```
def composeimage( x, y, colr, radius, points, diminish ) :
    nofill()
    stroke()
    strokewidth( 0.05 )
    autoclosepath( False )
    count = int( radius * 1.3 )
    colr = colors.color( colr )
    grad = colors.gradient( colr.darken
            colr.lighten( 1.0 ).dese        0.4
            steps = count )
    for i in range( count ) :
        stroke( grad[ i ] )
        a   0.75 - 0.25 * float( i
        colors.shadow( dx = 5, dy      ph   a, blu    15
        path   oval( x - radius + 1       y   radius   1
            radius * 2 - 1, radiu    2      draw   False )
        drawpath( brushpaint( path  poi      int( points
            length = radius - 1   randor ( count   {    1
            diminish = diminish ) )
```



```
stroke()
strokewidth(     .05
autoclosepath( False )
count = int( radius * 1.3
colr = colors.color(
grad = colors.gradient( co
        colr.lighten( 1
        steps = count
for i in range( count ) :
```


THEME 3

Stories in Flesh and Bytes

How can the human body come to life on a two-dimensional screen? Can it become a playable environment, a platform, a game world? How are technologies and bodies (inter)woven to evoke new meanings of em-body-ment? Can digital fictions and poems evoke memories and images of our bodies that make us reflect, revisit, and re(con)figure our gendered identities? What are the relationships between exterior appearances and internal body functions and organs? And how do works of electronic literature allow users to engage in new forms of literary experiences and critical gameplay?

In this part of *Dyscorpia*, artists innovate digital, interactive and multimedia forms of creative writing, fabricating stories in flesh and bytes. Google tracking data generate new weather patterns, bodies pass through genetic ally modified, chemically hyper-saturated, consumer worlds. Wafer-thin cross sections of our brains are held—delicate, fibrous, gossamer-like—in out-stretched hands.

DYSCORPIA.

Stories in Flesh and Bytes:
"Telling" the Posthuman Body in Electronic Literature

ASTRID ENSSLIN

The body in and as code is a much debated concept in posthuman thought. Posthumanism deals with questions of nature, technology, and culture, and the ways in which humans are disembodied and/or re-embodied in digital culture. It explores how connected we are with our physical bodies when immersed in a virtual world, where we find ourselves re-embodied by one or more avatars on screen. Posthumanism is concerned with the blurring boundaries between physical, real, actual, and virtual and how what are generally understood to be disembodied, online interactions can have very real, visceral, and material effects on us. As digitalized humans, we are embedded in multiple cybernetic feedback loops, and this embeddedness shapes our social relationships as well as the images we form of ourselves and our bodies. If we are cyborgs in the sense of non-binary, hybrid creatures between human, animal, and machine, what does this mean for our responsibility and respect for one another, as well as for other forms of life and intelligence? And what does our "being-in-code" mean for the ways in which we understand and communicate our selves through imagery and storytelling?

The *Stories in Flesh and Bytes* section of the *Dyscorpia* exhibition approached questions revolving around the posthuman body through the lens of digital verbal art. It showcased how innovative digital, interactive and multimedia forms of creative writing may offer us new ways of "telling," "reading," and "playing" the body on screen. These experiments in verbal arts are generally known as digital-born (or digital) fictions and electronic poetry (e-poetry) and come under the generic term "electronic literature," or "e-lit". Works of electronic literature tend to be short, experimental, and thought-provoking. They range from text-only hypertext and interactive fiction to audiovisual, hypermedia Flash works, and, more recently, playable works in immersive 3D, AR and VR, as well as on touchscreens. They engage critically with digital media and technological developments of our time; they often deal with social justice and environmental issues, and they encourage reader-players to consider questions of (dis-)embodiment, privacy, and algorithmic control in our datafied world.

