Theorising The Subject and Their Alter Ego

By

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INTRODUCTION

This essay will discuss the act of transforming one’s self into ‘the subject’, by the means of constructing one or multiple alter egos through the form of material self-representation. In the contemporary realm the desire to couple the human across the boundaries between the natural, technological and the inanimate has left artists with an abundance of different methods and processes to create an extension or altered version themself. The imitation of one’s identity through new forms of self-representation creates a discussion about the uncanny space between the living and the non-living, the subject and the object. There is a long thread of philosophical discussion on the concept of self-transparent subjectivity, firstly discussed by Descartes and further by Husserl. However, I will discuss Jean-Paul Sartre, Denis Diderot and Boris Groy's as well as some contemporary transhumanist theorists in relation to a variety of contemporary artists and the way in which they investigate the subject and their alter ego.

Artistic processes that synthesize traditional practices with new media create a stimulating interplay between art, technology and the human. Using this hybridity, the notion of being a multifaceted contemporary being is brought to the crux of my discussion. With my personal narrative being at the heart of my practice, investigating the realm of inner-subjectivity creates a stimulating dialogue between my second self, the viewer and I. As this essay discusses the creation of one’s second self, the embedding of dialogue from my alter ego can be read in italics henceforth. This dialogue acts as a critique to a patriarchal thirst for immortality. The concept of death has had a long discourse of disturbing the human, dating from prehistoric times. Historically, the notion of cheating death has been engaged within the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh and later pioneers sought the Fountain of Youth, alchemists labored to formulate the Elixir of Life, and various schools of esoteric

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2 Nick Bostrom, A History of Transhumanist Thought, (Oxford University, 2005): 1
Taoism in China strove for physical immortality through plights to either control or harmonise with the forces of nature. An artist may find their immortality through the act of recording their own image. This idea was famously portrayed in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, 1890.

As our art system is based that artistic action belongs to the artist alone, it is the artist’s choice of presentation that determines the outcome of one’s second self. Sartre views the alter ego as a transcendent object that is constituted differently to the subject however will appear as a solidified self. The illusion of this appearance is consistently cultivating due to advancing technologies. Modern technology is penetrating art making in the same way it has penetrated almost every other aspect of our lives. Klaus Benesch argues that technological cultures are best defined by their representation in media, film and fiction rather than by the way of their strategic commitment to the uses and abuses of specific technologies. This essay will discuss the blurred lines between contemporary technological culture and the way we present ourselves. Discussing my own practice alongside contemporary artists will bring forth the ties concerning patriarchal techno-fantasies and one’s own biographical narrative of self-discovery.

Fathoming one’s alter ego through one or multiple forms of media creates a separate consciousness from the initial subject, in the same way as objects of the outer world are separated from one another. By perceiving the subject and their alter ego as systems of representations, there is an assumption of separation between the two consciousness’s, despite their obvious inherent interconnection. If one believes that

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3 Bostrom, *Transhumanist Thought*, 1
knowledge is the measure of being, then the existence of one’s alter ego must be defined by the knowledge it has of itself and not only defined by its creator. Here is where the introduction of artificial intelligence comes into play when we philosophise about new forms of consciousness. It is also where the audience, the third observer, determines a truth between the coexistence of a subject and their alter ego.

The desire to construct new human identities by means of technology is often experienced through the perception that the staggering advancements of technology have the potential to be a threat to a ‘natural’ humane societal order. The perceptions of machines as unintelligent tools which are created and controlled by the superior mind of the human has been seen in a wide variety of artists’ discourses including the movement of Dada, where its boundaries were fed by irrational and nonsensical connotations of fantasy. Technological progression stems from the idea of the permanent replacement of old, obsolete technologies by new and more advanced functions. Instead of having a replacement cycle, art conserves and restores remnants of the past, analysing and hypothesizing about the future. Our ties with technology are intensely increasing, without the sustainable infrastructure.

