIU [DEIRO]

COME FEEL MY SKINS.



- 59 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Under... .. standing New Media*, 1999, p. 235.
- 60 Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self*, 2005.
- 61 Kathy Cleland, *Prosthetic Bodies and Virtual Cyborg*, 2010, p. 83.
- 62 Cristian Anutoiu, artwork text.



- 63 bell hooks, *Die Bedeutung von Klasse / English original: where we stand: class matters*, 2000
- 64 Cristian Anutoiu, artwork text.

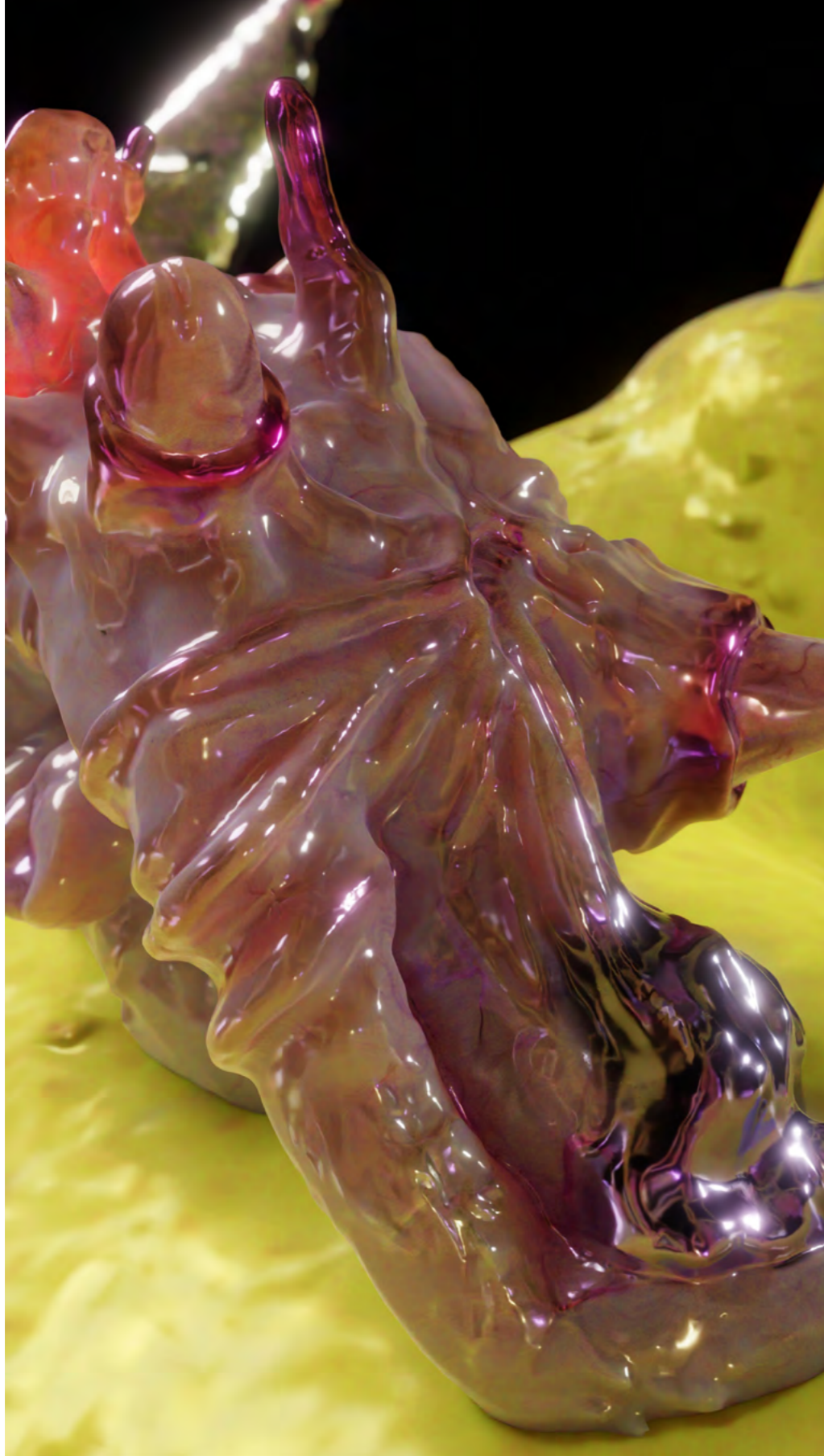


“we are all chimeras [...] hybrids of machines and organisms”
(Donna J. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*)