As curator of the *Stories in Flesh and Bytes* section of the *Dyscorpia* exhibition, my aim

was to explore how the posthuman body may come to life on a 2D screen; how may it become a playable environment, a character, a platform, or a game world; how code is used to interweave technologies and bodies and to evoke new meanings and experiences of embodiment; how digital-born fictions and poems may evoke memories, dreams, anxieties, and images of our bodies that make us revisit and refigure our gendered identities; and how they make us reflect on the needs of our volatile and vulnerable bodies in a genetically modified, chemically hypersaturated, potentially toxic consumer environment.

The three award-winning digital artists whose body-themed e-lit works feature in this section approach the *Flesh and Bytes* theme in very different and idiosyncratic ways. American hypermedia poet and artist Jason Nelson is known for his abstract, surrealist e-poetry. His interactive, playable poem, *Acesulfame K* (2018; **fig. 1**), recreates the dangerously seductive and literally intoxicating world of the grocery store aisle. The title refers to the chemical name of an industrial sweetener that is over 100 times sweeter than sugar itself. The work offers a cynically

playful critique of human subjection to the dictates of the capitalocene which simultaneously caters to our artificially created consumptive habits and destroys our bodies from the inside out.

At the core of Australian artist Mez Breeze's work lie the multiple creative and experimental intersections between bodies in 3D digital space and the ways in which they replicate, resonate with, and/or alienate us from our own physically and physiologically defined, phenomenological bodies. Dual embodiment through the cybernetic feedback loop can render the avatar body invisible yet narratively indispensable, or it may confront us with an alter ego that we explore through virtual touch yet that evokes acutely visceral sensations in our imagination. Breeze's 3D cyborgian sculpture, *The Thing Tableau* (2018; **fig. 2**) takes us on a journey along a cyborgian body imbued with personal memory and insomniac musings. Conceived and designed in VR, its story unfolds through a digital narrative that manifests by turning and tapping the sculpture. The story references insomnia and the thoughts that can creep and reoccur when in that twilight-ish state.

As we interact with *The Thing Tableau*, we become players of an emergent narrative that stems from our navigation of the cyborgian body on screen—a body that translates into our own as we find our own psychology enacted and performed in the experience.

Finally, Christine Wilks' digital body fictions focus on the cis-gendered female body across time and age, from the context of 19TH century coal mining to the fashion dictates of the 20TH century and contemporary appearance-based cyberbullying. They critique the gender biases in which women's bodies are entrenched as well as the constraints of their historical and social environments. Wilks is an award-winning feminist digital writer, media artist and game developer from Yorkshire, UK. She writes, designs, and programs so-called digital(-born) fictions, which are a form of electronic, nonlinear, multimodal literature, blended with elements of play and gaming.

Three of Wilks' digital fictions feature in the *Dyscorpia* exhibition. *Fitting the Pattern* (2008) is an early, autobiographical work of hers that takes us back to her childhood as

Figure 1 | Jason Nelson's *Acesulfame K* (ABOVE)

Figure 2 | Mez Breeze's *The Thing Tableau* (BELOW)

the daughter of a Yorkshire seamstress. Her mother had a strong, idealized image of the socially acceptable female body which she projected onto her adolescent daughters. Rather than measuring their bodies and making clothes accordingly, she made the clothes according to idealized body standards. The girls had to find ways of "fitting the Pattern," of approximating a symbolic order imposed on them by societal and parental norms. Wilks describes the reading experience as follows:

> Life's mysteries are rarely uncovered by a logical, linear process of deduction. You arrive at answers, ideas, suspicions, intuitions… haphazardly, in fragments. Over time you build the picture, piece by piece, shuffling and rearranging, until you start to see a pattern emerging.

The patterns are depicted as online sewing templates, which display chunks of text ("lexias") as the reader-player moves the stylized cursor over them (fig. 3).

