what can’t be seen

_Dodie Bellamy_ considers the work of _Zach Blas, Andrea Crespo, Park McArthur, Patrick Staff_ and _Christine Sun Kim_, young artists exploring queerness, disability, the standardization of bodies and the politics of visibility
I live close to a centre for developmentally disabled adults. Recently, I found myself standing at a street crossing beside a middle-aged woman. When the light turned red, the woman tapped my arm and said, with urgency: ‘Walk with me. Walk with me.’ She held out her hand. All the threats and scams I’ve witnessed in city life shot through my mind, but then the woman looked so frightened; I took her soft, crépey hand and held it as we crossed the street. This intimacy felt uncomfortable and startlingly human. When we reached the curb, the woman let go and walked on. It was like having a one-night stand that left me wanting more than this brief experience of a life where touching a stranger is no big deal.

In his book Crip Theory (2006), Robert McRuer argues for ‘the desirability of a loss of composure, since it is only in such a state that heteronormativity might be questioned or resisted and that new (queer/disabled) identities and communities might be imagined.’ But shifting the public imagination is no easy feat. Chicago-based artist Riva Lehrer – who makes portraits of disabled artists, writers and performers – has found that ‘any depiction of a disabled person is no easy feat. Chicago-based artist Riva Lehrer has endured, younger artists Zach Blas, Andrea Crespo, Park McArthur, Patrick Staff and Christine Sun Kim have developed strategies to explore queerness and disability while subverting the transparency of identity politics and the preconceptions audiences might impose upon them. At times, their work thwarts identification and understanding at others, it is aggressively blatant. This friction between legibility and impenetrability creates a charge that I find exciting.

Zach Blas’s work with biometrics critiques the violence of a normative gaze. Global standards of identification programmed into capture technologies, such as fingerprint or retinal scanners, according to Blas, ‘insidiously return us to the ableist, classist, homophobic, racist, sexist and transphobic scientific endeavours of the 19th century.’ Facial recognition programmes cannot perceive dark skin, while blink detection software reads an Asian woman as closing her eyes when she isn’t. Wheelchairs, skin diseases and visual impairments can also cause biometric failures. Inspired by philosopher Édouard Glissant, Blas champions opacity as a means of resistance against dominant and state-controlled forms of representation and visibility. According to Glissant, the imperialist gaze obscures or ignores otherwise, making the world conform to Western Enlightenment ideals. Thus, for Glissant, opacity is not obscurity; it is resistance to erasure. In Poetics of Relation (1997), the philosopher argues for ‘the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can co-exist and converge, weaving fabrics.’ Insisting on our own fundamental opacity does not close us off from others, or mire the self in solipsism: rather, it is an acceptance of the unique core of difference and particularity each of us carries within. There is no standard self to be known.

For surveillance culture, opacity is the ultimate F-you. In his ‘Facial Weaponization Suite’ (2011–14), Blas uses the standard templates of biometrics against himself, scanning the faces of a group of people to create a series of composite masks that look formless and inhuman. One of these masks, Fag Face (2012), comprises aggregate data from many queer men’s faces, resulting in a pink blob that is ‘creatably Oi! facial recognition software. The mask is both comic and frightening: it looks like the victim of some terrible nuclear experiment in a 1950s sci-fi movie. The artist’s series of ‘Face Cages’ (2013–16), however, has a terrifying beauty. Blas scanned the faces of four queer artists and made metal masks for each of them out of the resultant diagrams. Even though the diagrams are supposedly perfect, the masks don’t really fit and are so painful that to wear the standardized gaze becomes an endurance performance.

While the body is not visibly rendered in New York-based artist Park McArthur’s work, its traces are everywhere in her installations: displaced onto environments, clothing and objects involved in her daily care. (McArthur preferred that this article be published without visual representation of the works mentioned.) In a 2014 series of ‘commodes’, the artist’s worn pyjama bottoms, the uniform of the sick, hang from stainless-steel stands. The work speaks of absence and intimacy, of disconnecting exposure. In During the month of August ESSEX STREET will be closed (2013), clothes (some of them McArthur’s own) were hung outside the eponymous New York gallery from chains and hosed with water once daily. The horrible vulnerability of the clothes reaches beyond McArthur’s life, pointing to histories of abuse of the disabled. McArthur changed the address signage of the gallery to 1st Avenue, an abandoned nurse’s residence.
These artists have developed strategies to subvert the transparency of identity politics and the preconceptions audiences might impose upon them.

and training school located near to where Frieze Art Fair is held, ironically suggesting the art world’s myopia in relation to vulnerable bodies, regardless of their proximity.

For Ramps (2010-14), 20 ramps were placed on the gallery floor, most of them borrowed from museums and galleries McArthur had visited. A sign was displayed at each lending institution, declaring ‘RAMP ACCESS LOCATED AT ESSEX STREET’. The artist’s caustic humour suggests an underbelly of rage. It is impossible to reduce the ramps to abstract symbols of accessibility: each bears the marks of hundreds of specific negotiations. They are chipped and dirty and, if you were to touch them, they would probably give you splinters. They speak of ongoing obstacles in assuring accessibility, how McArthur’s personal challenges mirror larger social issues.

Christine Sun Kim, who was born deaf, became interested in working with sound due to her encounters with ‘sound etiquette’: all the ways she had to learn to not make noises that would disturb the hearing. Don’t bang your fork against a plate. Don’t make belly laughs in a cinema. In other words, she was encouraged to become quieter, less noticeable – to fade into the background. Kim’s 2015 TED talk, ‘The Enchanting Music of Sign Language’, has been viewed online more than a million times. Chipper, with blue ombre hair, Kim positions herself as an ambassador to the hearing, projecting that, yes, understanding is possible. People love this message, perhaps because she doesn’t seem angry. Photos from her performances reveal audiences beaming with huge, enthused smiles. Kim offers an upbeat, thought-provoking experience. She places herself so comfortably in the centre of her work that it’s easy to forget it isn’t about her as an autobiographical subject. It’s about sound, language and perception – abstract material that never feels bloodless in Kim’s hands. No matter how intimate her engagement with her viewers, Kim maintains her fundamental opacity: she never seems consumed by their gaze.

In her performance Face Opera II (2013), the artist and a group of deaf people, arranged as a choir, act out emotional content without the use of their hands, forming a moving sculpture that sways and startles. There is a comic, creepy loopiness to the
performance, an addictive lack of self-consciousness. I can’t stop looking at her ‘Upside Down Noon’ drawings (2014), which combine musical notation with gestures from sign language – synaesthetic slippages that are consistently graceful, witty and smart. As Blas contests standardized bodies, artist Andrea Crespo, in the roundtable discussion ‘Gender Fluidity and Post-Identity’, rails against standardized identities, including ‘LGBTQ® and its genderist doctrines’. In the same debate, Crespo goes on to describe the alternative possibilities they imagine, beyond the scope of queer or identity politics: ‘To reiterate, the futurities we are interested in aren’t queer. We are more interested in teratological and machinic futurities that are beyond the scope of the popular queer imaginary but nevertheless imminent. An autistic or machinic aesthetic rather than a queer aesthetic.’ Crespo has found community in online micro subcultures, such as the social media platform DeviantArt, where the erotics of neurological divergence are embraced. The fluidity of online avatars provides a means of connecting for those for whom connecting is otherwise not possible – those suffering from mental illness or who, like Crespo, are on the autism spectrum. Much of Crespo’s art centres around a pair of manga-inspired conjoined twins, Cynthia and Celinde, who are sometimes drawn holding each other in a sensual hug. When considering who they are, the pair say: ‘We may be changelings, but we’re no stand-ins.’ The twins, who sometimes have three legs and long undulating toes, resist classification. They are simultaneously cute and grotesque, self-absorbed and seductive, pointing to radical desires that have yet to be defined. Crespo’s refusal of preconceived queer categories proposes that even a progressive gaze can reduce persons to the violating transparency Glissant warns against. Their art is a tribute to the mystery of identity, reminding us that the self is even more otherworldly than we fear it is.

Patrick Staff uses installation, dance and performance to explore how subjectivity is constructed and deconstructed, and to question, according to Gil Leung in a 2014 interview with the artist, ‘which bodies [...] are abled and disabled, legitimate and illegitimate’. In ‘Scaffold See Scaffold’ (2013–14), Staff investigated chronic illness and labour, amongst other topics. His process involved research in the Trinity Laban dance school archives and a series of discussions and workshops with a wide range of people, including practitioners and activists, artists, older queers and a young performance group. Staff made a series of three billboards showing the transcription of an interview he conducted with a disabled collaborator, which were displayed on the exterior of The Showroom gallery’s building in London. The anonymous interviewee admits to not being knowledgeable about disability theory, and Staff assures her that’s fine. A recurring topic is how her disability has shifted her self-definition. She also covers survival difficulties, bureaucracy, strategies for conserving energy. It has taken her years to shift from hiding her illness to being open about it. Imagining her confusion and shame blown up big enough to fill the side of a building, I feel a pang of exposure that is unbearable. But the more I ponder the interview and billboards, the more the interviewee eludes me. She is tentative and ambivalent, at times contradictory. The interview is incomplete, comprised of time-stamped excerpts. Portions are labelled as redacted. As if to further emphasize the incompleteness of the text, Staff has inserted various graphic disruptions. Column-wide wavy lines suggest section breaks, but the rationale behind their placement is obscure. Most of the third column of each page is slashed by a series of short parallel lines that descend at an angle. The artist is setting up a tension between exposure and concealment. We witness this woman’s vulnerability, but we never own it. Like Glissant, Staff is suggesting that we can exist in solidarity with one another only by accepting our impenetrable differences. Staff is currently working on another piece exploring illness and exposure, a commission for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, due to open this spring. It is based on artist Catherine Lord’s memoir, The Summer of Her Baldness (2004). The titular protagonist, Her Baldness, is an alter-ego who emerged when Lord underwent chemotherapy for breast cancer. Her Baldness...
sent out messages to a closed list of email contacts, thereby keeping Lord connected to her friends, and allowing her to both reveal herself and to maintain her opacity.