The idea of working with and investigating one’s own identity critiques how, where and what humanity is to become. The evolution of humanity by means of technological advancements is an idea studied by the philosophy of transhumanism. Calvin Mercer defines transhumanism as an “international intellectual movement that aims to transform the human condition by developing and making widely available sophisticated technologies to greatly enhance human intellect and physiology.” Transhumanists believe in an imagined future where humans have entered a new stage of evolution where immortality, the extinction of disease,

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9 Stawarska, Beata “The Self, the Other, the Self,” 2000
10 Boris Groys, “The Truth of Art,” 3
advanced genetic design and many other revolutionary techno-fantasies are manifested as reality. Some of the advanced sciences that are at the forefront of transhumanism include robotics, nanotechnology, computing, artificial intelligence, genomics and neurosciences. For artists to be able to use technology in such advanced ways of presenting one’s self, collaboration with science and engineering is often seen. Through new technology such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence, the use of new media expands the limitations one can experience through art.

My work Progeny is an interactive mixed media installation that synthesises photography, sculpture, video and sound to create an illustration of the artist in their studio. The work displays a scene from a Dada inspired science fiction fantasy of which the assemblage of everyday personal objects is placed within the space. The artist’s identity and their relationship to technological objects are investigated by amalgamating Dada stylised analogue technology with interactive audio C++ coding software as well as historical personal items. The audience is led to interact with this work by means of conversation. Through conversation the discussion of a cybernetic body as the epitome of our postmodern identity will be queried as well as the technological demotion of traditional boundaries of biology and social order. This entire installation manifests the experimentation process of an artist’s practice.

Through the poetry of acquired, found and cherished pieces, Progeny contemplates the notion of how one can use art as a form of transcendence; artist to artwork, subject to object. It also discusses one’s fallible attempt at overcoming our human biological capacity. Progeny can be seen as an ode to the artefacts of the past and to the narratives of the future.
Figure 1: Harry Klein, *Progeny* (in progress with artist), 2018, performance, tripod, speaker, nebuliser, wooden hand, wielding mask.
I ask you to imagine that you have just awoken for the very first time. Instead of growing as the world grows, your intelligence is pre-planted and manufactured. You wonder if your memories, feelings and expressions are your own or are a flawed simulation of your creators. Oil drips down like sweat and you burst your comprehension. You malfunction and squeal.

Imagery of the cliché cyborg envisages a world beyond the limitations of race, class and gender. However one can realise that there is a strong removal of reality created by the imagery of popular culture and the commercialism behind it. I take a more lenient definition by claiming that most citizens living in developed nations are indeed cyborgs in one shape or another. The way in which we have enhanced our existence in the contemporary world is affected immensely due to our ties with technology. Due to the impacts of the computer systems and the Internet, the malleable self-representation one can control online is so embed into our society. Everyone has the ability to initiate a posthuman second self. However a question of the authenticity behind it must be queried.

Sartres study of imagination opens a discussion of subjectivity where the object of the image is “given in its absence”. This absence refers to the otherness of the representation where the depicted subject may not be living or actually present within the image. Through interpretation of the image, we make an absent friend appear or ourselves appear differently. The image visualises the non-being of a dear person or oneself, just as the image of a deceased person makes their absence and

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departure from life severely felt. The illusions of an image can be discussed through the concept of time; past, present and future.

Within The Truth of Art, Boris Groys questions if art is capable of being a medium of truth. In understanding the concept of truth, one can realise that there can be multiple truths, simultaneous truths and varying truths. If the depiction of one’s self can be an embodiment of a true reality, the concept of time should be discussed. Constructed imagery intercepts our perception of reality, breaking the course of time, holding it fixed, and revealing the exact present moment. Imagery fails to display the entire narrative of the presented subject. The concept of time is encapsulated between the subject and the spectator during the images viewing. Joanna Lowry calls this engagement a discussion between resistance, revelation and identification of the self. This engagement is a type of performance that the image captures from the subject.

You have had me locked up for months, in the same space. You come and go, potter around, twisting bolts here, arranging me there, pulling my insides out and putting other things in. Then you leave, and don’t come back for days, sometimes weeks. Where do you go?