In cyberspace, the contemporary self-body incorporates the virtual and transforms it into another manifestation of the body that exists simultaneously in both physical and virtual worlds. Through this exchange between realities, the virtual becomes what artist and theorist Micha Cárdenas calls *“transreal,”* ● 56 as *“real”* as our physical world. And while existing in a transreality, our body is not limited by the skin but rather expands through embodied artifacts. ● 57 Through the virtual, we have the freedom to alter ourselves, becoming a *“complex new expression of prosthetic reembodiment through which our physical bodies and subjectivities extend themselves into the virtual terrain.”* ● 58

In Cristian Anutoiu’s installation *COME FEEL MY SKINS*, the self is defined by the perspectives occupied by the body in the digital space ● 59 and the physical world. It is a fragmented self-body born as virtual artifacts that find their ways into tangible physicality and perception. Here, both the virtual and physical selves glitched and created new life while complexifying through AI-generated content. As we employ technology to define our contemporary self-body as well as our personal and cultural identity, computers and devices become our second selves, ● 60 and AI our companion and co-creator. As our contemporary self-body is embodied in conjunction with technology, navigating our avatars brings the sociocultural significance of the physical body along. ● 61

Crossing realities and platforms, *COME FEEL MY SKINS* proposes fluid and non-conforming bodies forever embedded in the internet and always confronting corporate structures and binaries. ● 62 It is a queer body, *“queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.”* ● 63 It is an online, networked self-body that belongs to everyone ● 64 while constantly creating and breaking connections and realities, existing in both cyber and offline spaces. *COME FEEL MY SKINS* looks at how the virtual and particularly the internet affect our contemporary notions of identity and goes beyond binaries and structures by literally breaking into beautiful cross-real pieces that nevertheless belong together in our transreality.



Cristian Anutoiu is a queer transdisciplinary artist from Romania/Germany. Their practice explores the endless notions and possibilities of cross-realities. By working with reinterpretations, scans, kitsch, and experimentation, fragments of worlds crystallize that are injected with mysticism and magic. Virtual and physical realms are used as a tool and melting pot for transporting speculative and world-building practices into phigitality. The organic and seemingly artificial serve as a tool to emphasize the fragility of human subjectivity.

Cristian is a member of room69, an artist-led collective working with new exhibition formats, media arts, and installations.

Currently, Cristian is studying Painting & Animation Film under Judith Eisler at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, where they are also based.

GROUP LOOKBOOK [ART]

Made to Measure





*“For their investigative and artistic data experiment *Made to Measure*, the group Laokoon creates the doppelganger of a person unknown to them based solely on their personal online data. Five years of this person’s life were reconstructed and filmed in detail on a large theatre stage. A few months later, the original and her datafied double met. The spectacular experiment becomes tangible on an interactive storytelling website where visitors can experience what conclusions can be drawn about a person’s character, psychology, and future behavior through algorithms. Laokoon exploits the potential of digital storytelling and invents a novel and complex narrative form about and through the internet.*

*The one-of-a-kind cross-media project *Made to Measure* also includes a TV documentary that uses concrete examples to illustrate how online companies, advertisers, and other data traders use the information they collect to profit from peoples’ weaknesses, insecurities, illnesses, and addiction potential. Several experts, such as a former Google marketer, an expert for psychological targeting, a former YouTube developer, and a psychologist, as well as data analysts, privacy activists, journalists, and philosophers, shed light on the mechanisms of online advertising and personalized content on video and social media platforms.*

*But couldn’t behavioural data also be used for the benefit of humanity? What forms of manipulation do we think of as socially acceptable or even desirable? *Made to Measure* allows visitors to experience in an impressive way how far-reaching the insights into our inner lives and our most intimate secrets are, which we grant Google, Facebook & Co. every day. And it poses the big philosophical question: does the idea of individual autonomy become obsolete in the digital age? Who determines who we are and who we think we are?”*



Laokoon is a collective of artists that combines investigative and scientific research with various forms of creative expression. They develop essays, documentaries, theatre productions, lecture performances, and radio plays centering on the question of how our concept of man and society is changing in the digital age.