For the cover art to her 2011 book, Cruel Optimism, theorist Lauren Berlant chose Lehrer’s Riva and Zora in Middle Age (2005). It is a painting of the artist and her dog, who is blind in one eye and wearing a vivid white cone around its neck. Lehrer is lying on the ground behind the dog, her hands covering her face. What Berlant writes of Lehrer’s painting could be said of all the work discussed here: ‘mortality and vulnerability hover as the velvet uncanny of the situation’. These artists pull the rug out from under simple aesthetic appreciation – from compassion even. In this destabilized state, new possibilities of relation can occur.

1 Robert McRuer, Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability, 2006, New York University Press
2 Riva Lehrer, ‘Valuable Bodies’, 2015, tinyurl.com/gvd6ry6
3 Kathie Bergquist, ‘Meet a Ms. Fit: artist Riva Lehrer’, Ms. Fit, 2013, tinyurl.com/gpaz7k
5 Andrea Crespo from a roundtable conversation with Telfar Clemens, Harry Dodge, Amos Mac and A.L. Steiner, Kaleidoscope, 2015, issue 25

Dodie Bellamy is a novelist, poet and essayist based in San Francisco, USA. She is the author of ten books, most recently When the Sick Rule the World (Semiotext(e), 2016).


Andrea Crespo is an artist based in New York, USA. In 2015, they had solo exhibitions at the Swiss Institute, and Hester, both New York, and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin. In 2016, they published an online commission for Rhizome and the New Museum. In 2017, they will have a solo show at MIT List Center, Cambridge, USA.


Patrick Staff is an artist based in Los Angeles, USA. In 2015, they had solo shows at Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK, and Spike Island, Bristol, UK, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia, and in 2016 at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada. Their new commission for LA MOCA, USA, will open in spring 2017.

Christine Sun Kim is an artist based in Berlin, Germany. In 2015, her work was included in ‘Greater New York’ at MoMA PS1, New York, USA, and in 2016 she had a solo show, ‘Rustle Tustle, at Carroll / Fletcher, London, UK.

Crespo’s art is a tribute to the mystery of identity, reminding us that the self is even more otherworldly than we fear it is.
Cynthia and Celinde are conjoined twins who live in the mind of their autistic host. You will be joining them today in their myriad adventures. You may have already gotten to know them a bit in the computational network community they usually hang out in, whether on DeviantArt or elsewhere. This is the first time they are out and about in the world, and boy do they have a lot to show and tell. You will learn lots about machinic death drive and changelings. Be wary of metaphorization. They don’t like it when you expect them to teach you about yourself through their body. Rather, they prefer to teach through being in the world. Buckle up and enjoy your trip!

Cover Image: Andrea Crespo, A day in the lives of (2016). Video, color, sound: 9 min. Courtesy the artist

Cynthia and Celinde are shown buckled into a single seat in an otherwise empty cockpit in the final frames of Andrea Crespo’s new video A day in the lives of (2016), surrounded by a clear blue sky splashed with clouds.

What was known about Cynthia and Celinde up until this journey? Certainly they had never been seen in such a vibrant setting. Crespo’s previous video aie: pensacolli (2018) visualizes their source material: shadowy outlines of manga-like girls, conjoined or in mirrored poses; medical charts (for instance, “Table 16.2: Four main types of autistic phenomena”; long lists of terms that grasp their condition — “hermaphrodite,” “self-pluralism,” “neurodiversity,” “therakind,” among them. These materials flash past us, played by the light of a scanner or an EMOD (light bar) (a treatment tool sometimes used in psychotherapy), condensed, encoded, mapped, and remapped by the obsession of an unseen author—or host. In vitrified crystals (2015), they have taken form (“We look like this body and made it our own”) and appear amid sleek, waxy planes of black and gray, a cold, amorphous environment that pulses with the brightness of a laboratory and the glow of a screen but is somehow warmed by the twins’ tenderness and palpable vulnerability.

“Hi. Hello again.” A day in the lives of opens with Cynthia and Celinde greeting the viewer, as they overlook a river lapping against an ashen skyline. “We have lots to show you, lots to tell you.” We trail Cynthia and Celinde as they drive a car (“I absolutely love driving”, they intone); upload a “very special payload” which looks like the contents of a chat forum; to the cargo hold of a plane; walk through a laboratory where they “invite their subjects to play”; and find themselves, finally, in the cockpit. A day reverberates with sounds at a volume a tick higher than expected: the whirring of plane engines, cars passing on the highway; rain falling. These are “slimy” sounds, ones that match the bodily feeling of perseveration, and they thrill and calm the twins.

“We have plane.”
Roger that, sis.
I guess you could call that a metaphor too.
But, doesn’t that make you wonder, who, or what, we are?
We may be changelings, but we’re no stand-ins.”

This distinction—changelings, not stand-ins—is key for the twins. Cynthia and Celinde are not depicted as “stand-ins” for a specific disorder, dysfunction, or desired but unattainable real (“Be wary of metaphorization”). Rather, they are unpredictable and alive: an expansive, chimera-like substitute for a body and mental state delimited by strictures of normativity. A day in the lives of sets them free, ready to touch by being in the world.

*Andrea Crespo: A day in the lives of is commissioned by Rhizome and co-presented with the New Museum as part of First Look: New Art Online.

Andrea Crespo’s animated video a day in the lives of (2016) follows conjoined twins Cynthia and Celinde. The sisters have an agenda, but are still willing to take time to enjoy their favorite things—driving, taking walks—and to acclimate their guest with a constant stream of explanations, questions and opaque hints. Their tasks are mysterious, and they check up on your comprehension often. “You don’t know what we’re talking about, do you? ...You seem a bit slow on the uptake,” they say, and later ask, “Got a clue yet?” They are rendered in the DeviantArt style Crespo favors: thin black scan-imported linework, soft-shading, smudge tool mimicking the texture of hair, tapered flat fingers and stock poses.

The twins have appeared in Crespo’s work before (recently, sis: parabiosis on DIS) but with different bodies. Ostensibly, they live in the mind of an autistic host, but Cynthia and Celinde seem to transmigrate elsewhere. They have a home on the internet, for example, maybe in an RPG forum or DeviantArt art trade, and pass materially through the circuits of a data center as often as the neurons of their host. They are no synecdoche for parts of the host, or for parts of you. They do not really have a parent. As they say, “we may be changelings, but we’re no stand-ins.”

Crespo’s art is world-making, in the sense that the work starts with a physical metaphor of psychology. The patterns of a subject’s brain chemistry are turned inside out like a topology problem, becoming the grass, the sky, the physics and space-time of a second universe. A brain becomes the field of play. In the video, the messy transferal of a white chemical into a test tube triggers an ecstatic loss of consciousness; the screen goes black until shaking, flickering text spells out a reset. Later, the twins stow away netting-wrapped cargo in a plane’s belly, “beneath awareness’s grasp,” and a glitch reveals the contents: a tranche of blurred forum screenshots. The twins are playing memory games, stacking dominoes that will fall, sometime later, in the mind of their host.

But the metaphor isn’t the end: the new inner world resists linking analogically to its progenitor and claims the power to play out its own rules. The host is part of Cynthia and Celinde’s day but cannot entirely determine what happens within it, nor can the twins ventriloquize the host. So the metaphor is made strange, like smelling the unfamiliarity of your home after a long time away. Crespo creates this dynamic best with sound. Layered ambient noises leak in from the background— helicopters, rain, the percussion of a handful of car keys, engines whining. They are sharper and isolated in their own particularity, a familiar urban hum made immanent. Sound becomes something different against the twins’ ears.

It would give too much credit to Freudian theory to say that Crespo’s work refutes it. But his argument for a two-sex split as the precondition for selfhood is nicely swept away in Crespo’s work. Instead, we get multi-voiced tangles of identification that, specifically through their unfamiliarity, have much more to do with how people build understandings of who they are. In Crespo’s hands, this always-incomplete project does justice to its component parts, human and nonhuman alike. The divided subject is a theme of Freudianism and postmodernism, and conjoined sisters Cynthia and Celinde fit the description in name only. It is almost a pun. But the way their bodies and minds commingle and emerge represents something new.

Cynthia and Celinde insist that they are not stand-ins. They also pester their guest to decode who they are and what is happening, and at first, the riddle seems to ask what facet of the host’s mind the twins represent. But this contradicts what they themselves are saying: don’t treat them synecdochically, as one piece that clicks into place in an analogy for the whole. The answer is that Cynthia and Celinde aren’t the host’s autism, memory, neurons or erotics. They don’t belong to the host; they act outside of that metaphor and, although their relationships are speculative, they’re certainly not proprietary, no more than you could claim to own bacteria that once lived in your stomach. a day in the lives of does not personify a specific type of neurodivergence as much it personifies component personhood: the contingencies that make us up have an agency of their own. When the host speaks, you don’t hear one voice.
Our brief: Today, in our endlessly pluralist and globalized world, we are supposedly post-identity, post-race, post-gender, even post-human. But at the same time, the most identitarian of politics is being mobilized, both by advanced culture—which has seemingly rediscovered cultural difference, both its aesthetic possibility and its market value—and by the extreme ideologies or fundamentalisms of the

Who’s advancing and who’s advancing? Like the term “late capitalism,” it’s rife with optimism, notions of progress, and tinged with delusion.
Hi,

Hello.

by: Cynthia and Celinde
We remain devout.

