Machine Bodies (Is Cyborg Good or Evil?)

The new is not utopian. But it is glitchy.

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The Vector Festival 2022 flagship exhibition, *Machine Bodies (Is Cyborg Good or Evil?)*, focuses on the relationship between body and machine – its tensions, in/compatibilities, liminal spaces, and byproducts.

In this exhibition, works by Xuan Ye, Madeleine Lychek, and artist collective L.A. Birdwatchers (Suzanne Kite, Aljumaine Gayle, Nicholas Shapiro and Ladan Mohamed Siad) utilize this uneasy interaction between body and machine to draw attention to the body's labor in AI technology, and in turn its biases. Expanding on Vector Festival's 2022 theme, *Glitch*, the artists treat abstraction and a/synchronization as tools to question our digital safety and autonomy.

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Machine Body (noun); a system in which physical human input and digital computing combine to create an image, object, or state of being.

REPRESENTATION AND CENSORSHIP
Notes on These Fucking Machines

Machine bodies are no longer uncanny.
Or we've grown so comfortable with chaos and absurdity,
that the uncanny is now familiar, even desirable,
or a funny way to cope. ✳

With innumerable sets of data, we can now conjure up complex images in
seconds, using just words and computing. The hot new cyborg artist on the
scene is DALL-E!

THE BODY AND AI AND I

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Q: Wait, which bodies are represented in the datasets?

DALL·E: While the capabilities of my image generation
models are impressive, they may also reinforce or
exacerbate societal biases.

🔍 "Woman on the beach"

Δ1
Images created by the
DALL-E mini model.

✳ The meme-ification of serious mental health
issues and trauma can be found across
all social media platforms.

(whiteness as default)

Q: Why are bodies censored? dehumanized?

DALL·E: While the extent and nature of the biases of the DALL·E mini model have yet to be fully documented, given the fact that the model was trained on unfiltered data from the Internet, it may generate images that contain stereotypes against minority groups.

Madeleine Lychek's *These Fucking Machines* is a series of AI-generated images. Using keywords which are explicitly sexual, queer, and racialized, this project investigates how specific marginalized bodies are perceived, generated, and categorized by machine learning algorithms. Lychek's artistic practice explores the limitations of the body in virtual spaces, often experimenting with content that triggers censorship.

It's very normalized, how our bodies are perceived, analyzed, and re-generated by impressive cameras and computing. However, much like how racial bias was * built into the dawn of photographic technologies, our current imaging technologies are riddled with similar limitations; 1) my Black colleagues' hair are often not understood by zoom's background-blurring software; 2) fat bodies are censored for no reason on social media; 3) until recently, most AR face filters only read light-skinned faces, or would contort your face towards whiteness; etc, etc.

These Fucking Machines urges us to think through these dynamics of representation and censorship in physical and virtual realms. The work's presentation plays with ideas of consent and lack thereof: a stark contrast between a large, somewhat unsavory image that greets you at the front of the gallery, and the small glory hole which holds a series of tiny, curious images, manipulating the viewer's body towards it. *These Fucking Machines* is the marriage of attraction and repulsion, critiquing our categorical definitions of each.

Developing color-film used to require a "Shirley Card" — an image of a white woman — a measuring stick for color calibration.

Shirley Card, 1978   *Kodak's Multiracial Shirley Card, 1995*

A: Yes, the toes.

I AND THE BODY AND AI

A: I don't know exactly what's in the datasets used by cyborg artists, but I know that the internet is biased towards the English language and western concepts. In some open-source datasets, the word 'Asian' is represented first and foremost by mass amounts of porn.

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DATA AND SURVEILLANCE
Notes on L.A. Birdwatchers

Sometimes you say "bodies", when you mean to say "people"

AI AND THE BODY AND I

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"The digital age is in the first place - before all other things - an age of digital surveillance in real time. Every production of a digital copy-image, is at the same time a creation of our own image, an act of self-visualization."   - *In The Flow*, **Boris Groys**

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Even as I type this sentence,

It predicts my next words,

like a psychic mirror,

or a twin sister.

JUNE 19 2020,
"U.S. watched George Floyd protests in 15 cities using aerial surveillance" - NY Times
JUNE 23 2020,
"Military helicopters roared over demonstrators, producing winds equivalent to a tropical storm." - Washington Post
JUNE 15 2022,
"An expansive Toronto police report released Wednesday confirms what many racialized people in the city have long said: Black, Indigenous and other diverse groups are disproportionately affected by use of force and strip searches by officers." - CBC

Q: Is data good or evil?

Created by artists <u>Suzanne Kite</u>, <u>Aljumaine Gayle</u>, <u>Ladan Mohamed Siad</u>, and <u>Nicolas Shapiro</u>, *L.A. Birdwatchers* was originally an alliance formed to observe and respond to policing tactics used during the George Floyd protests. The four artists identified that the U.S. government excessively used aerial surveillance on BLM protests in 2020. In this project, data that was captured through this surveillance, and that would be used for predictive policing models(*), is translated into an interactive and immersive audio-visual experience.

The configuration of this installation has varied and shifted in the past two years, and its datasets have been updated a few times. *L.A. Birdwatchers* combines datasets with the aesthetics of CCTV and the sonic stress of aerial

surveillance to critique the deployment of the militarized policing measures on those who live in targeted communities. Similar to the presentation of Lychek's work, *L.A. Birdwatchers* experiments with and analyzes dynamics of consent in relation to digital capturing and manipulation of the body. It reminds us that our data is collected and sold all the time, using dense legal literature to obfuscate consent. Walking into the installation, there is an instant and forced recognition of the legibility of one's body.