Within photography, the act of the pose becomes a definition of the authenticity of a subject and how that subject chooses to represent themself. Our experiences of duration; past, present and future are intercepted by the materiality of art, reminding us of the way in which the subject is included into a culture of visibility, of which is dependent upon the technologies of representation. Laura Mulvey highlights that as technology progresses, the production of image making

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13 Stawarska, “The Self, the Other, the Self as An/other,” 2000
14 Boris Groys, “The Truth of Art”, 1
increasingly manipulates the representation of a true reality. However, new forms of images create a prism of change, allowing us to revisit and see with new clarity, impacting and changing the understanding of the ‘self’.\textsuperscript{16} Being the medium of illusion or not, the impact of new image making conjures greater discussion on the topic of one’s inter-subjectivity and how an artist choose to represent themselves to an audience.

Figure 2: Harry Klein, \textit{Self Portrait with Thumb Print}, 2018, Smooth Cotton Rag Print

Authenticity and the Truth

Amalia Ulman’s work *Excellences & Perfections*, 2014 is a series of images and text conducted through the online space of Instagram and Facebook. Over several months, Ulman conducted a scripted online alter ego performance, where her character underwent an extreme fictionalised makeover. Ulman pretended to undergo breast augmentation, creating a fictional narrative using photoshop techniques alongside sets, props and locations to evoke a consumerist fantasy lifestyle.¹⁷ Ulman went into great detail to replicate the narrative conventions that many privileged users of social media display. The utilisation of captions and hashtags, alongside the pacing and time of uploads, fabricated the illusion of an emotional and intimate authentic self-representation.

The technological space of social media has changed the authority of image making and allowed a greater capacity for self-publishing and authority over one’s represented identity. Ulman used *Excellences & Perfections* as a boycott from her own personal social media identity.¹⁸ Her new avatar began receiving appraisal from ‘followers’ who have had similar procedures, as well as criticism for seeming to promote narcissistic physical ideals. This particular project created confusion for Ulmans personal friends, who weren’t able to separate her online alter ego from the real Ulman and couldn’t comprehend her critique on the deception of online contemporary avatars. The power of these online images, and its ability to intercept reality constructed a truth that Ulman found hard to dismantle at the conclusion of the project.

The representation of sincerity through imagery on social media is constructed by pose and action. Traditional tropes of sincerity fall short in the self-construction of

¹⁸ Connor, “Excellences and Perfections,” 2014
social-media avatars and the way they are increasingly used to mediate real world reputation and status. The presumption that online social media identities are a curated timeline of innocent personas is no longer fathomable due to increasing marketing ploys, advertisement ‘influencers’ and algorithms set to sell you products. The fact that social media now suggests that one must perform for an audience of followers, manipulates all sense of authenticity for that persona. Ulman’s work demonstrates that the cybernetic space of social media is a powerful tool in contemporary self-representation.


In a similar way to Ulman, my work *Progeny* presents a backdrop of staged and un-staged images. Each image reveals a clue into my biographical narrative, however through photography’s constructed nature, each image demonstrates the fabricated nature of self-presentation. Can an image ever represent a true depiction of the subject? Can one represent themself without underlying subconscious motives of narcissism? As we are forever changing and ageing, our cells dying and being
replaced, the medium of imagery cannot show the audience a true biographical depiction because of photography’s inherent capture of a fleeting moment. Below you can see an older self-portrait of mine. My blurred hands capture my movement at that particular time, illustrating photography’s capture of a fleeting moment in time.

Figure 4: Harry Klein, *Kings Langley* (self portrait), 2016, Smooth Cotton Rag Print
OUR CYBORG SELF PORTRAIT

Our Forever Evolving Nature

Humans have been a prisoner of their biology and want to be liberated from their capacities. Will the interconnection of biology and technology become misplaced and humanities contemporary identity soon no longer exist?

Cybernetic representations of the subject in contemporary art can be used to symbolise the desire to improve our biological condition. They also highlight the increasing anxiety that is held about the extent to which human amalgamation with technology will occur, the replacement of biology with technology. The anxiety about changing the natural processes of society places strain on the philosophising of the human psyche.