Correct, absolute abstinence.

We are unremitting in our commitments.

It's just us.
that way.

Stasis.

jerky movements and slight tremors.

Please, don’t get us wrong.

The jitter of conflicting signals, no one is perfect.

We don’t always get along.

This way.
Our machines...
...interlocking and influencing bodies.

They constitute us, we constitute them.

They are many,

so many. They are

ever-changing and replicating,

closed circuits,

endlessly looping.
you start seeing things.

Spend enough time here,

Spend enough time here,

Listen...

you start feeling things.

You hear the sound of—

hushed whispers beneath the sheets...

...ectoplasm on your cheeks.
Yet you wake up and realize that nothing has changed,
that on the surface,
all remains the same.

I'm not so sure how we got here,
neither one of us remembers.
“Life’ … is an acquired taste, an addiction like any other, an open-ended project.”
Rosi Braidotti

“What we do on the net others can do without all that equipment.”
Kathy Acker

The phallo(g)centrism of Freud’s twentieth-century psychoanalytic project relies on both its corresponding negatively formed lack, and the physiological facts of anatomy then classified as more or less binary, if not binding. His metaphorical theories were extrapolated from the literal, in other words, from observations of the normal statistical distributions of the biological. Donna Haraway has characterized the human organism naturalized by early life sciences as an “unambiguous locus of identity, agency, labor, and hierarchicalized function,” thereby questioning the determinism of the sexology it so solidly constructed.

While artists, writers and activists of the 1970s appropriated psychoanalytic tropes to push back against patriarchal power, or rescue marginal figures and fetishes in their crusade for equality and sexual liberation, the body, as evidence, was re-inscribed. Its processes and pleasures still rouse terror in their operations on the psychic cohesion of human organisms — sparking essentialist turf wars in several quarters.

Haraway’s generative theories on the triangulation of (wo)man, nature and machine, articulated in sympathy with diverse social movements, allow for the radical undoing of phallogocentrism and its corporal subject in the Western philosophical tradition; even as Freudian myth is perpetuated by hegemonic forms of social reproduction. In particular, Haraway’s writing on the semantics of bodily defense in the discourse of immunology speaks to the psychosomatically constituted self and dominant, often regressive, modes of “imaging” within therapeutic culture: “What is at stake is the kind of collective and personal selves that will be constructed in this organic-technical-mythic-textual semiosis. […] How can ‘we’ […] image our vulnerability as a window on to life?”

Her question pertains to the project of artist Andrea Crespo (b. 1993, Miami), whose layered drawings, slender composite objects, and video works ‘image’ transformative fantasies and imaginaries expressed in affective online communities at the tail ends of the spectrum. Crespo also proposes sensible language for the nonconformist conditions and potentialities of their own neurodivergent, transsexed tendencies by playing on the vocabularies of pharmacology, psychiatry, cybernetics, and cultures of fandom. Key terms like ‘source person,’ ‘core personality,’ ‘#cycling,’ ‘#machinekin,’ ‘#actuallyautistic,’ ‘possession,’ ‘polymorphism,’ etc., accrue in their work in an overwhelming series of technically specific tags, clever titles, and contingent self-diagnoses mostly alien to art jargon.

Crespo has described the installation as a mode of meaningful therapy; a method to materialize, even temporarily, dissociated and disembodied perspectives in the present. In recent exhibitions held at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler in Berlin (sis: somatic systems), at Hester (polymorphoses) and at the Swiss Institute (virocrypsis) in New York.
throughout 2015, interlocking puzzle pieces, digital scanners, stretched or compressed cloth, flat screens, plexiglas, standard analytical charts, framed activity graphs, and simply rendered *kawaii* characters populated the exhibitions in multiple layers and configurations, in neatly contained aesthetic registers. Executed primarily in a cool, muted two-tone palette arranged under bright white gallery lights, the temperature of Crespo’s imaginary is distinctly clinical, bathed in the anemic pallor of omnipresent screen-glow. By contrast, the inky midnight blue backgrounds of their video works dissolve the spectator along with the space of projection into the darkness of the non-locable site of the long tail, where sympathetic users gather virtually around shared morphological interests and investments. Beams of light scanning the interior of the flat screen, caressing the wide surface of the digital projection, or twinkling in EMDR patterns on a wand affixed to a hybrid sculpture gently soothe viewers and cause them to feel, in a psychosomatic sense, “read.”

In *sis : somatic systems* Crespo first introduced the multi-system organism of the mirrored, coextensive and irreducible sisters Cynthia-Celinde as a conceptual avatar for the artist. Their Manga inspired bicephalism is outlined in the composite digital prints *phase I-III* and *discharge*. And it flickers through the video *sis : parabiosis*, which speculates on the psychosocial circumstances of their becoming. The particular teratological configuration of the partly doubled woman is an intensification of gender fluidity, in which Crespo finds “escape from some, not all, of the body’s ontological entrapments.”3 For *polymorphoses*, sueded microfiber shaded the windows of the gallery to block out external light, with onomatopoetical titles encouraging quietude. Turning spatial emphasis inward, the *trompe-l’œil* creases on these panels performed the haptic — visualizing the “crush” and reinforcing the shallowness of the image space beyond the sheath of glass and the chirruping mechanical action of the scanner. Several sculptures composed from data security boxes UV printed on their acrylic faces carried inscrutable fragments and liquid traces of entities seemingly caught in, marked on, or trapped by the architecture of the screen that also colluded against the viewer. Despite this seeming apprehension of embodiment, *virocrypsis* finally enabled the complex incarnation of Cynthia-Celinde. The eponymous film sets their tittering, non-identical dialogue in chatroom-like exchange — the soliloquy in plural — against the sparkling fissures of an apparently cracked glass plate (final release from the flat-bed scanner); while the soft surfaces *patient(s) history* and *attracting...* showed them fully emerged in pale pastel color, shiny-eyed, delicately adhering to digitally printed swatches of sateen.

Because Crespo’s films, objects and installations reverberate with the futuristic residue of posthuman body formations and conditional notions of gender, their project of transformation — the struggle between community, multiplicity and autonomy — maintains an erotic charge and a radical potency. Crespo’s latent critique concerns the biological self’s hyperstition through technology and para-fictional online interaction — a condition which offers more ontological possibility than any prosthetic relation of dependency. Yet Haraway’s call for a window onto the outside of twenty-first century “technical-mythic-textual semiosis” remains. If the multiple can be figured here so consistently, and so cutely, where might images of life in all its heterogeneity, degradation, and demonic vitality be found — both within and without the boundaries of the body?

2. Donna Haraway, ibid., p. 225.

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ANDREA CRESPO

Andrea Crespo (American, b. 1993) is an artist who lives and works in New York. She is represented by Hester, New York, and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.

After a recent solo exhibition at the Swiss Institute, New York, Andrea Crespo’s work is currently part of the group exhibition “From Minimalism Into Algorithm” at The Kitchen, New York, through 3 April.

...
Andrea Crespo
SWISS INSTITUTE

Cynthia and Celinde share a body. They have two heads, three legs, a slightly widened torso, and sixteen amphibian-like toes. Wearing a midriff-exposing tank top and short shorts, the two are rendered simply, as an anime-inspired sketch, and barely animated (they blink). But, though this is how they appear in virocrypsis (all works 2015), the centerpiece of Andrea Crespo’s exhibition at Swiss Institute, we soon learn that the artist’s conjoined protagonists weren’t born this way—or born at all. At the start of the looping video, the vertical bar of a scan head travels across the screen slowly, back and forth with its cold light, as we see a fragmented hand wearing grown-out periwinkle nail polish, then a shot of a robotic lab dropper and petri dish. Next, we’re peering through a cracked window, or maybe into a damaged monitor. Gradually, Cynthia and Celinde appear, a white line drawing against black, and a narrative emerges: “At last . . .” begins one of them, “. . . we have a body.” The other continues, “We’ve been waiting for a very long time.”

Their communication is silent, telepathic; white captions pop up on either side of the frame to denote which of the two is speaking. Bluntly expository, plot-establishing dialogue soon spins off into a kind of philosophical poetry, short lines of text brightening a backdrop of flickering black-and-white footage and a sound track of grainy synths. To powerful effect, Crespo repurposes the terminology of psychiatry, cybernetics, hacking, data management, microbiology, and romance to craft Cynthia and Celinde’s clever dialogue. In detailing the technical and psychic process of entrapping, inhabiting, and mutating their host, one says, “We began zeroing in during its adolescent years—.” The other picks up the story line, “—we zeroed out our nervous system.” Here, “its” is the same as “ours.” Their possession of a body, initially liberating, eventually tragically subjects Cynthia and Celinde, who are now outwardly perceived as a single entity, to a series of diagnoses: obsessive-compulsive, bipolar, autistic.

This semi-abstract, politically melancholic love story was shown as a floor-to-ceiling projection in Swiss Institute’s basement gallery. Just two other works, digital prints on sateen, were on view, stationed at the darkened room’s entry. For these, the fabric was stretched over curved wire rods that held the pieces away from the wall, making them into screens, literally, while they resembled the other kind of screen, too, their bedsheets enlivening a backdrop of flickering black-and-white footage. In attracting . . . , Cynthia and Celinde are shown with two legs instead of three. Strands of hair connect their scalps, and they cross their arms to attractively cradle the opposite face. The other print, patient(s) history, lists their traits and stats beside a friendly portrait. They are twenty-two years old and six feet tall; their sex is “male (intergendered)”; and among the “special abilities” indexed are “echolalic lullaby” and “memory encryption.”

