

TOWARDS DISSONANCE :
A CYBORG LIVING WITH TRANSPARENT TETRAHEDRONS

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Media Archeology
June 9, 2016

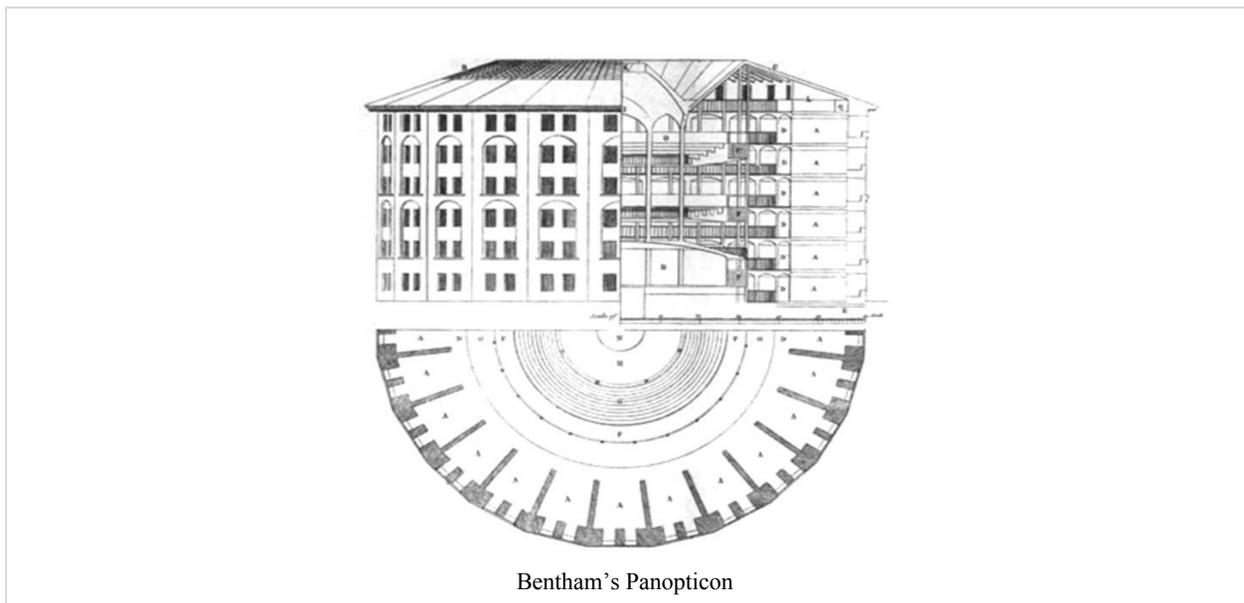
TOWARDS AN IMAGERY OF CYBORG WORLD

Through my practice, I create a virtual environment where a cyborg is living with transparent tetrahedrons. A digitally generated chimera, a human body whose openings—eyeholes, nostrils, ear holes, a naval, and an anus are filled with 3D model flowers, is animated. It does not have any conventional genital parts, but it has mixed gender characteristics, such as gynecomastia and male-patterned hair growth. It is surrounded by tetrahedral forms. The materiality of the tetrahedrons is totally hypothetical and generated by highly sophisticated computational physics. They are totally transparent but at the same time they can reflect and refract beyond the real-world optics. Some parts of the cyborg metamorphose into geometry shape and the cyborg becomes a new hybrid; as transforming into new shapes, as combining itself with the tetrahedrons, or as becoming what between these notions.



TRANSPARENT TETRAHEDRONS

Electronic surveillance and information surveillance started in 1960 have made the public interested in Foucault's Panopticism from his *Discipline and Punish*. Panopticon is a compound word for 'pan-' (means all) and '-opticon' (means observe). It is an institutional building designed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1791. This institution is a circular structure for inmates and has a tall inspection house at its center. By making the inspection house always dark and the inmates' cells light, the inmates are restricted to know where watchman's eyes are observing. This causes the inmates to feel being observed all the time and they internalize regulation and observation, ending up that they observe themselves.



Mark Zuckerberg, a founder of the world's most popular social network service, said "When I got started in my dorm room at Harvard, the question a lot of people asked was, 'why

would I want to put any information on the internet at all?”¹ “People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people.”² He declared privacy was no longer a ‘social norm.’ Zuckerberg considers that social norm has evolved over time. Douglas Rushkoff, an American media theorist, said “on Facebook we are not the customers. We are the product.”³ As non-paying subscribers, we are trading our private information.

The image shows the Facebook.com sign up page. At the top, there is a dark blue header with the Facebook logo on the left and a login section on the right. The login section has two input fields: 'Email or Phone' and 'Password', followed by a 'Log In' button and a link for 'Forgot account?'. Below the header, the main content area is light blue. On the left, there is a section titled 'Connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook.' with three icons and text: 'See photos and updates from friends in News Feed.', 'Share what's new in your life on your Timeline.', and 'Find more of what you're looking for with Facebook Search.'. On the right, there is a 'Sign Up' section. It starts with the text 'It's free and always will be.' followed by several input fields: 'First name', 'Last name', 'Mobile number or email', and 'Re-enter mobile number or email'. Below these is a 'New password' field. The 'Birthday' section has three dropdown menus for 'Month', 'Day', and 'Year', and a link 'Why do I need to provide my birthday?'. There are radio buttons for 'Female' and 'Male'. At the bottom of the sign up section, there is a green 'Sign Up' button and a link: 'Create a Page for a celebrity, band or business.' Below the entire screenshot, the text 'Facebook.com sign up page' is centered.

Our point of view on privacy has changed. In this contemporary society, people interpret privacy as informational autonomy. The notion of synopticon has led this phenomenon.