DEPART [OT]

The Subject Changes



“For thousands of years Earth’s resources have been extracted by bodies, most of whom were not free. But now, it’s our bodies, our selves, being extracted. And... mostly we offer it up for FREE.”

(Shumon Basar, Douglas Copland and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Extreme Self*.)

Leonhard Lass and Gregor Ladenhauf, aka DEPART, create poetic audiovisual immersions. Deeply rooted in the digital, they explore the ritualistic character of algorithms and deliberately venture into the uncanny – creating unique moments characterized by a formally rigorous and profound aesthetic. In their new installation, *The Subject Changes*, commissioned by CIVA Festival 2022, they return to one of their favorite themes: a weird, uncanny character in an alien environment. In their usual style, DEPART manage to combine their poetic approach to computer art, surrealist aesthetics, ritualistic behavior, and incisive kinetics/synthesis.

As the artwork deals with fragmented identities in times of digitalization and the concept of the avatar itself, we witness the struggle of a singular virtual being in conflict with its habitat and other somehow inexplicable and mysterious factors. ● 66 Looking at the figure, the mediatized bodies of “social” networks and their inherent effects of “self-zooification” ● 67 come to mind as the subject changes before our very eyes, according to and reacting to all sorts of different intrinsic movements and outside influences. As this spectacle of endless efforts, failures, and successes unfolds, a subtle dialogue between the visitors and the figure emerges, constantly changing the subject.

“Welcome to the cage that goes everywhere with you.” ● 68
(Jaron Lanier)

Today’s online environments allow for the simultaneous existence of multiple identities, and we must now think of the self as a multiple shared system. Our identities are constructed through the seamless transitions between the digital and physical worlds. Sherry Turkle compares this to the experience of multiple personality disorder, a schizophrenic projection and fragmentation of subjectivity. The self is not unified but decentered, and this fragmentation of the self is reinforced by the relationship between human and avatar. Given the almost infinite possibilities of representation in digital spaces, we rely on technologies to find ourselves and become ourselves. Identity becomes polyphonic, computers become “intimate machines” ● 69 that in some ways seem to know much more about us than we do.

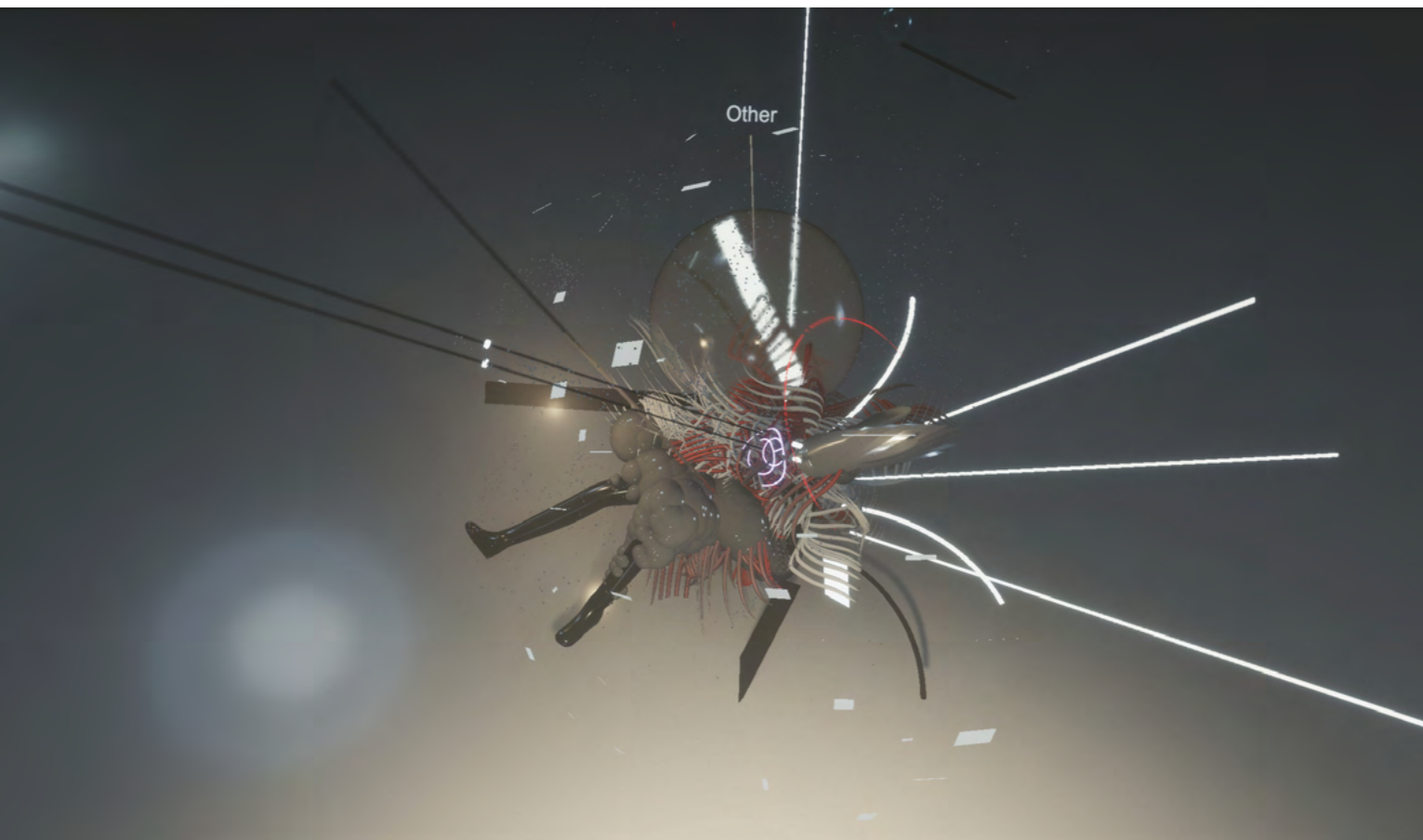
● 69 Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self*, 2005.