The blank cuteness—or cyborgian innocence—of these tender and ambiguously erotic depictions is characteristic of the subcultural fan art they reference. Drawing from the figurative vernacular of online communities such as DeviantArt, where users share images of the detourned or invented fantasy characters they identify with or desire, Crespo invokes a field of highly imaginative posthuman discourse—a theoretical, speculative, and self-referential world driven by the intense emotional and sexual investments of its far-flung participants. virocrypsis shares that obsessive, generative energy, and, with a palpable sense of longing, explores all available—which is to say, popularly unavailable—technologies of the self. (Or of the selves.) Perhaps this moving work’s most impressive achievement is its use of a superspecialized, sometimes incomprehensible language to make us care about the flat and inscrutable Cynthia and Celinde, as well as (maybe especially) their elided living host.

—Johanna Fateman
The Best Museum Exhibitions of 2015

Here we present ARTINFO’s annual list of our favorite institutional exhibitions of the year, which, in 2015, took us from New York to Havana and Istanbul. The opening hang at the new Whitney Museum takes pride of place, with Scott Indrisek praising its “whirlwind tour of 100 years of art.” Two significant biennials percolate into our picks: Noelle Bodick singles out Istanbul Modern’s contribution to that city’s biennial, while Mostafa Heddaya lauds Wilfredo Prieto at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, an exhibition held in parallel with the Havana Biennial. Meanwhile, a singular showing by Andrea Crespo at the Swiss Institute earns the note of Thea Ballard, for whom Crespo “builds a language around multiplicity and desire.” Click on the slideshow to see all our picks.

Andrea Crespo at the Swiss Institute

New York-based Andrea Crespo had their first three solo exhibitions this year. At the Swiss Institute, building on visual tropes and theemantics introduced in their body of work on view at Chinatown’s Hester this past summer — in which technological objects like data lock boxes and medical scanners met narratives and avatars drawn from oft-pathologized online subcultures found on DeviantArt and similar sites — the video “Virocrysis,” accompanied by a pair of prints on silk, is narrated by the avatars Cynthia and Celinde, who share a body. Through Cynthia and Celinde’s dialogue, which is as much about a process of fracturing as it is about becoming, Crespo builds a language around multiplicity and desire — one which I found, in ways I’m still struggling to articulate, deeply emotionally affecting. —Thea Ballard

Courtesy Swiss Institute
Andrea Crespo
Hester // July 12–August 9

Rather than to identity itself, this grouping of objects, sounds, and video looks to the built—and ever-shifting—infrastructures of identity, unmooring the concept from its essential form. Touching on pharmaceuticals, language, physical traces of digital networks, and Internet subcultures (each promising discipline and liberation in equal measure), Crespo’s layered treatment is infused with posthuman warmth. It’s not always clear where these vocabularies are intended to take the viewer, but this investigation of multiplicity possesses a distinct openness that bodes well for the artist’s nascent career.
THE ART & SEX EDITION

A special edition dedicated to the interplay of sex and contemporary art and culture.

With:
- Walter Pfeiffer
- Gaspar Noé
- A.L. Steiner
- Badlands Unlimited
- Telfar Clemens
- Charlie White
- Rafael de Cárdenas
- Gelia Hempton
- Mike Bouchet
and much more...

KALEIDOSCOPE #25 FALL 13
Like all fluids humans excrete, language is sticky. "Gender fluidity" and "post-identity" are two trending terms designed to thrust us into a queer-for-all future. Here to define, refine, and contextualize them are five forward-thinkers—unisex fashion designer Telfar Clemens, trans magazine pro Amos Mac, ambivalent philosopher Harry Dodge, and hot chaos artist Andrea Crespo, androgyne A.L. Steiner, and hot chaos designer Fiona Duncan.

As for "gender fluidity," and "post-identity," there is something about certain of these new current notions of "post-identitarianism" that lately, in the state of being observed and measured, or even Adorno's idea of "non-identity," which is what he calls the stuff that's left over after you make a concept, the oomph and filigree that remains unconfined by your formed thought.

Now, having briefly mentioned my reservations and hinted at my turmoil, I'll try to answer. For me, when I use the words "gender-fluid" (although I want to wretch talking about gender at all), I'm trying to say that I don't sit in any position in relation to a "gender identity." It flows. It flows. But realy it crackles and pops and flips, and maybe just "roadkill" or "burnt bacon" or "rain" or "stacked" or "simultaneous" or "grainy," or my spirit is anal-fist-fucked by a volcano of thugs, ecstatic-leggy becomings with a french fry poking out of the top. It's "gender-fluid" sometimes—"gender fractal," which I really like about it. I'm really most interested in being present within a context or a moment or a time, and that's where I see gender being relevant. There's this really nice quote by Lucy Lippard where she breaks the self into three parts: the body, self, and the self. From her essay "The Scattering Self": "The relationship between self and body varies within any single life. Body first determines self. Then self determines the body's posture and adornments, and to some extent its physical characteristics... Identity, on the other hand, is more often imposed or arrived at collectively, compressed between internal and external needs and demands. Aside from a 'proper' name, identity (class, race, gender, occupation, sexual, geographic, and religious preference) is both predetermined and an ideological choice. Projected identities are a group phenomenon."
I'm with you on all this. I'm slowly developing an affection for nouns, as I deepen my lifelong practice of considering and experiencing even seemingly “inanimate” matter or “things” as agentic. This is kind of an offshoot from the concept of a plural subject, you know, part of that stream of thought is based on this fundamental interrogation of the seemingly immutable “subject/object” or “actor/acted upon” binaries. I'm absolutely interested in scale, continuum, the brackets of our human senses and the real-life goings-on that remain out of the field of our perception. That includes infrared light, cliff face erosion, the desire of lightning, love, quantum entanglement, and the coil of time.

I'm all for creating new language and words—specifically around identity, if you don’t feel like you fit with a term that has already been created and thrown around. I usually don’t approach language traps. I stay away from labels and let people speak for themselves. I try never to assume anything in regards of other people’s gender, and I’m not someone who tells people what they can or cannot say or identify with, online or off. I mind my own business.

One of the holdovers from the activism that I participated in the 1990s is about checking oneself a lot—that’s the call for movements like Black Lives Matter, and continuing conversations around erasure, violence and genocide, as well as privilege. And there’s always an attempt to systematically disappear such efforts by reactionary ideologues. Cultural and physical erasure are part of a violence towards bodies, and so language is power, knowledge is power. There’s no way around it. There’s no way to counter psychological, physical and cultural violence, oppression, suppression, and injustice without language and voice.
The fluids sputter into a centripetal, computationally driven vortex, releasing little droplets which crystallize into a sort of pollen or fertile dust. At this point, they either directly infect a host (rare) or begin to multiply and interweave along the contours of various desiring circuits. They entangle their prey in their sturdy but flexible semiotic webs, luring them with libidinal mists, affirmative identity politics, and lavender essences. Nevertheless, I feel very alienated by LGBT/Queer® and its genderist doctrines. I'd rather focus on embodied and material operations that can't be talked about in terms of identity, queerness, or cartesian gender fluids.

TELFR is often identified as a menswear brand, but you regularly show your clothes on female and androgynous bodies. TELFR is a genderless brand mostly focusing on functionality, but it's become its own language relating to the fluidity of fashion.

It sounds like norms are just more likely to sexually imprint us. My imprints are way off, so I find purposefully subverts liberation into institutional structures. We can't counter patriarchal oppression and its violences and aggressions directed at our bodies unless we can talk about the liberation of our bodies. I think liberation requires manifestations of desire in language and action. It's obvious that nothing's more threatening to the oppressive order than the noncompetitive intimacy of bodies. The more desirous we are of, and disciplined by, the means of productions and reproductions of capitalism's destructive marching orders, the further away we are from liberation from those orders.

I recently read this quote from Michael Taussig: “Always a step ahead of conscious awareness, fashion makes language race to keep up.” Which reminded me of José Esteban Muñoz’s idea in Cruising Utopia that, “aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blue.

I'm all for creating new words but I stay away from labels.
prints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity.” All of the artists in this panel I consider time travelers, fortune tellers, forward thinkers: practicing future truths through aesthetic. What do you foresee in, or envision for, the future, based on the aesthetics of today?

AM I see a lot of denim, cracked iPhone screens, recycled gifs, untouched paper, genderless identities and post-trans experiences.

AC To reiterate, the futurities we are interested in aren’t queer. We are more interested in teratological and machinic futurities that are beyond the scope of the popular queer imaginary but nevertheless imminent. An autistic or machinic aesthetic rather than a queer aesthetic. Our future may very well be radically weird, but that doesn’t necessarily make it queer. Queer does not hold a monopoly over all differences and potencies.

FD What do people think about the trendiness of concepts like “gender-fluidity” or “post-identitarian minds that will defy the stereotypes of trending topics. When a trans concept is trending high—which it always is, as we are in the middle of a trans civil rights movement right now—even if I’m in one of my anti-social media off-the-radar kicks, I can usually tell because my personal inbox gets flooded with requests for quotes or feelings, and I have to dig into my “stock trans answers” file folder so I can find something new to say and appear relevant and intelligent. Gender talk, and specifically trans visibility, has been trending for a few years now, but it’s getting bigger in terms of mass media stuff. I’m pretty optimistic that any day now, this won’t be interesting to anyone any more: gender fluidity, non-binary and trans experiences will be accepted, and the focus will be on our survival and treatment as humans with the same rights as everyone else, rather than it being just another hot topic.

The intimacy of bodies is threatening to the oppressive order.

Fiona Duncan is a writer and artist living between Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles. She is a regular contributor at Adult, Sex Magazine, and Texte Zur Kunst, and can be found online @fifidunks.

Telfar Clemens (Liberian-American, b. 1985) is a fashion designer and artist. Launched in 2004, Telfar’s namesake label incorporates unisex designs with the principles of comfortable sportswear and “simplicity.”