¹ Bobbie Johnson, "Privacy No Longer a Social Norm, Says Facebook Founder," *The Guardian*, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2010/jan/11/facebook-privacy>.

² Ibid.

³ Douglas Rushkoff, "Does Facebook Really Care about You?" *CNN*, September 23, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/09/22/opinion/rushkoff-facebook-changes/>.

Synopticon is the concept of “surveillance of the few by the many,”⁴ as identified by Thomas Mathiesen, a Norwegian sociologist. A system that internet users watch a man of influence by exchanging critical awareness on society and by accusing against absurd reality can be synopticon, which anonymity of the internet contributes to.

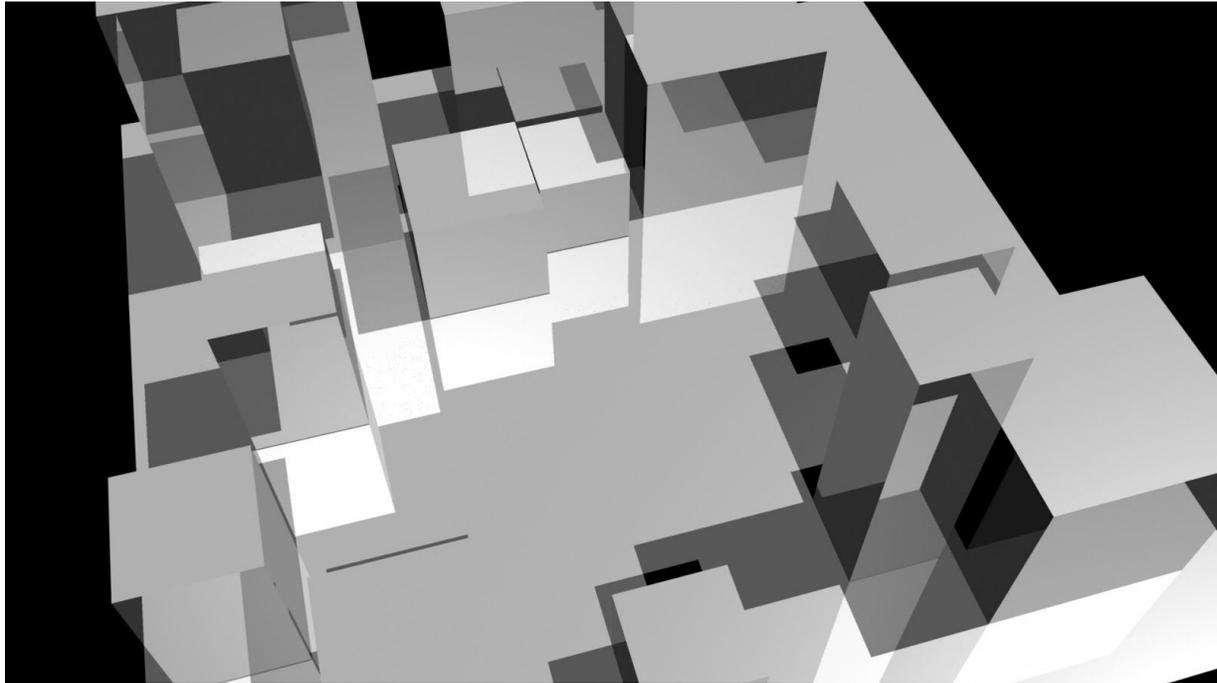
In my work, I create this synoptical society as transparent tetrahedrons with high reflection and refraction. Some might believe the internet and its anonymity can bring a utopian synopticon system. However, there still exist censorships and limitations. Flusser claimed the choice of various channels offered by television is highly illusory and this misconception of “control and freedom” manipulates viewers.⁵ What about the internet? It has been the profound idea that internet’s anonymity is imperfect. Still we live in this illusion of anonymity and freedom. This is why I conceptualize our networked world as transparent tetrahedrons with high reflection and refraction.

In terms of the form, instead of a circular shape which guarantees 360 degrees perspective, I choose a tetrahedral form. Unlike a circle, the distances from the center of a tetrahedron to the surface of it or to the edge of it are different. The corner of a tetrahedron is the furthest spot from the center where an inspection house was located in Panopticon. The corner is the darkest place and usually becomes a blind spot, such as a deep web. The difference between panopticon and my transparent tetrahedral model is that an inmate can freely navigate the inside

⁴ Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited," *Theoretical Criminology* 1, no. 2 (1997): 218.

⁵ Vilem Flusser, "Two Approaches to the Phenomenon, Television," in *The New Television: A Public/private Art: Essays, Statements, and Videotapes Based on "Open Circuits: An International Conference on the Future of Television" Organized by Fred Barzyk, Douglas Davis, Gerald O'Grady, and Willard Van Dyke for the Museum of Modern Art, New York City*, ed. Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 237.

of the tetrahedron. Often, the inmate deludes oneself that being on the corner is out of sight of a watchman. However, in my model, a watch man does not exist in the center of this institution and the watch man is not a single person.



Transparent tetrahedral model from *dissonance*

Within my work,

1. multiple transparent tetrahedrons are placed together and networked.
2. Each tetrahedron has different populations and different transparency, reflection, and refraction levels. But it is hard to distinguish material characteristics of each tetrahedron because tetrahedrons reflect each other.
3. One can freely navigate within the assigned tetrahedron. Often times, the idea of getting to another tetrahedron seems reliable due to the transparency and reflection.

4. Some believe the corner is a blind spot for a watch man or the safest place but others from the next tetrahedron can observe them.
5. Everyone is an inmate at the same time a watchman.
6. There is no way to escape from the tetrahedrons unless not existing.
7. Even though you do not belong to any tetrahedron, the image of you exists on the surface of the tetrahedrons by reflection.