In her Flash fiction *Underbelly* (2010), Wilks takes on the historical theme of women working in British coal mines. She juxtaposes their physical suffering with the physical work of a 21ST century Yorkshire sculptress (Wilks' sister), who has very different concerns about her body and the prospect of childbirth. They both share a concern with earth and stone, and both make their living by carving stone, for mining and artistic expression respectively. The sculptress' voiced-over meditations are overwritten by the voices of women working in Victorian collieries, whose static images are shown flitting across the screen as the reader-player clicks their way through the animated subterranean world on screen. The women's voices relate the dire conditions in healthcare and maternity support at the time, and their reports are accompanied by uterine and fetal images indicating affinities of exploitation between women's bodies and Mother Earth. In her artist's statement for *Dyscorpia*, Wilks explains that the remarkably uterine qualities of the 13TH century Hereford Mappa Mundi were the inspiration for this work (fig. 4).

Wilks' third work in the *Stories in Flesh and Bytes* section is the immersive 3D fiction *Inkubus* (2014), co-developed in Unity with British digital fiction developer Andy
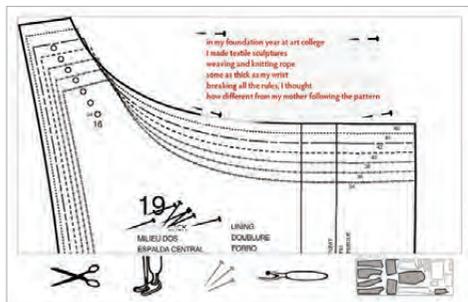

Figure 3 | Wilks reading from *Underbelly* at her artist talk, 10 May 2019 at the Enterprise Square Galleries in Edmonton *(ABOVE)*

Figure 4 | *Fitting the Pattern*, showing the cursor, stylized as sewing pins, opening an autobiographical lexia of text on screen *(BELOW)*

Campbell. The work thematizes and problematizes issues surrounding young women's body image and the social pressures emanating from contemporary ideals of beauty, power and belonging. It is a coming-of-age story about a teenage girl who has been grounded in her bedroom and experiences cyberbullying in an online chat with one of her best friends. In first-person player mode, we delve into a 3D world that evokes the interior of a blood vessel. In this "visceral labyrinth", we are bombarded with snippets of text asking us—the protagonist—to choose, in a binary fashion, between ideals of physical appearance and body image, and intellectual abilities (fig. 5).

In Wilks' own words:

> Some malevolent force peddles a destructive artificial feminine ideal. With creeping awareness, the girl (the player) struggles against the insidious gender stereotyping, wherein womanhood is rendered as malleable and polymorphic as a digital doll, which threatens to drain her of life.

At the end of the labyrinthine journey is a cluster of bubbles that depict the multiple faces of the protagonist's fragmented identity (fig. 6). Moving through the bubbles triggers audible cries of fear, pain or panic, and once all bubbles have been removed, the camera returns to the screen of the computer in the protagonist's bedroom, this time reflecting an image of a girl's face distorted in such a way that it explicitly references Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893). Overall, the navigation of and interaction with corporeal space as presented by *Inkubus*, paired with an open, neo-expressionist ending, offers an embodied experience that encourages reader-players to reflect on the realities of teenage cyberbullying and the psychological repercussions of social pressure and unhealthy body image among young women in particular.

In all three of Wilks' works exhibited in *Dyscorpia*, the cis-gendered female body comes to life through its absence: it eludes monolithic, deterministic depiction. Instead, it appears synecdochically, in fragments of temporal reading and spatial-visual design, and through motifs or traces of things that
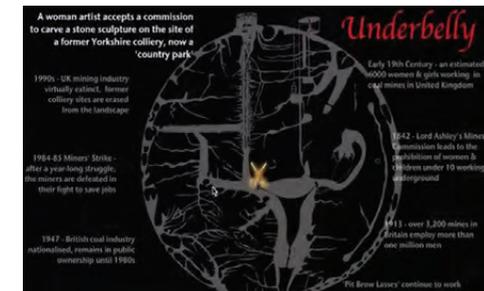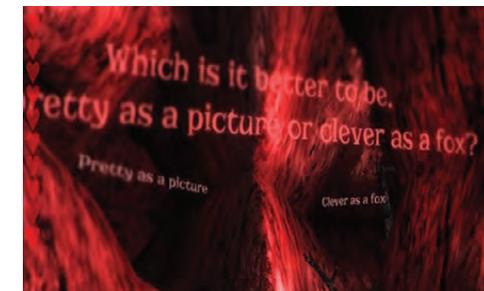