III

● 66 See Gregor Ladenhauf, *The Subject Changes*, artwork text, 2022.

● 67 Ibid.

● 68 Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*, 2018.



DEPART is Leonhard Lass and Gregor Ladenhauf. Their core endeavor is the conception of poetic audiovisual immersions. Deeply rooted in the digital, they explore the ritualistic character of algorithms and venture deliberately into the uncanny – creating unique moments that are coined by formally rigorous and profound aesthetics.

DEPART works in a poetic tradition: they strive to subvert languages – not just literal, word-based languages but languages as symbolic systems in general (involving sounds, images, algorithms, gestures, objects, etc.).

Through subtle manipulation of their specific grammars, intentional short-circuiting of their reference networks, and slight shifts of perspective, they aim to trigger internal landslides of consciousness.

As their modus operandi, they employ generative processes and realtime simulation to construct hermetically “believable worlds,” transitory sandboxes of synchronicities bordering on the surreal which evoke a virtual immanence

KEIKEN

[UK]

Wisdoms for Love 3.0





“Every new game is a voice in the darkness” (Anthropy, Rise of the Videogame Zinesters).

What happens when we become hackable human beings? What happens when technologies colonize our internal land and get to know humans more than we know ourselves? ● 70

Our contemporary reality is filled with doubts and insecurities in regard to the self. But especially during the pandemic, we have experienced the emerging of a lot of emotions and collective consciousness. The self-body became our land and connectivity deeply incorporated into our lives. And while technologies like AI can isolate us and break our abilities to connect, resilient bodies and beings resist by world-building and multiplying. They move beyond self-centeredness and loneliness into a new exploration and understanding of connectivity, finding new ways to openly and diversely access it. In the reality of algorithmic loops and technologies that separate and isolate us, we long and argue for connection and care.

“Become a Human God. Become a Divine Mother. Stay on your Moral High Horse.” ● 71 These are some of the choices we are confronted with within Keiken’s online video game Wisdoms for Love 3.0. As we move on a journey through hybrid entities ● 72 and ethical choices, we unfold a narrative of symbolism, mythology, metaphors, technology, and connections while also collecting “wisdom tokens” and moral contracts that bind us in a “moral exchange with the artists rather than a financial one.” ● 73 In Wisdoms for Love 3.0, wisdom is a tool for change, a proposal for an alternative definition of wealth within Web 3.0 technologies and the “life” game. ● 74 But within the game, wisdom is also a tool to connect with oneself and with others. Similarly to Rebecca Merlic’s GLITCHBODIES, Wisdoms for Love 3.0 proposes a collective network of bodies that express themselves in their very multiplicity and in their simultaneous center points. ● 75 And while exploring the collective consciousness and bubbled-up feelings of the contemporary moment, we encounter the desire for change and a more equal, decentralized future. ● 76 “So, join the map, rise from the Earth, or stay in the sky. How would you like to contribute to the metaverse?” ● 77

75



● 76 Keiken, artwork text.
● 77 From Keiken, “Wisdoms for Love 3.0” Gameplay.