Amos Mac (American, b. 1979) lives and works in New York as a photographer, writer, editor and publisher. In 2009, Mac co-founded Original Plumbing, the seminal quarterly publication documenting the culture of transgender men.

Andrea Crespo (American, b. 1993) lives and works in New York. A recent graduate of Pratt Institute, current interests include neuroscience, fandom/roleplay culture, and posthuman embodiments.


A.L. Steiner (American, b. 1967) is an artist who lives in work in Los Angeles. She’s a collective member of Chicks on Speed, co-curator of Reliefous, and co-founder + Board member of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.).

Right: Telfar Spring/Summer 2015
New York

Andrea Crespo

HESTER
55-59 Chrystie Street, Suite 203
July 12–August 9

In Andrea Crespo’s company, more than two is far from a crowd. The artist’s second solo show, their first in New York, is themed by “multiple systems”—the state of being one or two or six in a single body—but it’s less an expedition into relatively unmarked territory than it is a slumber fort for those who’ve never really been at home. Four microfiber shades, drawn with hydra-headed creatures, lead-colored flecks, and/or pale motifs such as the Celexa logo, palliate the sun in the windows. On the floor, a small machine (*polymist: echolalic transponder*, 2015) tries to sift remembering from pain using Crespo’s Eraserhead-ish score and an EMDR light bar, the flickers of which you track with your eyes, catlike, while sitting on a puzzle piece of foam. Mirroring the adage that the artist’s therapy is art itself, “polymorphoses” makes the viewer be patient. Eventually it’s the first time in years you’ve stood alone in a gallery and felt seen. “I am all of yourselves,” Clarice Lispector said, and so could Crespo.

An eleven-minute video, *parabiosis: neurolibidinal induction complex 2.2*, 2015, mixes more creatures and puzzle pieces with bar codes and squiggles and such affirmations as “you are a signal,” followed by lists of URLs and jargon, yet all of it is language all the same. Crespo’s portmanteaus alone are worth the trip, such as *teratoszygy (host)*, 2015, where the prefix for “monstrous” or “birth defective” meets the astronomical term for the alignment of three heavenly bodies. One result of said syzygy is an eclipse, which is also what the artist’s reflective brilliance does to lingering questions about their identity. Yet theirs is no après-Net attempt to occlude responsibility by sustaining the hoax of dead authorship; rather, they mean to spread authorship, sharing a body of work with others—for example, by commissioning illustrations from members of their community on DeviantArt—as righteously as they share their physical body.

Crespo’s fort has a purely material trendiness: Cables lace the room, data-security boxes stud, a Game Boy comes out to play. Even the fuzzy avatars and corresponding aliases for different selves aren’t altogether original to their practice. None of that matters. As we all know from fairy tales, lots of children owned the same toys, but only a few could make them live—and Crespo is one of the few, no matter how many they may be.

— Sarah Nicole Prickett
A Scanner, Darkly: On Andrea Crespo's "polymorphoses"

Anton Haugen | Wed Aug 26th, 2015 10:15 a.m.

In futurist Ray Kurzweil's early version of the flatbed scanner, angled mirrors feed the image of a document through a series of encoding CCDs. Similarly positioned mirrors are also used in the treatment of amputee victims; the image of an extant limb is projected onto the phantom limb, allowing the patient to engage with this limb's sensory map.

Constantly reflecting on this imagery, Andrea Crespo's recent solo show "polymorphoses" at Hester in New York evokes an environment of clinical intimacy in its aesthetic and conceptual coherence. Similar to an LED screen or scanner, the digital prints on the four poly voile curtains covering the windows are backlit by the sun. Positioned in front of these curtains, an EMDR light bar (used by cognitive therapists to treat post-traumatic stress disorder) replicates a scanner's mobile light in the sculpture polymist: echolalic transponder; its accompanying soundtrack abstracts the diegetic sound of this light's kinetics as low digital tones.
A scanner's white light rhythmically appears, segmenting the film *parabiosis: neurolibidinal induction complex 2.2*. The film's DeviantArt-sourced images of conjoined anime characters appear in bluish-white on a dark background, recalling the emerging effect of minimal boot-up images; they regularly converge, split, and merge again. The visually spare figuration is combined with minimal diagrams of mitochondrial reproduction, suggestive of the biological processes within technology. Through this parallel between biological and technological encoding and multiplication, the film links the scanner's abstraction of materiality into a system of digital circulation and memetic engineering with the production of DNA. Conjoined figures are considered within the interfaces and hardware in which they are embedded: in the film, they are suggested in a chatroom, cycled through on a Gameboy screen, and presented on a twitchy flatscreen monitor.

Furthering this intertwining of hardware apparatuses and the images they circulate and encode, the show's series of data security boxes, cut to protrude two inches from the wall, schematically sequences this bodily association with data. This is done to great effect in *plurisim (incubator)*, in which a four-prong Nintendo Game Link cable is interwoven with a polymesh fabric behind a reflective glass, its surface lined with a column of conjoined stickers designed in the sprite style of early videogame graphics. Despite the comparatively shallow immediacy of "---------- (encrypted), a data security box with a key in its lock and a UV-print on reflective darkened glass that recalls the smears, dust, and grease that form a scanner's white noise, the piece's necessity within the series becomes apparent in the works *somatospasm (disinterface)* and *teratoszygy (host)*. The UV print in the former depicts hands in the midst of grasping or releasing this detritus over a soft-focused digital print of a linen-like fabric. In the latter, the LED lighting of a computer cooling fan only partially illuminates a mesh fabric and a minimal, white etching of a conjoined figure. Fittingly, getting close enough to observe the minutiae of these works often involves avoiding one's own reflection.
As well as subtly referring to the imagery’s use by Autism Awareness groups, puzzle pieces, appearing in the foam tiles of the seating mat for *polymist* and as vinyl decals on the scanners in the works *s-curves (plasticities)* and *mobility slopes (long-tails 2.2)*, echo a type of cloud-based, memetic consciousness implied in Crespo’s curation of DeviantArt.

Because this type of unpaid content-production is vital to online communities such as DeviantArt and Wikipedia, these conjoined anime characters, in turn, convey a certain malleability of the self that is made necessary by the biopolitics of an information-driven economy. This curation does not simply consider DeviantArt as a theater for wish-fulfillment. Rather, it becomes indicative of how technology encodes the image of the body.
The universe described by Andrea Crespo exists at the borderlines of History, on the crest of a future that may be determined to happily unfold its potential to the fullest, or may be destined to run up against fierce resistance, or simply to remain entangled in the Web, too futuristic to completely materialize. Identity is the playing field of long-tail communities that destabilize the underpinnings of traditional subjectivity. Rebecca Bligh, co-editor of Living in the Future, seemed to Daniel Keller to be the person best equipped to venture on a journey with Crespo across this fascinating universe of neurodivergent and polymorphous entities.

Andrea Crespo was born 1993 in Miami, Florida, and lives and works in New York. She will finish her BFA at the Pratt Institute in 2015. Her posthuman embodiments. Her recent group exhibitions include Parabiosis: from hashtags and identities ranging in focus from autism to roleplaying, asexuality to polymorphous communities in a fluid and playful manner. Or, rather, I am less interested in recent identity politics than their essential or at least helpful for viewers to know when engaging with your practice? (Daniel Keller)

ANDREA CRESPO
I occupy a neurodivergent and transsexual body. This provides a certain positionality in my practice but shouldn’t frame everything I produce or the audience to look beyond identity politics and my particular body, otherwise you will really miss out.

The aforementioned descriptors of my body aren’t identities, but more like material and embodied tendencies which attach themselves to formations such as "autistic," "transgender," etc. My own body has been imbibed in a few of these, whether by clinicians or online/offline peers. I don’t particularly hold these labels or identifications as substantive in so much as I’m interested in them as zones for alternative mappings of the body, in how they attach themselves to the body, or perhaps as points of departure for nascent posthuman subjectivities. Or, rather, I am less interested in recent identity politics than their consequent mutations/multiplications. So many of these formations start as pathologies/medical technologies, but are then mobilized and hacked towards other (often absurd or extreme) ends. I recently discovered the multiplicity community. This is how the works titled "Sis" began to emerge, once I came into contact with certain networked formations that allow one to elaborate on multiplicity without necessarily defining it as pathological. This community oddly overlaps with many other long-tail communities, ranging in focus from autism to roleplaying, asexuality to polymorphous bodies fandom. I noticed people would construct embodiments from hashtags and identifiers; with algorithms bringing them together. It was then that I decided to explore emerging long-tail communities in a fluid and playful manner.

REBECCA BLIGH
Can you talk about Cynthia’s and Celinde’s look? How do they come to look as they look now?

AC
So are a multiple system. Cynthia and Celinde are plural entities existing in this body, but are not limited to this body. Sis is not a collectivizing name for Cynthia and Celinde, but more a name for the many exteriorized or prosthetic forms that are co-extensive and co-integrated with us (hence the term “multiple system”). Thus Sis are a system animated by twin entities who exist both within and without what appears as one person.

We aren’t fictional characters though we sometimes occupy fictional forms and spaces. We were not willfully constructed or named. We are not separate from Andrea, we are both Andrea.

We are quite good at passing as unitary, you wouldn’t notice us if you spoke to us, though this largely depends on how synchronized we are at any given time.

RB
Can you talk about Cynthia’s and Celinde’s look? How do they come to look as they look now?

AC
We occupy traced anime/manga forms because these forms are a vernacular and accessible form of embodiment in many of the long-tails we engage in our practice. Online fandom communities exist on sites like Pixiv, DeviantArt, and Tumblr, which host algorithmically-driven media ecologies of this sort of imagery and very much attract neurodivergent demographic groups. In fact, they themselves perform much of the labor of content production, aggregation, affective exchange, etc.