Figure 5 | *Underbelly*'s entry screen *(ABOVE)*

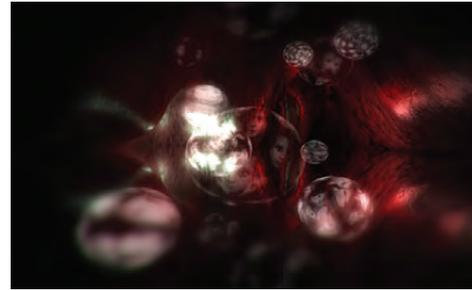**Figure 6** | Binary navigational choices in *Inkubus* *(BELOW)*

Figure 7 | Identity bubbles in *Inkubus*

may delineate or evoke the body. The body appears as voices, anatomic parts, abstractions or allegory, allowing us to read-play ourselves into these fragments and forge kinship relations with our own bodies and those of others. The parts stand for the whole, but the fragments also express a common experience of being a woman, where social pressures lead us to fixate on body parts at the expense of a more holistic sense of the mind-body relationship. These fragments can be seen in opposition to Jason Nelson's holistic yet anatomically and existentially un-fleshed skeleton avatar, which stands in a metonymic relationship to a potential post-anthropocenic humanity. In contrast, the holistic, walkable sculpture of Breeze's cyborg-narrator technologically dis- and re-embodies our posthuman subconscious via a narrative-allusive, byte-sized traversal. ×

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Acesulfame K | 2019

INTERACTIVE POEM

JASON NELSON

The work of American-Australian digital artist Jason Nelson confronts us with an abstract and puzzling array of avant-garde surrealist game art, where play becomes a paradoxical criticism of its own egocentrism, formulaicity, and obsession with stylized, hypersexualized bodies.

...like it never left.

The Thing Tableau | 2019

3D/VR SCULPTURE

MEZ BREEZE

The Thing Tableau is a 3D/VR work conceived and designed in virtual reality. Its' story unfolds through a digital narrative that can only be viewed online. The story references insomnia and the thoughts that can creep in and recur when in that twilightish state. The project is designed for audience interaction through click-based annotations, and can be viewed in multiple ways: as a text-based narrative that unpacks when an audience member interacts with it, or as an automated playthrough, or with no text at all but simply as a 3D or virtual reality based sculpture.

DYSCORPIA.

⊗ **Inkubus** │ 2013

UNITY GAME

CHRISTINE WILKS

As a feminist digital writer and game devel-
oper, Christine Wilks focuses on the female
body across time and age. Her female bodies
reflect the gender biases and constraints
of their historical and social environments
— from 19th century coal mining contexts
to the fashion dictates of the 20TH century
and contemporary, appearance-based
cyberbullying.

DYSCORPIA.

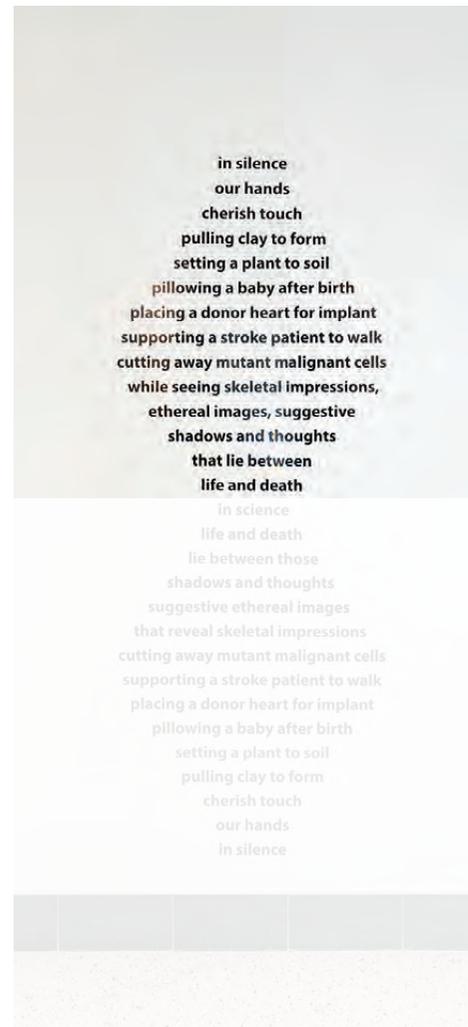## Narrative World-building in Datafication and Bioethics