CYBORG ONTOLOGY

Donna Haraway's cyborg aims to collapse 'all' authority. The uprising power during the process of breaking down existing authority becomes 'new' authority and it is what we keep our eyes open the most — the relative supremacy. Cyborg revolts against the political nature that any concepts can have — the potential for politically empowering. Within this cyborg utopia, society becomes more stressed. The noise collide each other and positivity disappears.

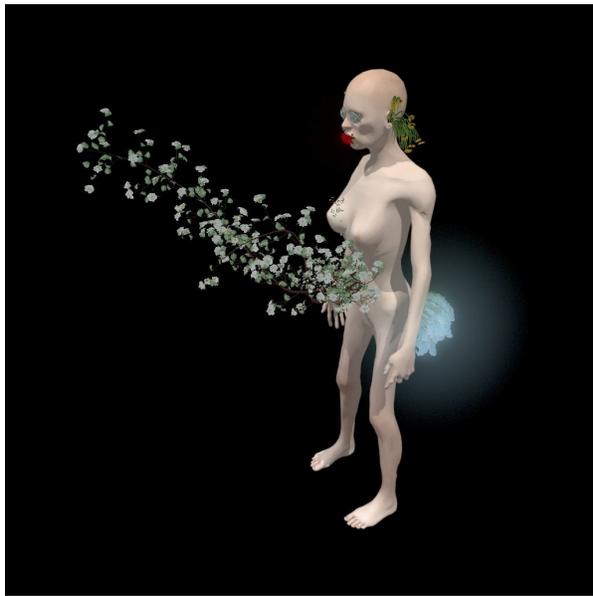
"We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs."⁶ "This cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation."⁷ Cyborg assures us to upset any classifications, concepts, and violence that constructed by phallogocentrism. I am seeking for the ontology for a cyborg through my practice.

⁶ 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), 150.

⁷ Ibid.

CYBORG IMAGE AS SIMULACRA

I adopt the represented forms from real life, producing a cyborg in a digital realm. The cyborg is a mixture of socially constructed identities as well as a hybrid of mixed reality and virtuality. The structure of the cyborg created based on the conventional human anatomy but the way it moves follows the computational and artificial physics.



Cyborg design from *dissonance*

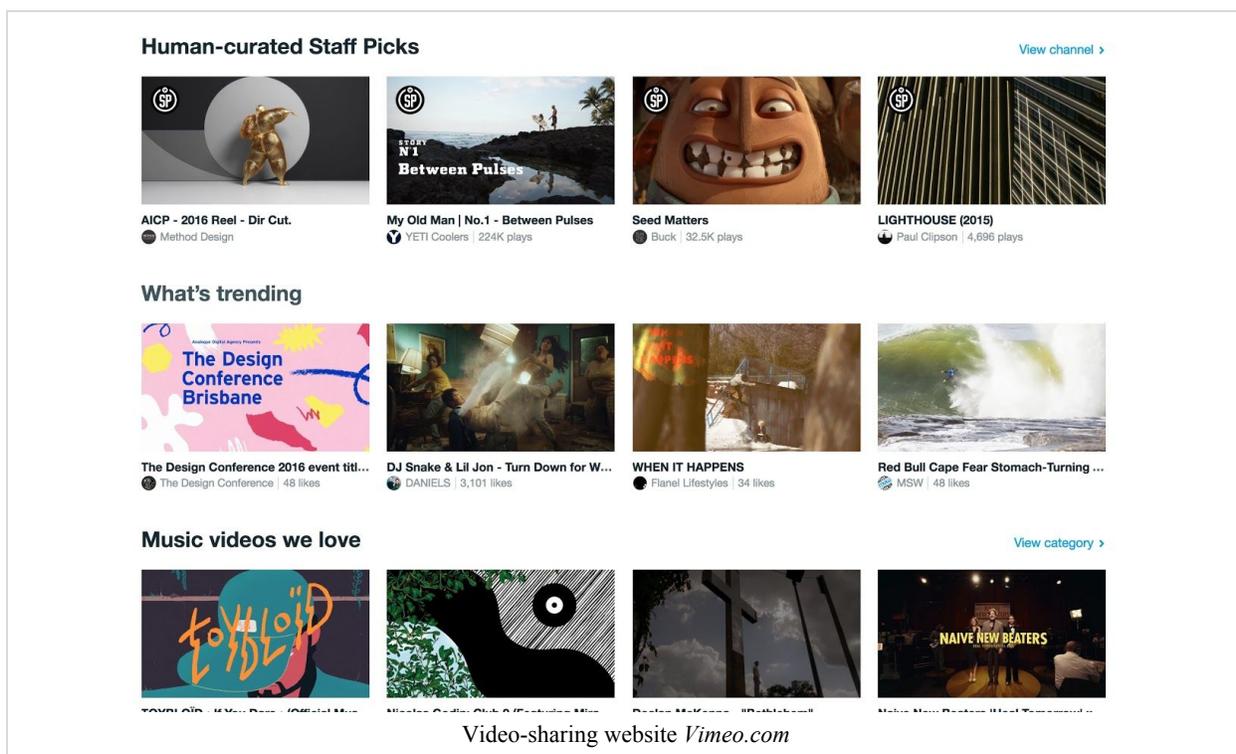


Cyborg design from *dissonance*

There have been various attempts to create cyborg images utilizing media throughout the histories. Phantasmagoria is a theatrical system utilizing magic lanterns. It was invented to convince the public that a ghost does not exist, by producing artificial apparition images with technology. Some audiences of phantasmagoric show reacted as they experienced an actual apparition. It is reasonable when the time period is considered. The public had a lack of understanding of photography and film technology. Yet, others acknowledged the show was pseudo and it caused the technological development of the show. No matter audiences are able to