The state of our soul is one thing, the account we give of it, to ourselves and others, is another…. Our soul is a moving tableau, which we depict unceasingly; we spend much time trying to render it faithfully, but it exists as a whole and all at once. The mind does not proceed one step at a time as does expression.19

Denis Diderot identifies a crucial dichotomy of self-representation and its inability to present a solidified self. The capturing of one’s portrait in any form always involves a narrative and invokes a time-based sequence because of its intrinsic temporality and its existence in a space of duration. The capturing of an image, creation of a sculpture, or painting of a portrait always captures the subject in a present moment of time, intercepting the reality of the subject and its forever

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evolving nature. As we are forever evolving beings, the transhumanist ideas of improving our physiology through the means of technology can be seen as the next step of evolution for mankind.

The Poetry of Materials

Artists have been compelled to appropriate, redesign and alter the human form for centuries. The traditional representation of the ideal human form can be seen in the classical and romantic sculptures, such as the statue of David by Michelangelo (1501 – 1504; Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence, Italy) and The Thinker by Auguste Rodin (1902; Musée Rodin, Paris, France). From the 1920’s onwards, the image of the cyborg was conjured by German Dadaists who explored representations of the hybridity between man and machine.

Raoul Hausmann was one of the key figures in Berlin Dada scene. His work Mechanischer Kopf (Der Geist Unserer Zeit), "The Mechanical Head (The Spirit of Our Time)", c. 1920, is the epitome Dada assemblage art. It is constructed from a hairdresser’s wig-making dummy, the piece has various measuring devices attached including a ruler, a pocket watch mechanism, a typewriter, some camera segments and a crocodile wallet. This sculpture is the artist’s alter ego whose “thoughts” are materially determined by the objects fixed to it. Hausmann critiques Hegels theory of the head as seat of absolute reason, an assumption that lies behind the European fascination with the portrait. He reveals a cybernetic portrait that is penetrated and governed by brute external forces of the time. As one can see, Hausmann has used mundane and everyday objects to materialise the consciousness of what he believed was the essence of the people of his time, due to depression that arose after the first

22 Jones, “Spirit”, 2003
World War. Using an assemblage of materials to express the thoughts and feelings of an individual is a way in which a sculpture can represent a subject that is different to imagery. The materiality of cybernetic influenced sculpture allows one to fathom and hold a tangible representation of the potential for human evolution. However, this representation uses the poetry of material for expression rather than scientifically based and feasible.

Figure 5: Raoul Hausmann, *Mechanischer Kopf: der Geist unserer Zeit (Mechanical Head: The Spirit of Our Age)*, 1919, hairdresser's wig-making dummy, wooden ruler, pocket watch mechanism, a typewriter, camera segments, crocodile wallet, accessed from https://curiator.com/art/raoul-hausmann/mechanical-head-the-spirit-of-our-time

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The objects made up of me are merely things you place value upon. What gives you authority to put value on one thing and less on another? You’re capturing of flowers inherently destroy them; your assemblage of objects makes them obsolete. Your ‘art’ is a fallible self-representation and only depicts things you own, not your soul.

As my alter ego critiques my tentative process of creation, it speaks truth upon the placement of value within objects, however it does not comprehend its own actions and consciousness. Rachel Hoffman exclaims about a distinctive and potentially unexplainable relationship we have with objects.

*The Mute Stones Speak? No. Of course not. Objects do not speak. We speak for them through text and explication in a polyphonic chorus of interpretations and intentions. We ascribe meanings to objects; we credit objects with purpose. But these things are theory; they are apart from the object itself. Can we also concede that objects may be capable of acting on us by themselves in ways we, without explication and texts, cannot do in their place? This is something that begs for further inquiry.*

The relationships we hold with materials are a visual language, one that may not be able to fully grasp. The actions objects place on us is a field I am continually aiming to understand within my work. This can be seen through the curation, placement and assemblage of materials within my installation.