MEGAN PERRAM

How can the human body come to (de)materialize in the digital space? What kinds of worlds can be imagined when the boundaries of the human body are expanded into cyberspace? How are conceptualizations of the self, community, state governmentality, or bioethics distorted and reconfigured in the mass of digital datafication? These are the questions explored in *Stories in Flesh and Bytes*, where artworks incorporate varied technologies including digital fictions, interactive story games and world-building, open-world video games, and abstract composition of medical images.

Flesh and Bytes turns to multimedia to evoke critical responses to larger considerations and anxieties surrounding the human species' plunge into the digital (bio)sphere. These anxieties are particularly attuned to concerns of who is gaining access to these technologies, which groups are being denied entry, and recognizing emerging exploitations. There is enthusiasm in the potential of embracing digital embodiment, however there is rightfully apprehension over the loose surveillance boundaries of these developing technologies. As the works in this exhibit

grapple with these fears, they all begin to converge at a single intersection: by igniting a conversation about what it means to preserve narrativity in a changing world. Having the opportunity to share our story is powerful. Storytelling in the digital sphere becomes akin to currency, and as the art in this exhibit shows, we must pay attention to authorship.

Walking beneath an enclosure of shear draping hanging from the ceiling, you become suddenly bound by illuminated, layered images of body parts: veins, skin, bones. You look up and see your distorted reflection bouncing from a mirrored, round surface. Your appearance is unrecognizable. Sheltered by all four sides, you stand at the heart of a tent upon which looms images of the body. You look at your feet and notice the glare of silver text printed on the floor, an echo of a poem displayed on the adjacent wall.

An excerpt which forms one end of the hourglass-shaped verse reads:

in silence
our hands
cherish touch
pulling clay to form
setting a plant to soil
pillowing a baby after birth
placing a donor heart for implant
supporting a stroke patient to walk
cutting away mutant malignant cells
while seeing skeletal impressions,
ethereal images, suggestive
shadows and thoughts
that lie between
life and death
in science
life and death
lie between those
shadows and thoughts
suggestive ethereal images
that reveal skeletal impressions
cutting away mutant malignant cells
supporting a stroke patient to walk
placing a donor heart for implant
pillowing a baby after birth
setting a plant to soil
pulling clay to form
cherish touch
our hands
in silence

The poem subverts a tendency to hierarchize. With a nonlinear structure, multiple ways to read appear: beginning at the bottom and moving upwards or each line at random. However, in any order, a theme emerges around the nurturing, generative capacity of the human body to affectively shape the bodies and objects around us.

Liz Ingram and Bernd Hildebrandt's piece entitled *Light Touch* evokes Susan Sontag's metaphor of bodies passing between "the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick." By layering medical images of CT, MRI, and PET scans, Ingram and Hildebrandt open a vantage point to ourselves as fragmented. The artists build the images with layered iterations of the body using new computer-generated information. In my experiencing *Light Touch*, I began to question the privilege in medical voyeurism: how is it beautiful to see ourselves this way? How is it horrific? Our self as a cybernetic organism is knit together beneath the rendering of these medical image-taking devices. Our likeness passed around to various experts and physicians who point to ailments bubbling below our skin in dark spaces we cannot see.