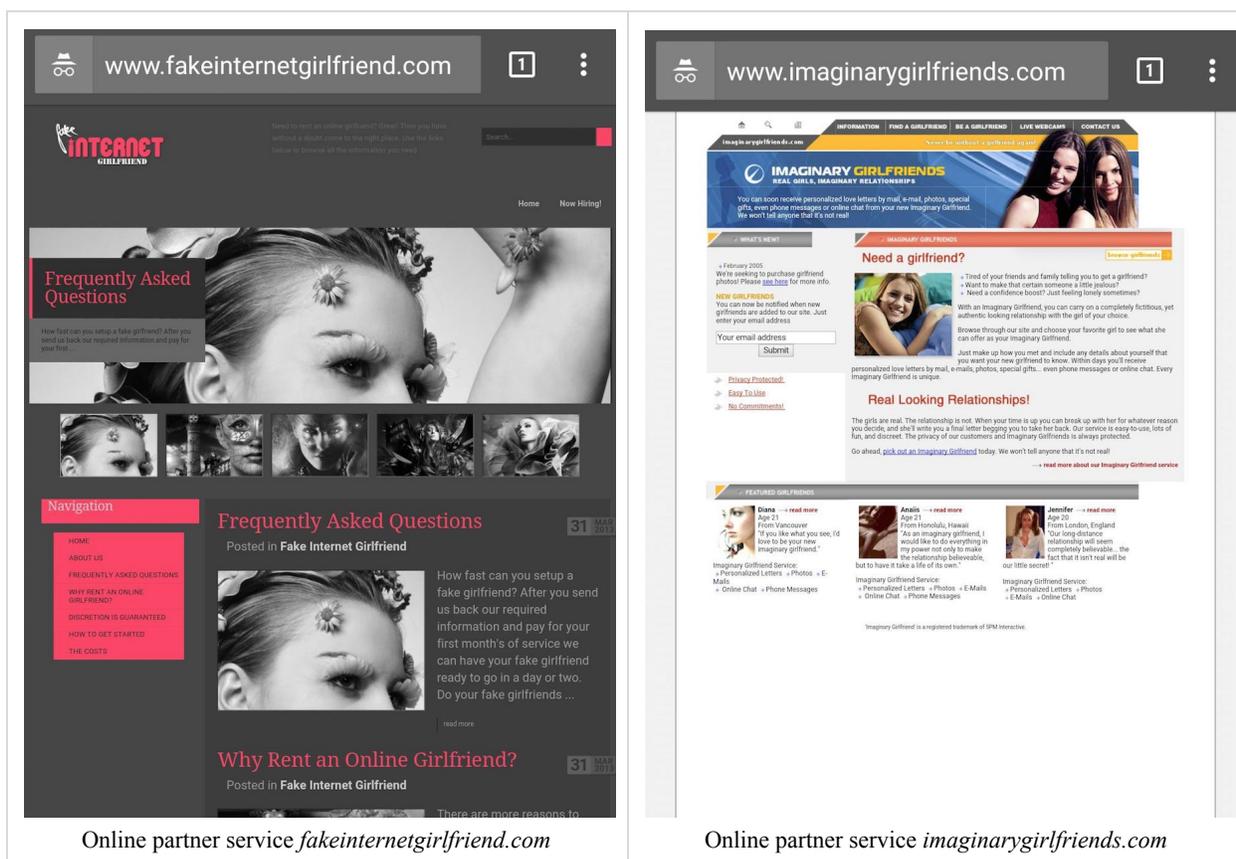
judge the integrity of the show or not, seeing the imagery of a ghost was still supernatural at that time. “The spectral technology of phantasmagoria recreated the emotional aura of the supernatural.”⁸

As technology and phantasmagoria show had been improved, easy access to the technology and popularity of phantasmagoria led the fashion of DIY magic lantern show. The access to open source software and community has been given to us. Now we see realistic monsters and ghosts in the movies but there are many amateurs uploading their movies via video sharing website. The technique of image manipulation is not limited to the professional. In addition, we not only create ‘ghost’ images using computer graphics but also are fully able to create ‘ghost’ identity — cyber identity, performing our own contemporary magic lantern show on the internet.



⁸ Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie," in *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (1988): 30.

The concept of phantasmagoria is ironic and paradoxical; the audiences see the pseudo imagery, but their experiences are real. Considering apparition as an imagined idea and experiencing the created image as a presence from simultaneously provide the mind of supernatural. Our altered ego, cyber identity, is also a mixed real/imagined idea, yet the perception from others can be real. The ghost identity, for instance, chat-girls for a relationship over the internet is no longer a new concept.