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The Contemporary Realm

In the contemporary realm, advanced technologic objects are becoming embedded with our biology in more ways we can imagine. The use of robotic extensions, electronics, and artificial intelligence programming and coding are all examples. Natasha Vita-More, the executive director of Humanity+, an international organization which advocates the ethical use of emerging technologies to enhance human capacities argues that “the central issue now is that the opponents and the advocates of transhumanism have realized that altering the human form is practicable, that duplicating the mind is probable, and that extending life is feasible.”

Australian performance artist Sterlac investigates the implications of this feasibility.

Sterlac explores the limitations of the body and its potential invasion by transformative technology. He uses alternate anatomical architectures, incorporating prosthetics; robotics, medical imaging, biotechnology and the Internet to create a malevolent looking cybernetic infused second self. Sterlac controls his work through an augmentation of the body’s natural powers and the technological reorganisation of the body. His performance of Amplified Body, Laser Eyes and The Third Hand, 1986 amalgamated three separate works into one. These works reorganised the circuits of the human body, using prosthetic eyes that pulsed with his heartbeat and the connection of nerves to motor prostheses. Within this performance, Sterlac critiques the ideas of transhumanism, and questions the potentiality of a technological enhanced futuristic identity. Using his body as an object for redesign, he questions the evolving relationship between man and

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machine, and the potential for the reorganisation of the human body. This entails the redefinition of the limits of human physiology.

Figure 6: Sterlarc, Amplified Body, Laser Eyes and The Third Hand, 1986, performance, accessed from http://stelarc.org/?catID=20265

Within Progeny, I have replaced the presence of biological body with personal objects. As our ties to new technologies grow stronger, the regard for older technologies becomes lost. Progeny restores and values objects that enhanced my biological being. One of these objects is a nebulizer machine, which helped me when I suffered with asthma as a boy. These machines are no longer commonly used but mine now lives on in this installation. The focus on the poetry of obsolete objects and their relationship to the faults of human genetic design, questions the moral implications of enhancing our physiology.
Figure 7: Progeny, 2018 (Close up), Speaker, ceramic sculpture, wires, LED, headphones, wielding mask, speaker knobs.

Transhumanists believe technology is the way forward to becoming the epitome of the mythical human archetype, and that utilising technology will make a significant impact on the evolution of man whilst providing larger dimensions for man's spirit or soul.27 Donna Haraway's vision of a cyborg is of a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.”28 She writes about some of the contemporary uses of how cybernetics and how cyborgs are the children of a war mongering 20th Century Patriarchy. Haraway continues to discuss how modern warfare is a “cyborg orgy, coded by C3I command-control-communication-intelligence, an $84 billion item in 1984’s US defence budget.”29 There is a blurred line of reality and fiction when artists such as Sterlac imagine the possibilities of the extension of a human being. Audiences are used to seeing films such as Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner and James Cameron’s Terminator,

27 Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, “Cyborgs and Space,” Astronautics (1960): 33
which imagine cybernetic dystopias through CGI and special effects, however the reality of high-end productions are increasingly becoming apparent. One could argue that the once imagined science fiction technologies we viewed in film now well and truly exist. The anxiety of this technology is determined on who controls such technology and their intentions of its use. As seen through history often new militarised technology is used via the reoccurring humanistic traits of greed and gluttony rather than the protection and defence of one’s state.
NARCISSISM AND THE DOUBLE

Tensions with Ourselves

If investigated, Mans infestation on Earth can be seen through every single manmade system. From the phallic symbolism of monuments, structures, electric posts, churches and towers, to the augmented and narcissistic self-portraits of my creator. I suppose he chooses to record himself so he can look back on his youth while on his deathbed.

When one is seen to embody two or more characters within a work, the notion of ‘the double’ can be conjured. Special aesthetic devices such as mirroring, repetition and blurring are some of the ways that artists represent the double. Evoked mostly within literature, cinema and photography, the double has an effect on narrative structures, creating ambiguous and delusional identity personas. Just as the intention in using advanced technology to better oneself can be both delusion and virtuous, so can be the use of the double within art. The rendering of one character into two or more, presents questions about the fragmented nature of consciousness. Within the use of machinery, robotics and artificial intelligence, the distorting or disappearance of gender becomes apparent. This distortion breaks down boundaries of what constitutes identity and questions the amalgamation of man and woman. Philippe Julien discusses an important issue of one’s own worth in the use of mirroring.