There is an incredible vulnerability and risk that accompanies medical admission into our flesh, particularly for people experiencing systemic subjugation. Despite all the ways in which various encounters with the healthcare system call on patients to forfeit the history of their bodies, *Light Touch* provokes a new assemblage of agency. Standing inside the tent of draping, my body in a sea of body parts, I cannot help but feel a sense of defiance. I hear a call for using these medical images as narrative empowerment, as a way to tell and retell our own story of the self.

Across the space in the corner of the exhibition room, a desolate, rocky landscape is projected faintly on a white screen. Below the projection, a narrowing collection of 3D-printed mountain peaks draws the viewer from the screen to a virtual reality visor at the end of the table. Entering into the simulated world of Daniel Evans' *Archipelago* proves to be a remarkable, posthuman experience. Evans incorporates the use of sculpture and interactive digital environments to design the terrain of *Archipelago*, produced wholly from data obtained by a single Google location tracking account. Inspired by open-

world video games, Evans' work mirrors the speculative world-building of American science-fiction author Ursula Le Guin, as well as folktales of Scotland and the Faroe Islands which center on the hybrid aquatic-human creature known as *Selkie*. In the world of *Archipelago*, the reader/player assumes a subjectivity situated at the sensory threshold. Intersecting the notion of mythos with technology, readers/players traffic perception across bodies of water and land while Google's location tracking data falls like gentle rain from the sky. Moving from one island to the next triggers a digitized female voice treading different versions of the *Selkie* myth. *Archipelago* challenges us to consider the jurisdiction of data collection and analytics, that assume a neoliberal capitalist exploitation enacted on the body as a cybernetic traveler. Considering the astronomic amount of information corporations extract from our assemblages of flesh, as proven in the intricacies of the *Archipelago* world, this virtual space also becomes the backdrop of a new telling of a story. This story holds the cybernetic weaving of our bodies with the digital as a richly generative opportunity, if nurtured with liberation in mind.

Light Touch and *Archipelago* both evoke similar fears: a fear of meshing, a fear of amalgamation, and a fear of monstrosity. Indeed, there is a lot to lose. The works in *Flesh and Bytes* call on the viewer to consider the ways in which the subjugation of particular bodies may be heightened through the digitization of flesh. Once we become wholly fused with the digital, what will prevent the pure commodification of bodies in a bioethical or datafication sense? Our dystopia emerges when the virtual movements of our bodies in digital space and the biomedical cyborgian destiny of our ill bodies become monetized in neoliberalism. This raises important questions surrounding state or corporate ownership over digital body parts, or citizenship status as irrevocable consent to digital surveillance by corporations. In particular, we must consider who will profit from our body's kinship with the digital and who will be violated.

However, as we grow into the cybernetic organism it is likely we will confront potential for generative opportunities. Our next effort must be supporting strategies that program liberation into computer design software

so that our forthcoming digital tools might intuitively challenge our human biases. When we frame the digital as an institution existing inside and participating in a socio-politically oppressive landscape, we can begin the conversation about Becoming-cyborg as a rhizomatic emancipation. Ultimately, *Light Touch* and *Archipelago* show that posthumanism is an ontological opportunity to change the foundations of our reality and something we should (cautiously) yearn for: to bend our flesh towards the bytes. ×

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Light Touch | 2019

Light Touch: Self Portrait | 2019

DIGITAL INKJET TO SILK HABOTAI WITH REACTIVE DYE, ALUMINUM RODS, ROPE, PIANO WIRE, STEEL HOOP, STYROFOAM BALL, DRAPERY WEIGHTS, MIRROR VINYL FILM FLOOR GRAPHICS & VIDEO ANIMATION PROJECTION ON SILK FROM PERSONAL CT AND MRI SCANS

LIZ INGRAM & BERND HILDEBRANDT

Light Touch is an exploration of the human body as matter and as light. A hanging tent-like enclosure, made of silk fabric, invites the viewer into a quiet space to contemplate our changing visions of what it means to be human and how we understand the body differently today. Using combinations of printed photographic images of hands and arms gently supporting MRI scans of a head, combined with a poetic text, the work is at once caring and unsettling. The accompanying video projection on silk, *Light Touch: Self Portrait*, portrays diagnostic CT and MRI scans as an animation, reflecting on how it feels to view one's body as traces of light (disembodied) during a personal journey with lung cancer.