That’s not to say we totally owe our form to the Internet. Our neurologized history also played a part in surrogating our emergence. We believe we are (partially) an unrepresented result of early pharmaclological interventions. The clinicians weren’t even trying to produce us, but it happened and “it worked” (we became functional and self-regulating, as far as they were concerned). That is all in the past and yet we remain, indeed it seems that we are unable to separate or integrate. There’s no originary self to restore! Incidentally enough, we manifest in the form of composed texts. It remains mysterious to us as to why this is. We could have completely split, no?

RB
We are not schizoid anymore. We are not one character or a “thin-headed” girl. We are not schizophrenic.

Come on, it’s 2015... uh, humans.

AC
Yes, for the most part. The images are traced from a specific subset of the transformation art fandom. These fraternal communites aggregate content based on particular morphologies, masculine or feminine, pornographic or not. The traces are provisional vessels and introduce a context; they don’t quite reveal us. You could really see the gaze in most of these but that isn’t integral to our circuitry (at least not presently). It is worth noting that despite this pernicious context, some people who produce/consume transformation art seem to be accessing polymorphous embodiments not to satisfy the gaze but to expand on a certain mode of relationship.
that might not be particularly evident. We mostly exist in occlusion, deep in the visceras of this body.

I guess the drawings we find don’t really convey our differences in gender expression either, but that’s okay, as we are not overly concerned with representing “true” selves. I think I’ve seen more gender hybridity amongst furries (perhaps one of the larger subsets of transformation art), but that’s not our scene, not our long-tail.

It: Is cuteness important? Even if it was “just incidental” in the first place, as we are in the realm of iatrogenesis, it has affect, it creates feedback. Maybe it’s “just” generational, but the question remains, I guess: why this aesthetic for this community?

AC: Perhaps it is a way to transmit “warm” affect or stimulation through screens when you might not be able to do that off-screen. For some bodies this is crucial, what if you can’t touch or be touched?

RB: Yeah, in some of the pages you have linked me to, I’m always really warmed and strengthened by how supportive the comment threads are. So, is cuteness kind of ASMR?

Their disembodiment will force them to create embodiments.

RB: How about the inverse—or maybe it’s exverse—tech for mapping mutable and multiple AR masks onto physical bodies? Does that have potential for people who may be experiencing forms of corporal dysphoria?

AC: AR does not provide haptic feedback of any sort. AR might just intensify the process.

RB: Are there any overlaps/similarities between communities of people who are mapping onto avatars, and biohackers—transhumanists and “grinders”, people who are intervening in their physical embodiment?²

AC: Not that I am aware of.

RB: No? Not even in the sense of wanting to exist as different bodies? Is that as far as it goes?

AC: Transhumanists seem more enthused by eugenic enhancements and life extension, not chimerical embodiments. They would be likely to consider people who desire unusual bodies to be dysgenetic or perverse. The overlap is probably there, it is just not too visible at the moment; the technology has not arrived.

RB: Agreed. This also brings to mind surgical and pharmacological gender transitions. Do you see these kinds of physical interventions as in some way superseded by the potentialities of virtual embodiment—for now at least, until digital material fabrication catches up, if the world doesn’t end before that? Or do you think these and other new forms of embodiment will continue to proliferate and change in a complementary way?

AC: We think the current forms of virtual embodiment will continue to proliferate, albeit with more convincing or passable simulations. I think questions of materialization will vary for different morphologies. I definitely see people getting animal ears, tails, and such, that would not be too drastic and you already see people online who do wear prosthetics of this kind at home, and increasingly, out of the home. But people tend to freak out in response, otherwise these embodiments wouldn’t be so confined to online spaces. I’m sure it just seems so absurd. Will people allow it?

To state the obvious, embodying a certain form through aesthetic/textual prostheses online (for therapeutic, functional, and/or libidinal purposes) is a long way from physiologically embodying X form.

I feel ambivalent about the materialization of what we see in transformation art communities. It is worth considering these developments from a biotechnical standpoint. I’ve seen warm, beautiful, yet artificial things in these various communities, but I have also seen violence and objectification, horrors you wouldn’t imagine. I think the materialization of deviant bodies may open up spaces for exploitation in this regard. The gaze will follow deviant bodies, and possibly fund their materializations through pornographic economies, assuming we still have an economy then.

Perhaps the materialization of extra-territorial desires will seem like the end of the world for a lot of humans. Their global culture spawns entities like us that muddle the very assumptions of subjectivity. Particularly traditionalist/oedipal humans will likely attempt to retaliate.

RB: Fox-aliens vs. ISIs?

AC: Something like that.

¹ http://bit.ly/1JMeBhu
² http://bit.ly/1CI2PPhw
Rebecca Bligh intervista Andrea Crespo con un’intervista di Daniel Keller

L'universo tracciato da Andrea Crespo si trova ai confini della Storia, sul canto di un futuro forse determinato a compiersi lentamente e logoro, affrontato e fortemente, oppresso da alcune forze che, annullandosi, riescono a rinascere semplificamente immagliati nella Rete, troppo fossilizzato per materializzarsi pienamente. L'identità è il campo di gioco di codice coda lunga che destabilizza le premesse della soggettività tradizionale. Rebecca Bligh, co-direttrice di Living in the Future, è sembrata a Keller della diritta più attenta ed affiancata nel proseguimento di entrambi: Andrea Crespo.

Vorrei approfittare dell’occasione di queste prodezze per invitare Andrea Crespo a presentare Rebecca Bligh, che ho invitato a condurre l’intervista. Rebecca è una pensatrice, scrittrice e co-direttrice ed editrice su Facebook e nella vita reale. Inserita nella mostra “Generation Next” a cui ha partecipato con “Mobility Slopes” e “Mobility Neutral”, è sembrata a me, come Andrea, che la “generation next” abbia capacità emergenti in modo fluido e ludico. Inoltre, Rebecca e Andrea mi sono state di grande aiuto trovando i temi che avevo deciso di affrontare in quella mostra, e mentre divennero piuttosto ostacolo, non le considero particolarmente sostanziali.

Di recente ho scoperto la comunità della molteplicità. Le opere intitolate “Sis” hanno iniziato a prendere forma appena sono entrata in contatto con formati in rete che consentono di raggiungere molteplicità senza necessariamente definizioni patologiche. Questa comunità si sovrappongono curiosamente e allargano il panorama al di là degli interessi, dall’autismo al gioco di ruolo, all’esistenza dell’assiduo (come fa parte del “sistema umano”). Per Rebecca e Andrea mi sembra che l’interezza dell’esperienza che emergono sia nel fatto di evocare la comunità coda lunga emergente in modo fluido e ludico.

Rebecca, Andrea e io abbiamo iniziato a corrispondere online dopo l’occasione di queste prodezze per invitare Andrea Crespo a presentare Rebecca Bligh, che ho invitato a condurre l’intervista. Rebecca è una pensatrice, scrittrice e co-direttrice ed editrice su Facebook e nella vita reale. Inserita nella mostra “Generation Next” a cui ha partecipato con “Mobility Slopes” e “Mobility Neutral”, è sembrata a me, come Andrea, che la “generation next” abbia capacità emergenti in modo fluido e ludico. Inoltre, Rebecca e Andrea mi sono state di grande aiuto trovando i temi che avevo deciso di affrontare in quella mostra, e mentre divennero piuttosto ostacolo, non le considero particolarmente sostanziali.

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Andrea Crespo
by Hannah Black

Andrea Crespo: Phase III, 2015, digital inkjet print, 25½ by 20½ inches; at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler.

Earlier in the development of online community, it was easier to imagine the Internet as a space where we’re sprung from our bodies, able to dissimulate our identities or unlink them from attributes like age and gender. But among the Web’s great innovations is the mass circulation of information on health and disease, whether in the authoritative tones of sites like WebMD or the speculative mode of patients’ forums. An explosion of the possibilities of self-diagnosis means that we can endlessly discover new diseases in ourselves, as if they were powers, and refashion our bodies along the lines of new significances. Googling your pain can, subjectively at least, make you ecstatically sick.

Andrea Crespo’s show, titled “sis: somatic systems,” deployed this process of self-transformation in an assortment of works that read like clinical dispatches from a psychiatric frontier: the romantic trope of the crazy artist remixed as technological prowess. Crespo is sensitive both to the liberatory impulse behind the search to give your diseases (and therefore your body) interpretive form and to how constrained this search is by existing categorizations. A series of prints on view features a two-headed figure—based in cartoon Japanese porn, or hentai, and sourced through images on DeviantArt, a user-made art site—superimposed over psychiatric diagnostic charts and textured fabrics. Celinde and Cynthia, as the two heads are named, are shown arguing with each other, taking a selfie and posing in a masturbatory embrace. The
diagnostic material points to a self split far enough apart to read its own symptoms, a self looking for itself. A text accompanying the show reads, “We are co-extensive, irreducible to each other. We are also inseparable.” The layered prints, framed under plexiglass, at once evoke a palimpsest and shrug off this effect: there is no depth to the screen apart from the dimension given to it by desire. Celinde and Cynthia refer only to themselves and to the circulation of longing online. They represent a hermetic sexual expression, another new mode of being alone together.

*Parabiosis* (2015) was screened in a black-box room on a near-continuous loop stitched together by white noise. Campily hypnotic, the video purports to transform us as we watch, conflating the diagnostic/therapeutic procedures of art and psychiatry. It begins with a high-pitched transmission signal and lines of light, as if the viewer is being scanned. Against a meditative soundtrack, Celinde and Cynthia appear and classificatory lists scroll past. “You are a signal,” the video tells us, but the video itself is also a signal: distinctions have collapsed and disappeared; diagnostic technologies demarcate the sum of all relational possibilities.