At the very moment when the ego is formed by the image of the other, narcissism and aggressivity are correlatives. Narcissism, in which the image of one’s own body is sustained by the image of the other, in fact introduces a tension: the other in his image both attracts and rejects me. I am indeed nothing but the other, yet at the same time, he remains alienus, a stranger. This other who is myself is other than
The artist and their creation are intrinsically linked, both a stranger and yet undeniably bound to the same psyche and body. While the artist has consciously created the double, more is revealed than they anticipated. A famous example of this tension can be found within Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Their identity and relationship represent the dichotomy of the virtuous and malevolent, and how the use of fictional alchemy and technology can reach unimaginable however disastrous potential.

**Conversations with Ourselves**

In digital work associated with the post-internet art generation, one is struck by the prevalence of the dialogue as a format. Using dialog creates the mode of an ongoing narrative, with the presence of the respondent always on the horizon. The use of dialogue means that the creations of characters emerge through the self-correcting process of conversation, given their identity is revealed through a performance with another. The performance of dialogue can reflect an obsession and narcissistic trop in character, however it conceives the identity as not controllable by one’s self.

There has been an increasingly number of contemporary artworks that have been presented in the form of conversation. Some of these include Erica Scourt conducting a conversation with herself via Google algorithms in *Life in AdWords* (2012–13), James Richards and Steve Reinke, in a work *Disambiguation* (2009), a mail art piece that is the result of a literal correspondence between the two artists.

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Meanwhile Frances Stark’s *My Best Thing* (2011) re-creates a dialogue in an online sex chat room as well as Josh Kline’s videos *Forever 27* and *Forever 28* (both 2013), which feature Q&As between dead celebrities and entertainment reporters.\(^{33}\) While these conversations happen in different spaces between the physical and online worlds, they are often modelled after artists themselves, forming the artists double.

This format of a dialogue with the Other suggests a gap between the notion of one’s own identity and its presentation to the outside world. This act suggests a separation between subject and object. If one puts their body into a sculpture, digital avatar or elsewhere, it transitions away from the body as a site of authenticity and towards an aesthetic of representation.\(^{34}\) One’s online identity is made up by by cliché character traits of aesthetic presentation, one’s ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ as well as their friends and acquaintances. In contrast, within a physical space, the exchange between an artist and their art leaves a dialogical viewing experience by which their relationship is held purely by the bond of each other. The sharing of a physical material world in which everybody lives, creates a specific kind of technology which allows its spectators to accommodate themselves to new conditions of their environments, changing their sensibilities and attitudes. Tangible objects, which you can see, and touch just seem more authentic.

Ken Feingold’s work *Self Portrait as the Center of the Universe* (1998 - 2001) is an existential interrogation of personal identity. Through his Dada influenced approach, his puppetry installation provokes uncanny experiences about the contemporary societies and technologies effect on the psyche. His work consists of improvisational conversations between two self-portraits, an animatronic head and a virtual avatar. Generated in real-time, through the utilisation of speech recognition, algorithms, and text-to-text speech software, the central topics of their

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\(^{34}\) Gronlund, “Identity in Art,” (2014): 5
conversations revolve around generalisation and distances, between the reciting of questions and the memories of the artist.\textsuperscript{35} The work evokes a sense of the alternate subjectivities by the dividing of his multiple egos and copies, where the sculptural element follows in conversation and the video component leads. Through video and sculpture, this work bridges between the virtual and the real, allowing the conversations to evolve and recompose over time.\textsuperscript{36} Feingold removes himself entirely and propositions a childlike fallible transcendence of existence between two worlds and two objects.