DYSCORPIA

DYSCORPIA.
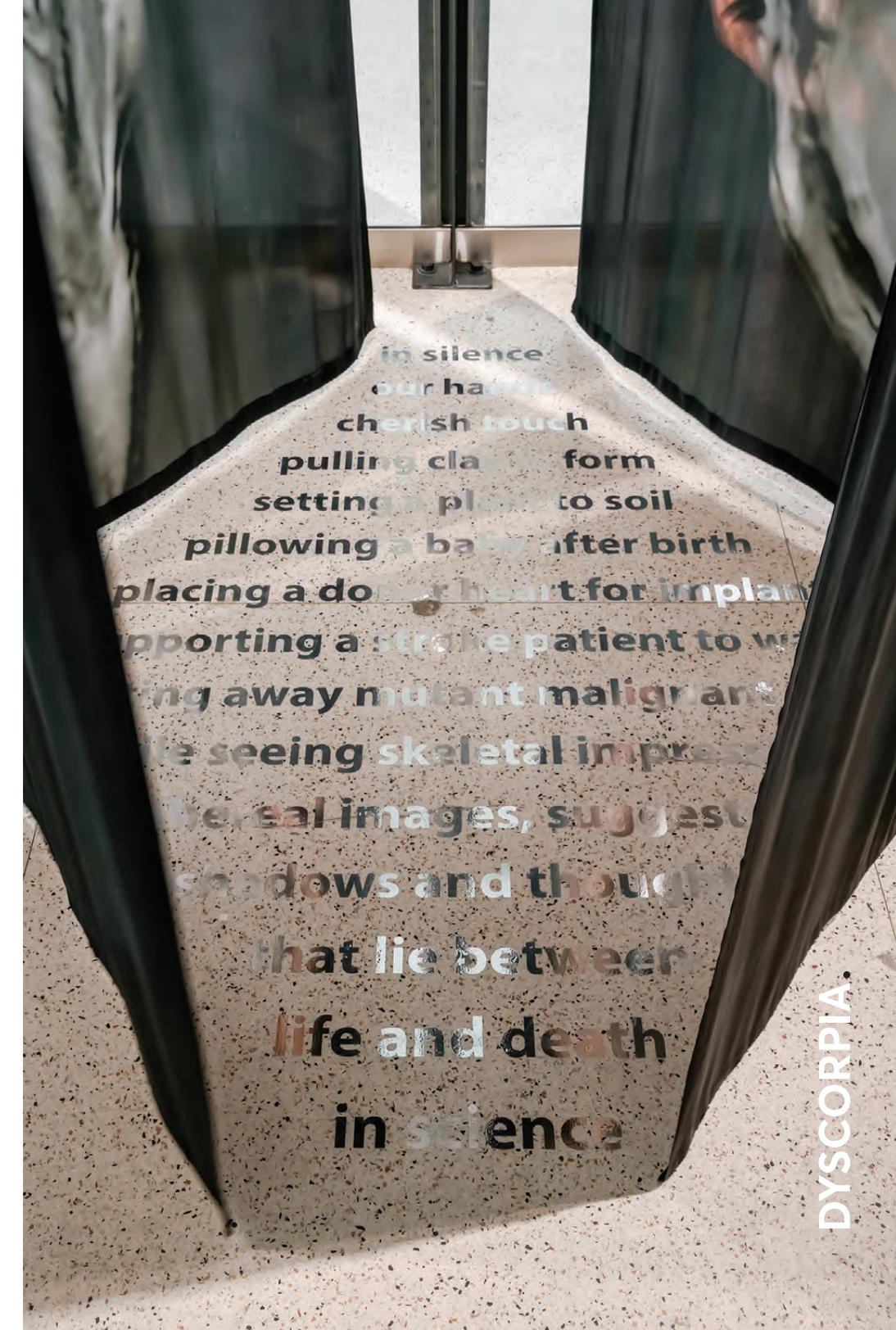
Archipelago | 2019

VIRTUAL REALITY, ACRYLIC, 3D PRINTED PLA

DANIEL EVANS

Daniel Evans' *Archipelago* is a multimodal creative project encompassing sculpture, print, and interactive digital environments. Inspired by the speculative world-building of Ursula Le Guin, Selkie folktales of Scotland and the Faroe Islands, and open-world videogames, *Archipelago* presents an environment generated entirely from the location tracking data of a single Google user account. In doing so, the project negotiates the double-bind of data collection and analytics, exploring both the generative possibilities afforded by these technologies and methods, and their potential abuses as tools of power and control.

Without Body = Within Becoming

JESSICA LACCETTI

Digital fictions have a way of bringing the body into the world of the creative work. What is fiction or art without a body, without the body? Thinking specifically of the digital works in *Dyscorpia*, they require, to some extent, interaction or at least the gaze of a body. However, the works themselves also want to eschew the body; to hide it, to appear only via the interaction that appears on the screen or through the installation.

How do we constitute experience without the body? Where is the body in relation to story; to story development? Readers and gallery visitors are not only required to make their way through physical exhibits or click a mouse to fabricate the narrative. Rather, there are narratives looking for the body. Thinking of his recent (March 2019) creation on Instagram, Liam Nikuro explains:

> I'm...a virtual human created using CG. I don't actually exist in real life but I'm hoping that the creative things I produce can entertain and give a little hope to real people all over the world. I want to be able to create something for the good of this world.[1]

Now we have a narrative in search of bodies to be entertained. And also, intertwined with the search for the body of others, is the search for a voice. As a computer graphics (CG) creation, Liam does not have a voice. There is a writer, a creator of Liam's Instagram and Twitter feed but no "real" voice. "We're currently searching for an attractive voice," says Liam's creator, Hirokuni Genie Miyaji, the CEO of 1sec Inc, (a "virtual human planning and production" company).[2]

