

ART

Monthly

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```
class ZeroGen(object):
    name = "TEST"
    prefix = "00"
    version = 0

    config = {}

    def __init__(self):
        """set up ZeroMQ connections
        and register suspects"""
        self.suspects = []
        self.api = {}

        if not pattern.exists(pattern=os.path.join(
            os.getcwd(), "iris.py")):
            self.connet = zmq.Context()
            self.recv = self.connet.socket(zmq.REP)
            self.recv.bind("ipc://greenless" + self.prefix + ".ipc")
            scan = "ZeroGen" + self.name + " waiting for messages"
            self.suspects = []
            self.start_suspects()

    def send(self, recipient, message, data=None):
        """send suspects or API calls to another ZeroGen"""
```

Hostile Spaces

Tim Head interviewed by Patricia Bickers

Deep Listening

John Akomfrah interviewed by Chris McCormack

Radical Care

Louise O'Hare

Watching the Dictators

Bob Dickinson

Jordan Strafer

Profile by Hannah Hutchings-Georgiou

Shu Lea Cheang: Scifi New Queer Cinema, 1994–2023

'Early in the 21st Century', announces text at the start of *I.K.U.*, 'the Genom Corporation advanced the sexual revolution' by deploying a squad of humanoid robots to sleep with as many people as possible and collect their orgasm data. Over the next 90 minutes we follow feminine 'data hunters' on their 'non-stop sexing journey' through the 'night-world' of New Tokyo. One insatiable robot awaits her prey in an inflatable pink enclosure, while a shibari master ties a woman up and lowers her in like a mouse into a snake tank. Another so-called 'I.K.U. Coder' uses a less elaborate tactic, seducing victims next to a fish tank in a sushi restaurant.

The film, released in 2000, is subtitled 'This is not love. This is sex' and unsurprisingly the 'hunters' are not especially affectionate: they murmur phrases like 'I want it very much' in a stilted, servile voice, their groans and slurps out of sync with the on-screen action. As each scene comes to an end, the robot's arm morphs into a dildo which, witnessed via cavity-view animation, extracts precious data from inside the climaxing partner. Welcome to the cinematic cyber-carnival of Shu Lea Cheang, whose four feature-length films are currently showing on a weekly schedule in a dark, carpeted room at London's Project Native Informant.

In conventional pornography (as well as much classical film), the male subject dominates the female object, the narrative and camerawork defined by his desire. Here, however, the ostensibly female figure oscillates between cutesy anime-style sex object and penetrative predator, weaponising her erotic appeal as her dainty



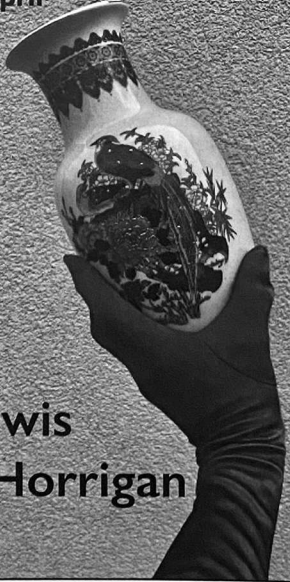
Shu Lea Cheang, *Fresh Kill*, 1994, film

arms become extractive dildos. In Cheang's 2017 film *Fluids*, semen is sold as a powerful narcotic: much of the film is taken up with relentless wanking on the part of 'bio-drug carriers'. Ejaculation – normally the cathartic finale in porn – is here instrumentalised and enforced to the point of mundanity. Scenes from the production line are contrasted with orgiastic celebrations of queer desire. 'Let there be pleasure on earth' and 'let it begin with me', proclaims a masturbating character dubbed 'The Pornoterrorist'. With wit and bravery, Cheang rejects the heteronormative structures most pornography bluntly asserts.

The Genom Corporation reappears in her 2023 film *UKI* offering a service whereby people can sign up online in order to immediately orgasm when they touch hands with other users. One pair meet at a bar modelled on Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, 1942. 'I want to

Peacocks & Mesh


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Nicole Bachman: There are tides in the body
Francis Offman: Economics of Painting
Youth Collective: Activate / Assemble / Amplify
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warwickartscentre.co.uk
Photo credits: Nicole Bachmann, There are tides in the body, 2024. Featuring: Patricia Langa, Hannah Parsons, Natálie White. Courtesy: Nicole Bachmann

really meet you,' a woman says in a rare moment of sincerity, to which her acquaintance replies 'my desire to engage with you is purely an act of data transaction'. Meanwhile, a suited figure reads the news - the government encouraging women to reproduce and limiting the right to abortion - but the pair are distracted: palms touching, eyes closed, and breathing heavily across the bar. This is orgasm as 'opium of the masses'. Why engage with society when solipsistic pleasure is so intense and so easy? During their 'transaction', Genom collects 'genetic information' which is sold on to 'therapeutic companies'.