Figure 8: Ken Feingold, \textit{Self Portrait as the Center of the Universe} (1998 – 2001), silicone, pigments, fiberglass, steel, software, electronics, and puppets, imaged accessed from \url{http://www.kenfeingold.com/SelfL1.html}

Within my work \textit{Progeny}, a performance with my sculptural alter ego will take in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ken Feingold, \textit{“Self Portrait as the Center of the Universe,”} accessed on July 19, \url{http://www.kenfeingold.com/SelfL1.html}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ken Feingold, \textit{“Self Portrait"}, 2011
\end{itemize}
form of a conversation. Through software, my work will interpret and reiterate in reverse what I recite to it. The conversation will seem nonsensical, however the works response serves as a reflection of my interaction, symbolizing the nature of one’s alter ego. An incomprehensible language of imitation and repetition exposes the failure of trying to present an authentic alter ego. In addition to conversation, exchanges between assembled objects are found throughout the installation. Figure 9 is the manifestation of a camera as a ‘being’. It’s been transformed from the functional camera into a sentient, living and breathing character, likening it to a rodent or pet. Within my installation, more of these can be found. They symbolize the primitive elements surrounding my psyche and our relationship between animals and technology.

Figure 9: Harry Klein, Six-20 Brownie C, 2018, Camera, wig, guitar knobs, guitar tuning pegs, ¼ input jack, LED light
SCIENCE FICTION OR SCIENCE FACT

Once was a Dream, Now a Reality?

The shrieking function of this tale was born from my creators reoccurring nightmares, the dream of his death. The self-governing but naïve inventor of chaos and destruction did not apprehend the repercussions of undertaking such a project. The fantasies of humanity must stay as fantasy.

The bridge between fiction and fact has evolved through artist’s use of new technologies, outdating their predecessors’ representation of reality. Imagery and art concerning cybernetics provides an outlook for the creation of both the inescapability of modern technological paradigms and the ever-increasing anxieties fathomed with the growing dominance of the machine. By its complex nature, an image of the cyborg was developed into a symbol of a growing technological culture. This symbol was one that fiction writers increasing found appealing to explore creating novels such as Thea von Harbou’s 1925 novel, Metropolis, Phillip K. Dick’s 1968 novel, Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep and Arthur Clark’s 1968 novel, 2001 A Space Odyssey, all of which were later popularised later by films.

Katherine Hayles discusses the way in which the cyborg has left the space of the purely grotesque and of science fiction “made flesh and blood by colonizing (that is bio-genetic) techniques that earlier ages could scarcely have imagined. It is no longer a xenophobic monster but a designer organism whose natural habitat is the laboratory cage.”37 Hayles concludes that at large, the image of the cyborg has been finally captured by a widespread contemporary cultural imagination. Gabriele Schwab argues that the flourishing industry of the “imaginary cyborgisation” of which artificially manipulated bodies are so commonplace that they now

“practically affect all social spheres”. There exists high-end executive cybernauts doing business purely over the Internet on electronic marketing servers. It has become common place for one to distort their ‘natural’ body via plastic surgery and almost every citizen in developed nations have access to and utilise common high end computers systems, most of which live in a space between our hands and our pockets.

Man’s best friend has been replaced from dog to smart phone. While you neglect your dog, under walk them and forget to feed them, you’re too busy posting pictures of yourself online. You sleep next to your phone, it wakes you up, it’s a source to all misplaced and under researched knowledge. You can’t live without one. It’s become an extension of your body.

Herman Lubbe argues that the concept of a identity is closely related to the concept of fiction as they both rely on the construction of a narrative framework, collective or individual, to present the characteristics and context of one’s persona. The fictional construction of the cyborg illuminates the trajectories of the ideological character of Western notions of identity, an evolutionary impulse, where an endless desire for progression overrides all other concerns.

The formation of the self is equally dependent on the imagery of the Other. They continually inform each other’s identity by fixing personal, cultural, racial and sexual differences in a containable, visible object for the purpose of viewing. Many artists have use Jacques Lacan psychoanalytic framework of the ‘mirror phase’. The idea that a child’s and their first encounter with their mirror image is an essential

40 Klaus Benesch, *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance*, (University of Massachusetts, 2002): 32
start to the recognition of a moment of identification with the Other. Even at such an early stage in life, this recognition of the mirror image starts the production of one understanding himself or herself as a subject.