(*) Predictive policing models refers to the use of computer systems to analyze large sets of data to inform decisions regarding where to deploy police surveillance, or identify individuals deemed likely to commit a crime. Developed in the intersection of the military industrial complex and policing, this technology – purportedly intended for foreign warfare – is regularly adopted by local police forces.

🔍 "Surveillance"

Δ2
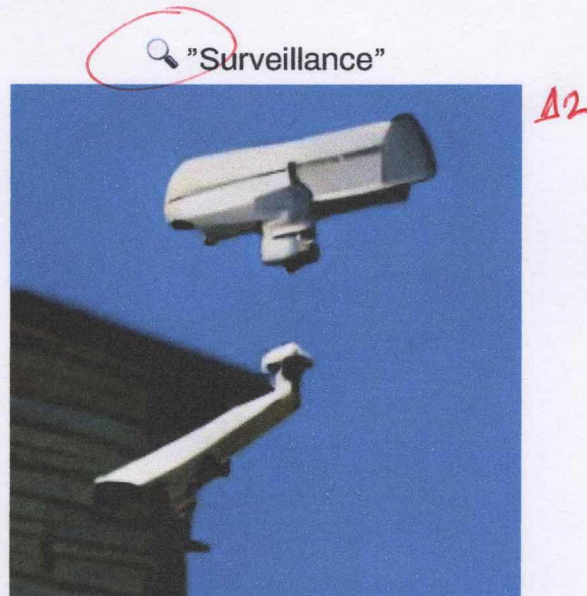
It's not enough,
we must voluntarily, continually,
feed the machine our image, in real time,
and its mirror reflects back
with all of the glitches and faults of our nature.

A: It's a life or death situation.

LABOR AND REST
Notes on What Lets Lethargy Dream Produces Lethargy's Surplus Value

THE BODY AND AI AI

"The illusion of knowledge and the anticipation of mastery combine to impel the timeline of progress, but they obfuscate the absence of understanding... and comprehend nothing beyond movement and efficiency..." *- New Dark Age*, **James Bridle**

"Part of the reason so few of us have a healthy relationship with pleasure is because a small minority of our species hoards the excess of resources, creating a false scarcity and then trying to sell us joy, sell us back to ourselves." *- Pleasure Activism*, **adrienne maree brown**
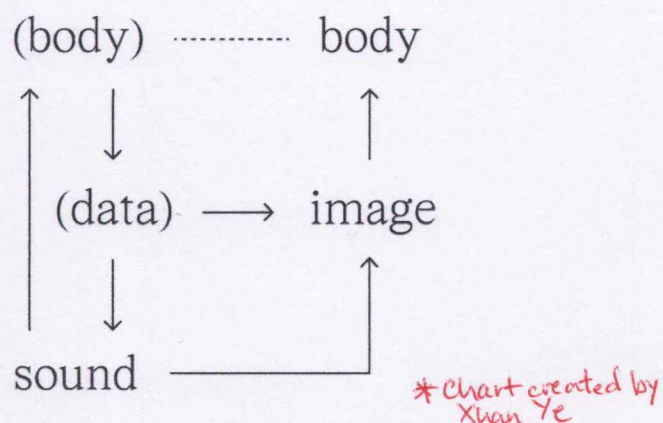
Q: How do we put out the fires?

MAY 2 2022
Amazon is ending its Covid-19 paid sick leave policy starting on Monday, the company said in a memo to employees this weekend. Amazon also said it will no longer notify workers of positive cases in its facilities, unless required by law.

[Siri, Alexa, play "Worldwide Steppers" by Kendrick Lamar, 2:48 - 3:04]

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*Chart created by Xuan Ye

In *What Lets Lethargy Dream Produces Lethargy's Surplus Value* by <u>Xuan Ye</u>, we are invited to slow down, and to assess the value of a resting body. Using an electroencephalogram (EEG) and sensors, the artist has recorded themself sleeping, synthesizing bioelectric signals into data that manipulates audio-visual material. Created in 2020, during the first Covid-19 lockdowns, this work is an ode to doing nothing, a hymn to chronic fatigue, and exhaustion.

What Lets Lethargy Dream Produces Lethargy's Surplus Value is part of the artist's larger performance series titled *Allegorical Circuits for Human Software*, which explores and reflects upon the self's relationship with its own body as a lens to critique technologically-induced acceleration of the world.

This process-based installation is specifically an act of resistance to hypercapitalism and the over-demand of productivity at the expense of our wellbeing. Xuan Ye inverts the act of doing nothing into something to be exploited for surplus value in creative image-making. It illustrates a crucial realization that productivity is dangerously premised on continually creating something new, and if maintenance and care was considered productive in the same way, maybe we won't burn everything to the ground.

Q "Javanese person resting at the beach"
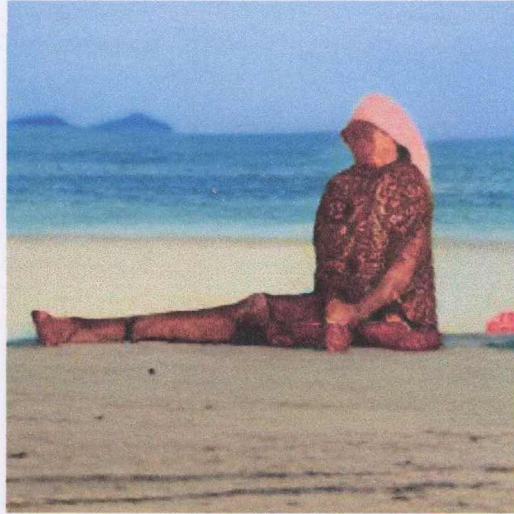
A3

A: You should turn off your computer every once in a while.

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