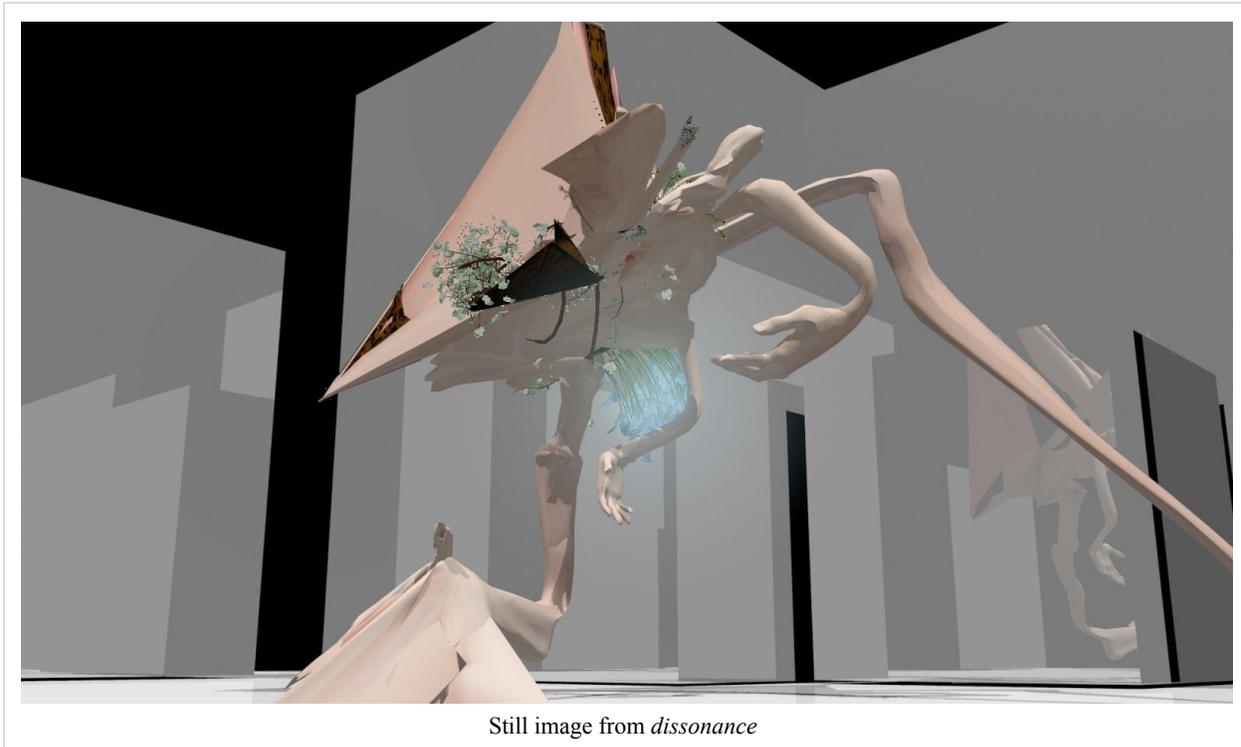
Online partner service fakeinternetgirlfriend.com

Online partner service imaginarygirlfriends.com

Walter Cooper Dendy concluded that a ghost was “nothing more than an intense idea” and that seeing a phantom was “an act of thinking.”⁹ I am intrigued by how the development of technology changes the notion of seeing a phantom in this era. What seeing a digital cyborg can

⁹ Ibid.

bring about? I question myself that what interaction between a digital cyborg and audiences can be. Rather, how is the notion of digital cyborg juxtaposed with the notion of a phantom? The cyborg created through my practice is an intensified/agreeable idea, reasoning/nonsense, and communicative/disconnect. I open this to the audiences rather than redefine it. My work presents modes of interpretation.



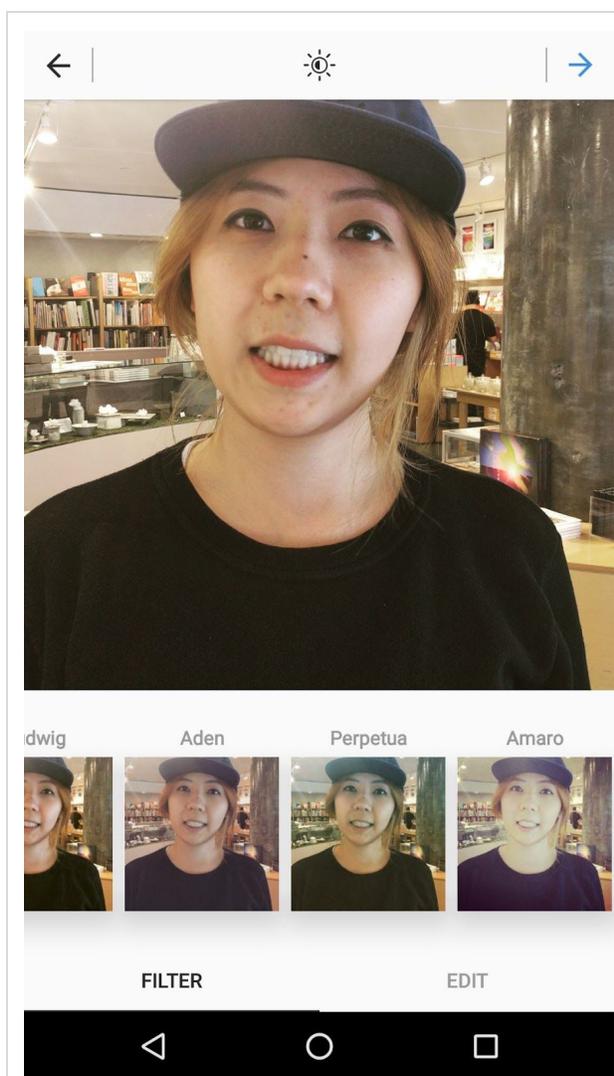
Still image from *dissonance*

Another example of ghost producing technique is photography technology; it materializes the image of a ghost. It seems that photography captures the presence of spirit, but at the same time, it dematerializes and transforms the visual nature of material reality into a ghostly double.¹⁰ Photography technology is no longer a new technology that can frighten us. Moreover, people

¹⁰ Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," in *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era*, ed. Murray Leeder (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

enjoy it. As photography becomes something mundane, we dispel our doubt about the ghost.

Now we are still surrounded by ghost images — manipulated images through media, such as ‘an ideal body’ or ‘an upright politician,’ but we don’t have much sense of doubt. Photography does not guarantee its integrity anymore, especially in digital culture. However, people consider this phenomenon as natural rather than take it critically. Photo manipulation has become a part of the process of photo-taking, it is not a post-process anymore. As technology permeated our life, we take a ghost for granted, eliminating our doubt.



SPECTACLES AND UNCANNINESS

It is a universally acknowledged fact that the media we perceive every day is full of spectacles. There exist spectacles in the process of spirit photography, which caused the spirit photography as a material of showbiz entertainment. The way spirit photography utilized woman medium has a great resemblance to the way we use woman image within 3D computer graphics, the most prevalent visual culture of our contemporary society.