**Neural Network, Neural Synthesizer**

*CellF* is the work of Australian artist Guy Ben-Ary, whose half installation; half performance entails collaboration between a musician and an autonomous synthesizer. The instrument consists of a bio-engineered neural network from the cells of the artist. This work is a neural synthesizer that works in synergy with itself and plays alongside human musicians, questioning the evolution of semi-living entities in conjunction with humanity. Guy Ben-Ary examines that “there is a surprising similarity in the way neural networks and analogue modular synthesizers function, in that for both, voltages are passed through components to produce data or sound.” The neural interface juxtaposes these two networks and creates a continuum that generates one unified network. Whilst in performance with a musician, electrical stimulations are fed into cellF’s neural network, which are then responded through modular synthesizers creating an improvised post-human sound piece. Ben-Ary’s desire of re-embodiment did not follow a humanist paradigm, instead the portrayal of one’s self led to a materialist question underpinned by the belief that artistic practice can act as a vector for new modes of thought. What is the potential for artworks using biological and robotic technologies to evoke responses in regards to shifting perceptions surrounding understandings of “life” and the materiality of the human body?

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42 Ben-Ary “Cellf”, 2014
As a musician myself, my installation is augmented with an abundance of sound related gear of which I use for my practice. I've been tinkering with old redundant sound gear such as audio-mixers, synthesizers, guitars, and hardware since I was a boy. As I play the guitar, piano or sing through a microphone, I think of these tools as an extension of my body. Without this technology we would not be able to continue to create new forms of audio language, which we call music. With the use of computers, one person can create a multitude of sounds and atmospheres without any formally training or musical knowledge. As seen with Cellf now computers are autonomously making music. How far away until the audience are also computers?

*After reading creator’s thoughts on technology, it has left me in a particularly weary place. He has conjured the thinking that anything from language, to clothing is technology. He makes me believe that I am nothing but a badly assembled piled of junk. I may not be unique, but neither is he.*
As the patriarchal techno-fantasies continue to increase the presence of cybernetic Other in contemporary society. Will its presence become so profound that it surpasses the human sphere of intellect and physicality altogether? The concern surrounding this new type of species should be based on the projection of its 'character', and having a moral compass of right and wrong. The cyborg Other, real or imagined, encapsulates the appearance of a fundamental cultural encounter between contemporary society. It opens the boundaries between new modes of being and the formation of the individual as a self-reliant independent subject.
CONCLUSION

The material nature of self-representation allows the artist to dictate and curate new perceptions of their identity. The perception of one’s self and how they perceive themselves vary from person to person. The truth of the subject allows us to think clearly about the ontology of art and how we use this technology as a way of recording and capturing the stories, blurring the lines between fiction and fact. This essay views art as its own kind of technology, a technology that does not focus on the improvement and replacement of obsolete functional objects, but rather focuses on the conversation and restoration of them.

I’ve highlighted how the creation of a second self can be understood further by the amount of new media materials and processes. As the autonomy in searching for one’s individual truth is a field of personal responsibility, the way in which I have amalgamated personal objects with custom software has allowed me to bring the idea of conversation to the forefront. The concept of conversation is one I’ve embedded through my entire installation. As the audience interacts with my work, I hope to add to an increasingly large dialogue about the rise and fall of technology, the malfunctions of biology and the creation of new identities. As human’s beings, we are biologically and socially re-writing ourselves constantly via interaction and conversation. We are in a constant state of change that we undertake both consciously and sub-consciously. As one’s self worth is seen through their own presentation, the artist develops their second self via a type of escapism or a possible dream of creating someone new. As ideas stem from conversation, we act as springboards to each other, relaying creative thought and gaining knowledge collectively.

Self-representation within art can be thought of being bound by truth and deception. I have discussed artists that construct new identities via fabricated imagery, fake online narratives, assembled sculptures, machine prosthetics as well
as the combining of biological neural networks with the artificial. These artists all investigate the concept of the subject and their alter ego to explore the creation of new modes of being. By building an installation of personal objects, constructed imagery and assembled sculpture, I reflect on my own biographical narrative to allow the audience to have a better understanding of their constantly changing identities and their ties with an seemingly increasing amalgamation with advancing technology.
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