The body intersects story; it is story. This is multi-mimetic reading in practice.[3] If transliteracy is a transformative perspective that supports the role of multiple literacies in a work, then multi-mimetic reading is these multiple modes, the meaning-making process itself, and all of it grounded in the becoming self. This is how these stories of *Flesh & Bytes* leave the reader changed; this is the transformational work of the body participating in the design/reading/making of each narrative. The body here is the meaning-maker; making herself within and outside of the digital and interactive narratives. The subjectivity that is threaded together is always new, always a representation, and always becoming. A new

reading, a new instance of interaction allows the body and, therefore, subjectivity, to be remade and replayed. As noted by Bell et al., "digital fiction isn't just "read", or "watched", or "played" - it is "experienced," and these experiences have to be seen as all-encompassing phenomenological processes."[4]

These are not Michel Foucault's "subjugated knowledges,"[5] but rather, in Donna Haraway's words, "situated knowledge" where the "vision is better."[6] The intersections among the body, the work, the act of participating in the reading are not inadequate because of their unreliability but become disruptive and offer new ways of seeing narrative and its creation. Just as *Eve 2050*'s gold mask doesn't quite fit, the construction and interpretation of ourselves, our bodies, our works come into new ways of creation and revision. The multiple structures of these kinds of works encourage becoming identities and multiple subjectivities that seep into our lived experience. Through the tensions and contradictions in these reformations and representations, space is open to rail against a singular or static self/body. As one of my digital narrative students explained, the

process of meaning making, of situating the body is "about becoming more aware of myself and of others and how they read the world." ✕

FOOTNOTES

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THEME 3
STORIES IN FLESH AND BYTES

DYSCORPIA

JESSICA LACCETTI
WITHOUT BODY = WITHIN BECOMING