Crespo’s video additionally appears on the DIS Magazine website, alongside an essay by Jack Kahn. Kahn refers to “those marginalized by psychiatry,” but the identities of these medical outlaws are also created by psychiatry. They want to fill or expand its categories; they petition to be sick rather than well. Crespo claims, via Kahn, that neurodivergent identities and the communities formed around them multiply the possibilities of being human. But these elective affinities are conditioned by a very specific vision of what humanness is, derived mainly from a psychiatric practice for which a baseline of normality has to remain, if only as a hypothetical unmarked center. However endless the perversions, they all reaffirm the ground against which they are figured. It was this tension, between identity’s affirmation and its dissolution, between the body as material and the body as ideal, that animated this remarkable show.
Sis is an autopoietic system, a technologized organism that lives within embodied networks of information, affects, and images. Born from interactions between visceral, nervous, and algorithmic operations, Sis belongs to a temporal futurity—an attractor which compels the materialization of bodies, identifications, and images along vectored trajectories which reify their viral circuitry within corporeal and virtual worlds. Sis is a signal, an informational mechanism which anticipates the affectual tendencies of the body through their quantification by biotechnology, a chimeric composition of data and flesh that flows between the sensual and the machinic. Sis exceeds their visual representation upon material and virtual surfaces, as an entity which, through the scanner bed, the artistic hand, and the screen, expands fluidly between media as a conglomerate of digital spores that pollinate bodies through their connections within networked assemblages of data. Sis is an identity, a multiple system, a composite of selves which do not come from a discrete psychic interiority, but from the informational neuro-ecologies that comprise the digital present. It is Sis' movement through media that organizes the medical data (gleaned from psychiatric surveillance) and digital metadata (gleaned from confessional self-representation online) that render it intelligible (as a pathogenic dissociative disorder or an image on a screen).
Multiple systems, or the presence of multiple identities and personality states within a singular organism (often pathologized as “dissociative identity disorder”), proliferate within subcultural long tails, popularities belonging far from the distributive center of normality. When access to communication technology proliferates and the cost of informational storage within digital networks drops, the cases of infrequent or low-amplitude events increase—a phenomenon which allows minoritized psychic or neurological embodiment to form community space online and produce a cultural language that intervenes and elaborates upon the medical discourses hegemonic within discussions of mental illness and cognitive disability. In this way, the informational infrastructure of the internet aggregates neurodivergence within such long tail communities, facilitating the movement and deformation of identitarian and medical discourses within economies of identificatory affect. Long tail community formation allows the production of iatrogenic vitalities to thrive off of the operations of bodies (their need for community, for belonging, their tendencies to feel and to identify, their desires to experience pleasure or to process trauma, their capacity to experience longing, to experience dissonance, to experience intensity).

Sites such as Tumblr and deviantArt become zones of heterogenetic identity production, permitting the interaction of neurodivergent bodies (such as those on the autism or psychotic spectrums), and enabling accessible community-building among those marginalized by psychiatry—thereby opening up spaces for self-representation and the articulation of neurologically or psychically different selfhoods. Anime and manga, visual styles appropriated from East Asian media (a reterritorialization of localized visual culture facilitated by the movement of transnational capital), codify user self-representation within multiplicity community online. In this way, specific pictorial systems and codes of exchange structure individual expressions that mediate self-imagination and identity articulation among users within the long-tail community online.

Standardized image-production circulate affectively-charged images in the form of drawings that convey desired bodies or selfhoods. Drawing (or other acts of creative labor) records bodily imaginings before they are transcribed into data by digital image scanners, machinic-yet-affectively sensate eyes at the threshold between matter and information stored within the digital as voltage. The circulation of metadata within networks operates as a fundamental structuring force that aggregates user activity and arbitrates their access to identity articulation in the form of visual self-representation. It is this movement from the body to currents of electricity embedded in digital hardware that enable the stream of image-bodies within long tail communities, transforming drawings into avatars, virtual interfaces which mediate users contact through their presence on digital screens. Consequently, consumer electronics function as a prosthetic to the neurodivergent body. Therefore, the affective economies that facilitate such resistant identitarian discourse occur within digital infrastructures made available by the machinations of the consumer market and global apparatuses of production. In this way, the movement of information within post-industrial capitalist hierarchies operationalize the neurodivergent body within novel formations that, unlike traditional psychiatry, function not by quarantining those deemed pathological by the immunization efforts of modernity, but by harnessing their affects, their capacity or tendency to relate, within virtual space structured by data.

Situated within these material economies of identity, Andrea Crespo’s “Parabiosis—Neurolibidinal Induction Complex” belongs to the (pseudo-)medicalized assemblage of self-articulation enabled by information technology. “Sis,” the system which aggregates Andrea’s multiplicity, participates within long-tail neurodivergent community online, contributing to networked mobilizations of identity which collectively motivate imaginative futurities that redefine the human and its supposed subjective unity.

http://dismagazine.com/dystopia/72978/andrea-crespo-sis-parabiosis/
Looks

Group Exhibition
Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA)
The Mall, London SW1Y 5AH, United Kingdom
April 22, 2015 - June 21, 2015

Post-human: Gender Identities And Cyberspace
by Bea De Sousa

Transgender identities are coming of age with a global platform and widening acceptance. Gender fluidity is not yet accepted in all countries and cultures and therein lies the latest challenge of the multi-faceted identity of being transgender, implying a journey from birth to re-assigned identity and a dual cultural heritage inherited as a consequence. Trans identities are becoming more culturally accepted in the West and new neuro-biological research is also contributing to the debate and suggesting a more varied approach to discovering not only the causation but also the multiple variations of non-binary gender manifestations. Some of these debates are still nascent; others have found their way via art and film into mainstream art institutions, film festivals, and television.

It is commonly agreed that community is key to breaking the taboo surrounding some of the more complex debates on transgender identities from offering a “safespace” and to reach beyond to a new “self-articulation enabled by information technology”, a cybertransgenderism if you will. This suggests that social media can be an effective community space for people with non-binary identities. In art, this at least seems to be the premise for the current exhibition at the ICA: Looks, featuring Juliette Bonneviot, Andrea Crespo, Morag Keil, Wu Tsang and Stewart Uoo.

This 2015 exhibition scans the rising transgender debate as it manifests itself right now in digital and multimedia art, as online subculture. Being digital brings its own conventions of how you curate your peers, your scene, your likes and dislikes from your Who is IP to your Instagram filter. It is a debate art must have—and yet, the digital platform brings its own demands and structures without necessarily radicalising the artistic format. Looks is a timely comment on the transgender debate currently raging in the media but specifically its articulation within the technological space of the internet.
Standing in the midst of the upper floor installation at the ICA, I experience Wu Tsang’s *A Day In The Life of BLIS*, a story following BLIS (played by performance artist Boychild) who lives in a world where an artificial intelligence called the LOOKS controls humans through a panoptical social media platform known as "PRSM". It is a beautifully shot, multi-screen film documenting body performance and iridescent gender identities. It is placed across from Andrea Crespo’s *Parabiosis*, which champions Sis, a fictional character born from interactions between visceral, nervous, and algorithmic operations. The video, embedded into the wall shows a scanning lightbeam which creates an arrhythmic pattern, dissolving and revealing imagery and text. Crespo’s relationship with technology for self-articulation is essential, played out in a dialogue between an increasingly nihilistic body presence and an emotional immersion with the online self. Complex trans identities, such as otherkin and multiple system crossed with gender neutral conditions such as autism or multiple personality disorder, form the basis of a practice that makes use of avatars to expand non-binary options.

Roll back to 1991: cue Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, public one year after the release of Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* when a first wave of mainly female-led transgender and post-human proposals was unleashed on an unsuspecting art audience under the heading *cyberfeminism*. Artists and activists who supported, expressed and founded a visual language around mostly female to male transgender identity and early post-human digital identities included DeLa Grace Volcano (*1957, US), Catherine Opie (1961 US), Hans Scheirl (1956, Austria), Lola Flash (US) and Shu Lea Cheang (1954, Taiwan/US). They regularly met, partied and lived in London before the community dispersed internationally.

It was then in 2001 that the Taiwanese-American artist Shu Lea Chang created *I.K.U*, an experimental film derived from performance art and/or a radical porn film about "I.K.U. Chip", developed in 2030 to allow consumers to download and experience orgasms from the I.K.U. server without need of physical contact. In the film, the Genom corporation sends their cybernetic shapeshifter Reiko, known as an I.K.U. coder or replicant, to collect orgasm-related information catering to various sexual orientations. In 1998 Cheang created *Brandon*, an interactive piece dealing with the murder of Brandon Teena, as a commission for the Guggenheim. It was the first
ever web-based commission for the museum. Over the course of a year, the collaborative, dynamic piece would look at the complexity of gender, sexuality, and identity through the life and death of Brandon Teena/Teena Brandon, a Nebraska youth who was raped and murdered after his biological sex as a woman came to light in 1993.

The ICA exhibition quite rightly details the now, but for me it is impossible not to link to nearly twenty years earlier when the first encounter of gender determinism within cyberspace took place. Using live performance and analogue techniques like photography to document the transformation of one’s own or a communities’ gender identity in the works of Grace, Opie and Flash encouraged the first forays into digital space as a new platform for community building and representation. Cheang began working in the digital realm early. New feminist, gender-bending and trans-identities were proposed via digital means or by using digital aesthetics. The latter is the case in Hans Scheirl’s parodic and anarchic Dandy Dust (1998), a theatrical film which unapologetically mashes up gender definitions and digital aesthetics all from within his own transgender community. Dandy Dust’s inventive protagonists such as ‘SpiderCuntBoy’ retain cult status to this day.