Cheang's work emerges from the late-20th-century hope that technology might offer escape from patriarchal oppression and the biological essentialism that fuels misogyny. Donna Haraway famously envisaged the cyborg as a hybrid figure that dissolves the hierarchical divisions found between human-non-human and man-woman as a way to challenge the core tenets of capitalist society. Manufactured not born, the cyborg undermines the bourgeois family's reproductive function. *UKI* stages a conflict between tech's emancipatory potential and social tradition. Genom's handshake orgasms untether sexual pleasure from penetration, desire from power, and gradually generate 'hormonal and physiological androgyny' in users. The government responds by incentivising women to return to their role as 'birth-giving machine[s]'.

Cheang's films are themselves cyborg creations - glitching into existence, recalcitrant and inventive, and constantly blurring the lines between culture and nature. Her first feature, *Fresh Kill*, 1994, takes place in the shadow of a landfill site which, it is hoped, will become a mountain park. People fish through drains for scraps of 'technotrash', a man brushes 'bird excrement' off satellite dishes, and a girl falls ill with a disease caused by industrial waste in the food chain. These are ecosystem dramas in which technology and biology are always intermingled, in which human action is secondary to the movement of fluids, viruses and data.

Rather than simply illustrating this vision of total connection (by now the stuff of eco-critical cliché), the films satirise the way dreams of dissolved boundaries and tradition-smashing technology have been co-opted. Freedom and the free market have become confused when a corporation claims to have 'advanced the sexual revolution'. Cheang brings to queer culture a lesson learnt from sci-fi: technology is as apocalyptic as it is messianic, it augments rather than weakens mechanisms of domination. In this respect, her work evokes the dizzying complexity of contemporary activism which is forced to operate in the cracks between governments and companies, old systems of repression and novel modes of surveillance and control.

Shu Lea Cheang's exhibition 'Scifi New Queer Cinema, 1994-2023' continues at Project Native Informant, London, until 20 April.

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Report

Resolve: You Get a Car [Everybody Gets a Car]

In the weeks leading up to Tate Liverpool's planned closure in October last year for what was termed 'a major reimagining', a degree of anxiety had, in some quarters, set in. An anchor institution, Tate Liverpool has been a mainstay of the region's cultural landscape since 1988. Crucial in the city's successful European Capital of Culture for 2008 bid and the first home outside London for the Turner Prize (and first to host it twice), across its 35 years the building has boasted an embarrassment of artist riches. With exhibitions by the likes of Gustav Klimt, Andy Warhol, Piet Mondrian, Leonora Carrington, Francesca Woodman, Glenn Ligon, Jackson Pollock, Rene Magritte, Marc Chagall, Maria Lassnig and Nam June Paik, the gallery had all but removed the need to travel for the best in modern and contemporary art - unless your trip was to Liverpool in the first place.

Those names, and this new context, go to show just what the gallery's visitors have become so used to - and what they'll so keenly miss during its refurb. Tate Liverpool's operations aren't paused entirely during the next two years, however. It has retained a footprint in the city, and presently calls the nearby Mann Island setting of RIBA North home. The move (at the end of October) has coincided with some key changes to personnel, not least with the arrival from Manchester's Whitworth Gallery of Leanne Green as head of exhibitions and displays. Another curatorial addition is Carine Harmand, whose first role in her capacity as the John Ellerman Foundation curator has been to deliver *You Get a Car [Everybody Gets a Car]* by the Resolve collective. The project, which takes its name from a famous Oprah Winfrey declaration, seeks to accentuate the positives of the current circumstances.

Rather than simply clear the old building and syphon off what it could to existing networks, it was decided instead to work with Resolve to consider meaningful alternatives. The group, which operates at the intersection of architecture, engineering, technology and art, prioritises what it terms 'inspiring community empowerment' in the context of 'addressing urgent societal challenges'. It seems a perfect solution. Tate clears its building and redistributes the stuff that might otherwise have ended up in landfill to the benefit of a range of grassroots organisations across the city region. In doing so, new friends are made who will, hopefully, be inclined to become regular visitors to the gallery.

The decision to work with Resolve - which justifiably walked away from working with the Barbican last year after a number of 'hostile encounters' with art centre staff (Artnotes *AM469*) - was still a bold choice by Tate. The group is clearly unafraid of critiquing big institutional partners but, in coordinating the redistribution of materials from the currently closed site to well-selected community focused creative practices

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