

NOMADIC BODIES

Johanna Bruckner, Adam Harvey, Annkathrin Kluss

September 07 - October 20, 2018



Exhibition view, *Nomadic Bodies* (Johanna Bruckner, Adam Harvey, Annkathrin Kluss), 2018

“If I were to phone my younger self and the young Bill would ask me: ‘What kind of cool technology are you carrying with you right now?’, I would have to answer: ‘I have a huge colour TV in my pocket, which allows me to talk to anyone in the entire world, even if it doesn’t have actual keys but instead visual imitations of keys. We are all connected with the same invisible thing called the Internet and people are using it to send each other pictures of cats and to watch porn for free.’ What is he supposed to think of us?”¹

Humans are increasingly embedded in larger systems of ecology, technology, economics and networked reality. The physical-real and the immaterial-digital space are closely connected via social networks, artificial intelligence, communication technologies, algorithms and pervasive surveillance systems. During the 18th century, the human body was perceived as a machine-like system that stood at the center of the world, passively absorbing and processing information. At the same time, phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty removed the separation of the body and the soul.

¹(Own translation) Gibson, William, „Ich hoffe, wir sind nicht in negativen Utopien gefangen“, Interview geführt von Jochen Wegner, in: Zeit Magazin Online, 12.01.2017, <http://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/leben/2017-01/william-gibson-science-fiction-neuromancer-cyberspace-futurist>.



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They recognized that the body actively engages with the environment and saw this as a basic prerequisite for the phenomenology of perception. In recent years, Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti have described humans as a species among many others ensconced in an ecological network, co-dependent with others. Thus the conclusion can be made that the body – and by extension the subject – must always be considered within the context of the collective accounting for the co-existence of non-human and human entities. The subject has to relocate his/her own power of taking action and making decisions to new, diverse actors. These ideas gave rise to the cyborg theory of the 1980s, that pursues the dream of disembodied intelligence, or the post-human approach liberating minds from the mortal constraints of the present human stage.

Digital forms leave noticeable traces of the human body behind. They increasingly possess their very own corporeality. Bodies are continuously breached by invisible structures of power and become fragmented material. Through advancing technology, bodies, embedded in networks of human and non-human entities, can be permanently reshaped and optimized. In the exhibition *Nomadic Bodies*, Johanna Bruckner, Adam Harvey and Annkathrin Kluss investigate discursive perspectives on human subjectivity as well as the body. The sovereign subject is fundamentally questioned and at the same time types of human resistance between the total economization and the presence of the internet are sought. As a result, the following questions are asked within the exhibition space: How can one comprehend the current relationship between the digital and the human body? Is it necessary to create a space, which allows the simultaneity of different reality and body modes to think and act? And how can this liquefaction of real and virtual space ultimately open up new possibilities for the development of an alternative future?



Exhibition view, *Nomadic Bodies* (Annkathrin Kluss), 2018

The works of Annkathrin Kluss negotiate with identity structures under the influence of the digital age, technology and economy as well as the resulting sense of self and self-portrayal. The video installation *Neo-Chimeras – On Images and other Artificialities* (2017/2018) constructs an autarkical system, which at first sight seems indestructible and frozen in its perfection. Yet this first impression soon proves to be illusive: the promise of a simple perceptible and consumable Utopia presented by Kluss turns out to be a structurally fraudulent system of individualization. In the video you find a patch-worked self, a modern day chimera that wanders over an alienated environment. It tries to adopt itself to its surroundings and finally turns into its own plastic version. In addition to the video work, glass-copper-tubes filled with sand and colored fluids move themselves through the room way up to the ceiling. The fluids seem to be familiar, they remind us of products from the hygiene or beauty industry. To the viewer, everything in Kluss' installation seems to be in a steady flow through an invisible machinery, to optimize itself and to become consumable, stencil-like images of our time.

In the works by Johanna Bruckner the bodies of the performers and dancers examine forms of human resistance to the contemporary characteristics of capitalism, which is now more than ever before embossed by automatic processes and algorithmic systems. In her video installation *Terra X* (2018) images of protesters and hacker speeches are presented that express critical claims versus corrupt operation of logistics software, which are mostly associated with warfare. The first part arose in response to a recently developed Israeli software program, which, among others, is used by governments in the Global South against terrorism and criminal organizations. Bruckner explores how, now more than ever, our social infrastructure is shaped by technology and software under the control of mindless algorithms that have been developed by the military sector, private cor

porations and other powerful global players. This investigation is achieved by focussing on the current developments in the HafenCity in Hamburg. Her works are based upon a critical debate over the deregulation of new living spaces and of abstract working conditions and surveillance systems, which were developed as part of the “Smart City” concept. The body movements of the performers, dancers and skateboarders interrupt and disrupt for a brief moment, as a reaction and countermovement against the algorithmic streams of data, finance and surveillance of public space. The referencing back to the physical gestures of the performers may offer an alternative model of solidarity with social subjectivity and the physical resistance within this abstract network.



Exhibition view, *Nomadic Bodies* (Johanna Bruckner), 2018

The two-piece video work *Machine Learning City: Camera A* (2018) and *Machine Learning City: Camera B* (2018) by the scientist, media artist and activist Adam Harvey, continues his investigation and research of the consequences of surveillance systems and linked data analysis technology. Within this framework he investigates questions about digitalization: How do we define the private and public space? Do we have the right to our own image or do cities have partial ownership too? How do surveillance systems structure the public space anew? And what kind of future role will citizens play in training their smart city's AI software programs. At the centre of his works displayed in the exhibition *Nomadic Bodies* lies the dispute over biometric rights, which, as Harvey shows in a case study from Graz, may have been violated in a dataset created from citywide surveillance cameras.

The two videos show surveillance camera footage captured at the Graz central station that is being distributed as a machine learning image dataset to AI researchers and companies around the world. The videos show how the images would appear to algorithms used to track pedestrians throughout the city, including background subtraction analysis to isolate motion and pose estimation to infer gait and furtive behavior.



Exhibition view, *Nomadic Bodies* (Adam Harvey), 2018

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