Screenshot from *Grand Theft Auto V*

The spirit photography was created without camera or lenses, instead, it embodied woman medium as apparatus, which were controlled by men. Also, it is claimed that the presence of medium was necessary to form the images. The medium became a new phenomenon

that requires investigation rather than a new revelation of the reality.¹¹ A man was a mediator between audiences and woman medium, for instance, male magicians and female assistants, who were a medium for the show. The connection between spirit photography and 3D game lies in hyper- masculine manner; Florence Cook was a subject of the photographs, being objectified. She was framed in the spirit photographs and confined in a spirit cabinet, while Crookes was the only agent to create images and define aesthetics. It has been always controversial if magic shows including phantasmagoria and spirit photography are real or fraud. However, it does not undermine the uncanny quality of the photographs.

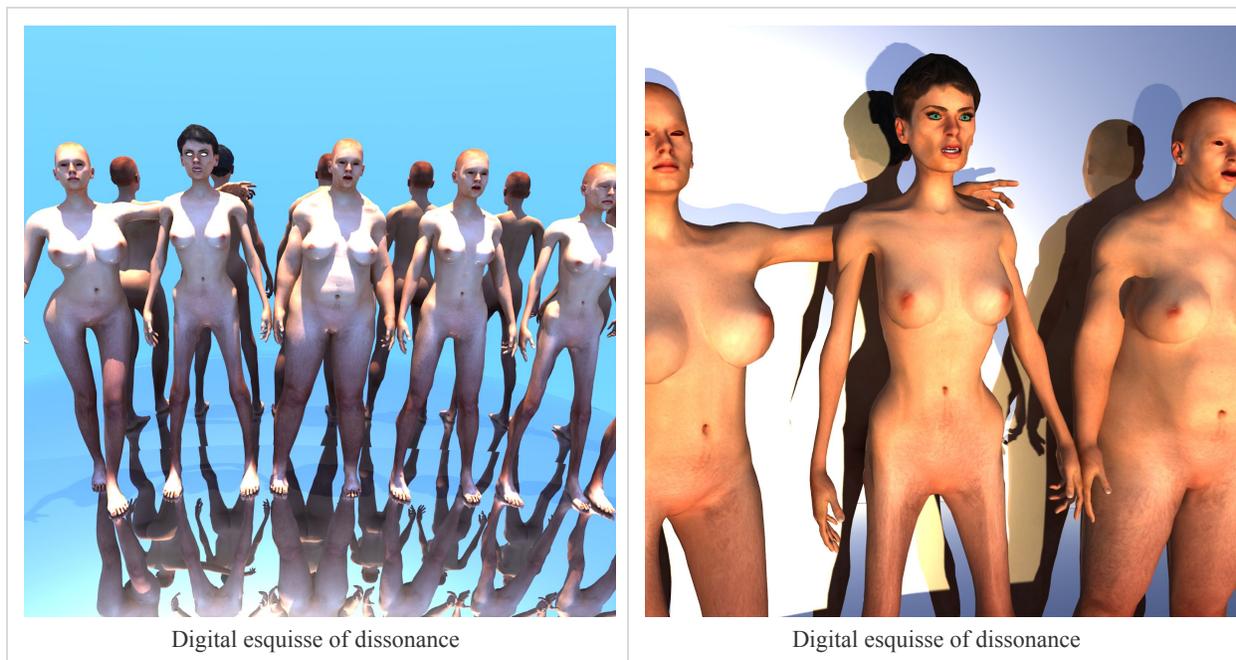
CONTEMPORARY MAGIC SHOW STATEMENT

I present my work in a sense of a contemporary ‘magic show,’ prompting viewers to be fully immersed into simulacra. My focus on creation is not making images more realistic nor imaginary, but producing ‘punctum.’ I digitally generate a chimera, a hybrid between human form copied from generic game characters and 3D modeled flowers. The cyborg is transformed beyond the conventional human anatomy and metamorphosed by computational languages. Vertexes, edges, and faces are moved, rotated, and scaled, instead of joints and muscles. The uncanny imagery of the hominid frame is juxtaposed within the cybernated realm, seesawing between realistic implausibility and improbable reality.

I aim to break the false idea that we can access the reality given to us. We see reality only within the gaze of capital. Capitalism is the form of constituting material relation, but also the

¹¹ Ibid.

way it acts is a form of sense and a form of thought. It formalizes our reality. “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.”¹² Debord said.