Keiken is an artist collective, co-founded by Tanya Cruz, Hana Omori, and Isabel Ramos in 2015. Based between London and Berlin, they come from mixed diasporic backgrounds (Mexican, Japanese, European, and Jewish). The name Keiken is taken from the Japanese word for experience, lived experience being an idea at the core of their practice. They are collaboratively building and imagining a metaverse to simulate new structures and ways of existing and to test-drive possible futures. The metaverse is a fully immersive virtual space of multiple worlds which allows Keiken to become the architects and collaborators of the future. The metaverse pierces our perceptions of reality and defies all that we know. Keiken creates these speculative worlds through filmmaking, gaming, installation, extended reality (XR), blockchain, and performance. Through these varied mediums, they explore how societal introjection governs the way we feel, think, and perceive.

● 73 Keiken, artwork text.

● 74 Ibid.

● 75 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Remediation: Understanding New Media, 1999, p. 257.



● 70 NXT Museum, Wisdoms for Love 3.0 gameplay session & conversation with Keiken, <https://youtu.be/GE0uyAizues>.

● 71 From Keiken, Wisdoms for Love 3.0 gameplay.

● 72 Boris Magrini, “Radical Gaming – The Language of Video Games in Media Art,” HeK catalogue Radical Gaming, 2021, p.19

AT THE VERY END OF THE
EMBODIED STRUCTURES
EXHIBITION,

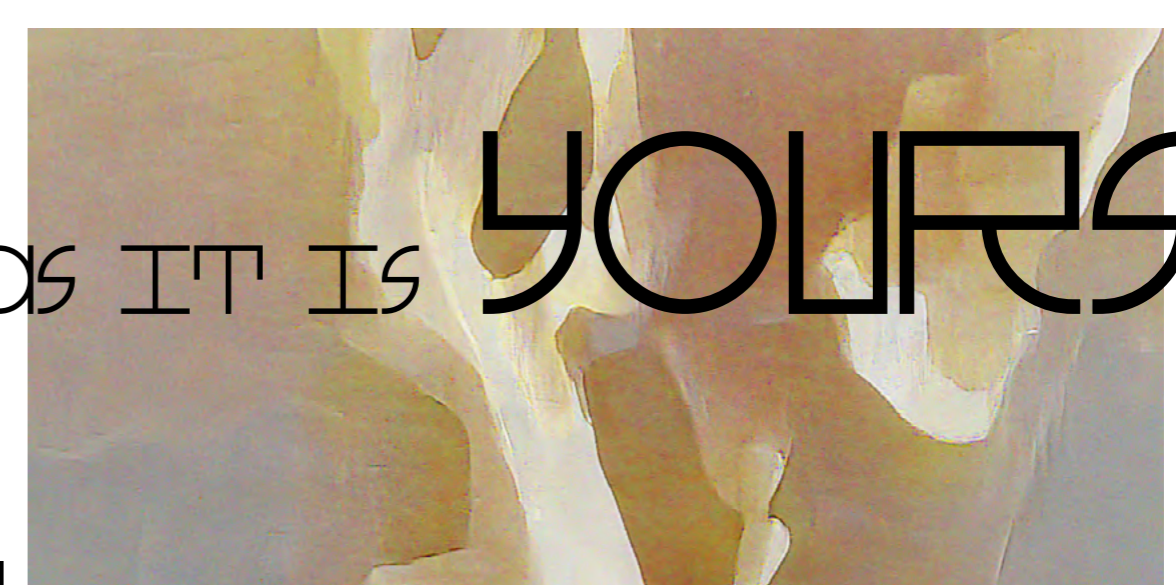
WE FIND A NEW BEGINNING.

A CIRCLE AND A MAZE,
A LOOP THAT OPENS.

A BODY THAT IS AS MINE AS IT IS YOURS,

BEAUTIFUL AND FREE,
REBELLIOUS AND RESILIENT,
PHYCITAL AND COSMIC,

LIVING AND
ULTRA-TRANSFORMING. 



"I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess."
(Donna Haraway, A Cyborg Manifesto, 1991)

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