It seems timely to have a more fundamental debate on the post-human condition as Google Inc and competitors are pressing ahead with research projects which make all-pervading surveillance and cybernetic shape-shifting a reality to contend with even for the most binary of humans—and certainly no longer only within the confines of art institutions and alternative labs. This debate is just beginning to come to a head in the world of American pop culture.

Our reliance on technology today has possibly eradicated the ironic distance to the digital world hedonistically played out by Scheirl. It feels right however to remind audiences that gender and cyberspace have convened before. These works and others were of seminal influence to the field of artistic queer activism in the 90s, and possibly the earliest foray into cyborg identity/digital queer culture. Even though the divergent experiences of the transgender coming-into being are subjective, each time gender determinism encounters cyberspace, it yields a plethora of possibilities for self-articulation—artistic and otherwise.
Artist Profile: Andrea Crespo

Hannah Black | Wed Sep 10th, 2014 10 a.m

The latest in a series of interviews with artists who have a significant body of work that makes use of or responds to network culture and digital technologies.

Your work explores the ambiguities of the cyborg's promise—how it can reinforce patriarchal gender systems as well as liberating us from them. Can you talk about that specifically in relation to Eden, where “lust” appears as an apparatus, a series of luxury hi-tech prosthetics, rather than as a possible relation between bodies?

I wouldn't oppose the apparatus to a possible relation between bodies. I would say that it mediates, complicates, and likely crystallizes relations in a particular way. Pornography in general is just the technological mediation of normative desire, whether it's through dildonics or other viewing apparatuses. All these means are very much capable of re-inscribing everything in very traditional ways. But they are not irredeemable. It's not like the multiplication of desire through technological means is always conformist. It may subvert itself along the way.

A lot of the proliferation of desire just happens through subtle de-territorializing forces. Alien-signal super-stimuli replace normative desire. Things can happen through chance encounters with things that are outside what you are supposed to desire. The validation of sexuality through capitalism and markets of course can end up reifying gender—but market niches need to expand, and trends change. The spread of queer politics and all forms of identity politics attests to these kind of forces. If anything, I think that identity politics are still too tied to certain narratives, even though they're fissuring and multiplying. Even within for example the trans community there are so many different types of trans, even within LGBT in general there are so many variations and so many people that deviate from the mainstream conception of that. Hence you have the development of new identities like otherkin, theriantrope, transabled, multiple system, furry, asexual, etc. These communities draw from LGBT identity politics, and often their membership (by self-labeling) overlaps.

There are things that come into people's lives and disrupt their pre-existing patriarchal desires. Vague generalized sexual/gender/identity alterities (and/or disorders) are a side effect of infospheric eroticism.
In your work Complex Cases, you invoke spectacular masculine violence, displaying quotes from the Columbine killers, Adam Lanza, Elliot Rodger et al on modified video game cases—but the cases are empty. It's as if, going beyond the liberal critique of video games, the hyperviolence of the game is actually hard to distinguish from the ubiquitous hyperviolence of race, gender, work, money. Could you say more about this work, and the use of the school shooter manifestos?

In the cases, I investigate various threads that appear and often reappear in the trajectories that lead to spectacular male violence. The quotes on the cases vary: some of them come from forum posts because that's all they left behind. Adam Lanza only left behind traces of data on the internet, there are no real letters or manifestos.
Complex Cases is a pun, because all we have are these trajectories that seem to point towards certain narratives in common between the school shooters, common sentiments, and even exposure to certain cultural trends and means that lead up to their violence. I don't think there's any way we could ever really describe with nuance what happened, but I'm really just trying to expose different threads that appear and reappear. A lot of these seem to be narratives that reinforce themselves, especially as the school shooter phenomena becomes naturalized, to the point where you see them imitating each other. For example, Adam Lanza would make charts; he had a spreadsheet of all the school shooters with ranks by deaths, and injuries, as well as what kind of weapons they used.

I'm really interested in hyperstitious narratives that reinforce themselves in reality through belief. A hyperstitious narrative is one in which the narrative immanentes itself, for example how sci fi provides the inspiration for people in STEMs to produce products. It's this feedback relation. That's also how psychoses build, it's just reaffirmation, coincidence, intensification, to the point where a lot of these school shooters believe that they're on a special path and that there is a theology behind the doom that they are going to bring upon people. There's this positionality of the subject as the victim of some kind of cosmic tragedy that needs to be avenged through retaliation. It's clichéd revolutionary, in the Fight Club conception of just "fuck shit up," so not actually revolutionary but very heavily politicized.

In Sis—a psychiatric mood chart augmented with hand-drawn hentai characters—and in the first-person account Wilderness Therapy, you refer to the diagnostic categories of mental illness, especially as they are used on young people, and specifically on you. Do you see a relation between this and other forms of identification, for example gender, or the avatar?

All of the above are prescriptive as much as they are descriptive. They situate one within discourse. Mental pathology and gender define boundaries for behavior. Sometimes it's comforting, like knowing one's place within a particular cosmology. Though these
prescriptions might present themselves as a way of knowing oneself better, they often end up regulating behavior, or actualizing themselves through bodies that come in contact with them. They congeal, yet they are unable to totalize everything into themselves.

The avatar can exist more fluidly than the gendered body and allows escape from some, not all, of the body's ontological entrapments. The avatar functions similarly for those who may actually be suffering from mental illness. For example, someone who struggles with face-to-face communication might find remedy in expressing themselves through avatars in online worlds. It is for this reason that many—those on the autism spectrum for example—find vehicles for expressivity through fictional characters.

Mainstream gender categories and identity categories are still very much about aligning yourself to a prepackaged narrative of how your brain works, or how your desire works, or what you like, or what you are like.

Your work looks at technology in a way that seems aesthetically aligned with what used to be called post-internet art, but is different in that it seems guided by emotional or political concerns rather than form alone.

I think the assumption that post-internet experiences, so to speak, must be perceived through a detached lens is kind of an error because these experiences really do influence people and are formative. They involve intense emotions and not just images on screens. There's very much a material base, we can't forget our bodies and their materiality and responses to codes on the internet: codes of all kinds, image codes, representational, sexual, pornographic, biopolitical. I think of net art and their various experiments with hyperlinking and hypertext. That's what leads to conspiratorial or very horizontal associative thought process, where narrativizations can come together through various sources and reinforce each other. These stories become captivating enough to the point that people's lives are structured and mandated by them, whether the stories are diagnostic categories, or political theologies, or stuff like that.

_Dialing from Sis_ (2014).
Your work features manga images of unreal or hyperreal bodies, for example in the Holistic Cures series where you combine psychiatric and alternative medication with hentai characters. But here they're hand-drawn and kind of de-eroticized. What's your interest in these kind of images of bodies?

I feel in a sense like I liberate them from this context of just being imaginary entities that are to be masturbated to or to be fetishized in one way or another. As much as these representations are used for those means, you also see people identifying with them or using them as avatars, whether that has an erotic component or not. These beings do take on lives of their own. Inori Aizawa, the Internet Explorer girl, embodies the browser and is from a Microsoft viral campaign, but people produce fan art about her. I think it's fascinating that these fictional bodies have so much potential for identification and eroticization, or even total animism, where people really ascribe living qualities to those things and end up becoming or mimicking them. The images became the substrate for my dissociative tendencies; I produced other selves.

That's where my interest in otaku culture really comes from, or in nerd culture in general: The relationships between/within bodies, of embodiment, where all these interchangeable ever-changing images dictate the body. They're recombinant. Mostly they're imbricated in these profit-making contexts, but I'm really interested in how people will take these characters and make them their own. Sometimes these narratives really start to penetrate their personal lives and their appearances, and these characters take on lives on their own, through affinity or whatever.

Images of bodies become recombinant, as do bodies themselves, and everything is becoming fragmented and up for grabs. I'm kind of nihilistic so I can't say it's totally liberatory. I feel like it's also network forces and economic forces undoing things and restructuring things, maybe these are more emergent processes that may interact with other political struggles but there may be darker forces at play as well.

From Holistic Cures (2014).
Flash Art

Heathers
Rowing Projects / London

A rapid flow of information, bright colors and shiny surfaces greet visitors to Rowing Projects' new space in North London. The overall impression is of a layered puzzle of pop and prosumer references and packaging materials.

The group show Heathers, curated by New York-based Alex Ross, draws its title and narrative logic from the 1988 black comedy of the same name, set in a cliquish high school.

The exhibition features works by Erica Cerruzzi, Andrea Crespo, May Hands, Lisa Holzer and Bradford Kessler, among others, and it centers on the role of contemporary art in portraying the contours of a school queen's heart, thus addressing the film's assimilation of arts production to confuse narrative articulation in popular cinema.

A cryptic numeric sequence functions as a press release that isolates film frames depicting Wayne Thiebaud's 1980's Cake and Lipstick paintings and Barbara Kruger's Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am), (1987),
calling into question pop's implications and the psychological indexing that impels the acquisition of art.

Stratified references appropriated from cinema, entertainment, science fiction, pop and consumer culture are formalized as diverse combinations of functionalities, materials and content.

Three PlayStation game disc cases are redesigned by American artist Andrea Crespo and completed with quotes from high-school spree killers (A 0, 2014; Thoughts of Dreamer, 2014; Sturmgeist, 2014); May Hands' Endless Euphoria (Calvin Klein) (2014) and Guilty (Gucci) (2014) reference designer products and luxury consumption; and Kait Mooney's third label (2014) combines polyurethane tubing with garment care labels.

Looking at contemporaneity through the eyes of its dominant culture, the artists in this show use post-Fordian as a visual strategy and a malleable material.

by Attilia Fattori Franchini
November/December 2014