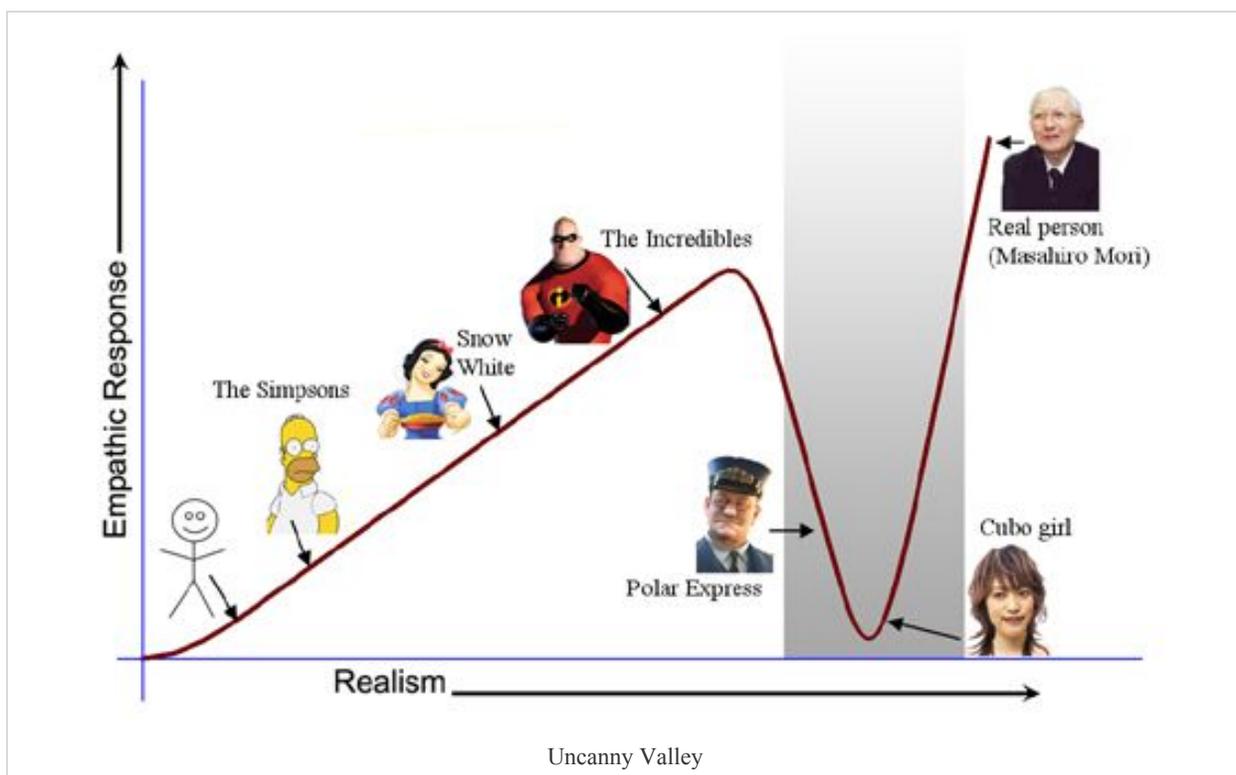


The subtle but compelling discrepancy between the simulacra and reality induces the viewer to feel empathy or revulsion, sending them up and down the uncanny valley. Within this hyperreality, an overlap of virtuality and reality, the digital image’s punctum have provided. The viewer is invited to zoom into the frame and navigate the simulated metaphysical space where the digital sublime is framed. The uncanniness, the indistinguishable difference between the two domains, is a vital part of my work. Like a feeling of ‘aura’ in the 18th century, I consider ‘uncanny’ as a new aesthetic category that characterizes digital universe.

¹² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (BERKELEY: Bureau OF PUBLIC SECRETS, 2014), 7.

UNCANNY AS A NEW AESTHETICS

The uncanny valley is easily observed at animation films. *The Polar Express* and *Final Fantasy*, which are composed with highly realistic yet not completely realistic digital human images, were box office failures, casting away on the uncanny valley. On the contrary to this, *Avatar* succeeded to escape the uncanny valley by utilizing facial motion capture. However, though we cover the whole surface of a human body with sensors, there still will be gaps between sensors. Flusser suggests that we can fill up the gap between digital and analogue by raising density of particles.¹³ But condensing density of computer graphics like reality is not the only way to breakout from the uncanny valley.



¹³ Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 11-22.

Interesting point is that the more we are exposed to that uncanny imagery, the more we consider it as something to enjoy rather than to overcome. Technology has struggled to reach the realistic expression but it has experienced frustration, admitting that we can reenact reality but not reproduce reality. Meanwhile, we have constantly encountered uncanny imagery and the uncanniness has become the new aesthetics. This is nothing new. There have been many artists such as Francis Bacon and Patricia Piccinini and now we watch music videos of FKA twigs and Die Antwoord that streamed over millions via youtube.



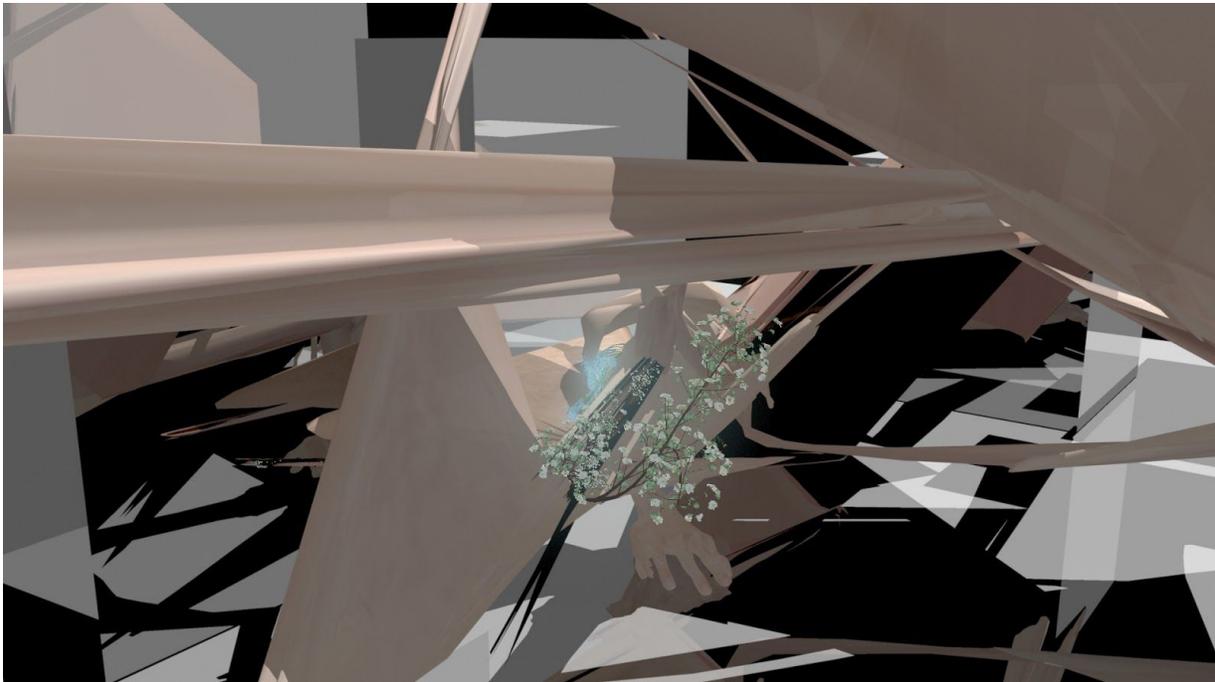
The Young Family by Patricia Piccinini



Still image from *Pitbull Terrier* by Die Antwoord

METAMORPHOSING CHIMERA

I questioned to Haraway how cyborg functions and the question became a task for me. A chimera is composed of lion's head, sheep's torso, and snake's tail. It is hard to find the exact boundaries between each part; till where is the lion? The boundaries are ambiguous. On this ambiguity, there exists a cyborg. The monstrous form is ideal in this cyborg utopia. Haraway declares to become a cyborg rather than a goddess. The notion of perfection such as god is considered to be worshiped and admired, and it is authority and violence. Noise and stress from a collapse of the perfection is a liberation from the authority.

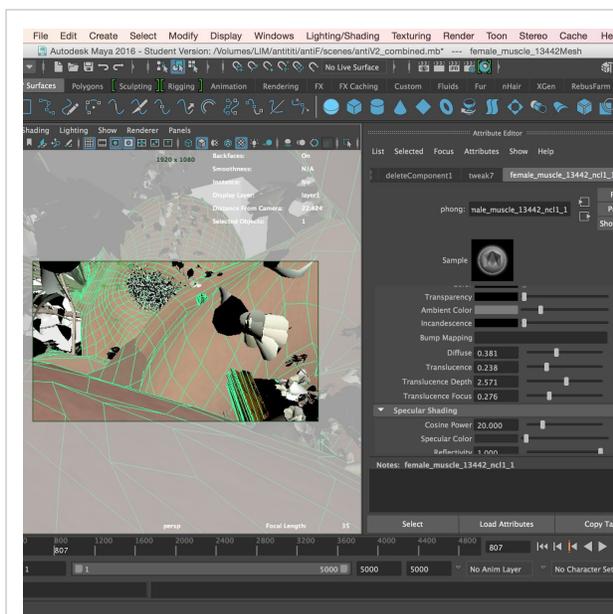


Still image from *dissonance*

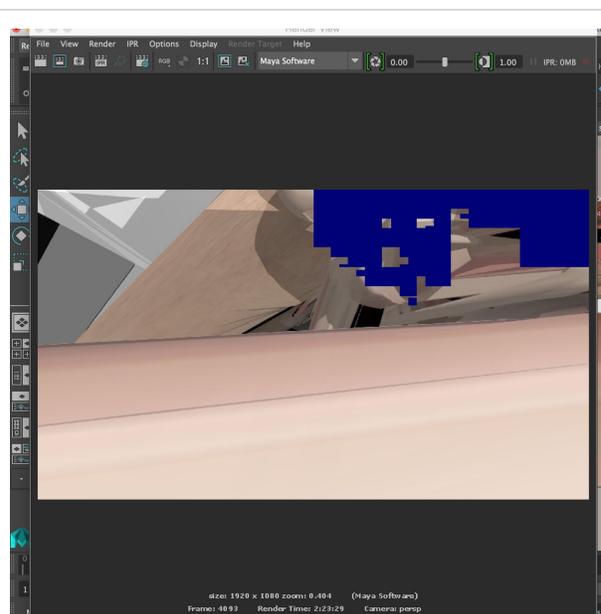
I consider the imagery of the cyborg I generate as soon-to-be prevalent, or maybe it is already prevalent. No matter how I deconstruct the represented forms of reality, the aesthetic of

the image is bound to be familiar to viewers. Thus, I suggest metamorphosis as my cyborg ontology. To reconstruct newly generated aesthetic within my work and to prevent to it empowering as a ‘new’ aesthetics, I force the cyborg and the environment to alter constantly.

To dismantle the control I have over the creation, I cooperate with a computational system. I code parameters into the digital scene to make the cyborg and the environment metamorphose by their own rule and interact each other. Often times, it provides me a feeling that I am empowered within this virtual atelier. However, when I look into closely, this digital software also have a control over me; sometimes I cannot conduct a creation due to a limitation of the system and sometimes I just fail to utilize them. “Digital worlds are reshaping how we communicate and express ourselves.”¹⁴ For me, software is far beyond the notion of a tool. We are co-dependent and through this relationship, I seek for a new methodology of the art-making process.



Virtual atelier Autodesk maya



Crashed image
(Render time: 2 hours 23 minutes 29 seconds)

¹⁴ Steven R. Holtzman, *Digital Mosaics: The Aesthetics of Cyberspace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.), 18.

While the cyborg and the environment are metamorphosing by their own languages and systems which collaboratively constructed by me and software, they deconstruct authority and power that artist has had. As a result, within my video, there are glitches, such as a blackout screen caused by a virtual camera moving inside objects, and there are many frames I cannot predict as a creator. Even though the creator, artist myself, determines the materiality of the tetrahedron as reflective surfaces, it does not reflect some object like flowers; the different types of rendering software cause this noise.



The cyborg's vertexes, edges, and faces are moved, rotated, and scaled. The cyborg constantly evolves into a new chimera, by sometimes transforming itself, by sometimes becoming a new hybrid with the environment, by sometimes causing a crash of tools. This endless deformation revolts against authority, standing up for all cyborgs.

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