

The Cyborg Epiphany of Pascal Dufaux

There is the old adage, “better living through chemistry”. It was a marketing tactic to change the minds of post-war consumers, naturalizing them to the integration of science and big business. And indeed it succeeded. We live in quite the artificial landscape these days, made of polymers and pharmaceutical cocktails and digital projections. And while the wise are rightfully wary of what is motivating the embedded level of technological mediation in our culture, we have also arrived at an unprecedented matrix of organic and synthetic ecology. The virtue of rapid technological development has been the extension of the human condition.

When considering the installation work of Pascal Dufaux one could adapt this adage to, “better sensing through *cybernetics*”. The comprehensive study of systems, cybernetics is a term and philosophy coined by Norbert Wiener in the 1940s. A cybernetic technology is one that deals in units of information and the now ubiquitous concept of feedback—where the thing affected is also involved in its own manipulation by way of a circuit or *loop*. Using information as a kind of material, cybernetics seeks to augment the individual with a collective sense of mind, body and even spirit.

In Dufaux’s *The Cosmos In Which We Are*, the viewer’s perceptions of space and time are altered and augmented through the ‘eyes’ of *Kinetic video sculpture #2*. A brand of what Dufaux deems his “vision machines”, *Kinetic videos sculpture #2* is a surprisingly pleasant amalgamate of lenses, legs and fluorescent lights. Resembling a glowing space probe, it sits centred in the darkened gallery capturing various views of the space through its multiple cameras. This footage is then projected as a live feed onto the walls. Like the stilly nexus of a black hole, the artwork quietly fragments its surroundings into superimpositions of the immediate past.

This visual inversion also means that gallery-goers observe themselves as the subject matter of a real-time “extraterrestrial” vision—they are outside the looking glass. Not unlike the effect of *Swarm* (2013) by James Coupe, a Cronenberg-inspired installation that uses CCTV and facial profiling to ‘classify’ its onlookers, *Kinetic video sculpture #2* provokes important questions about the influence of surveillance technologies on the perception of our bodies. Although Dufaux’s piece does not harbour the dark undertones of Coupe’s Cronenberg homage, the recognition of our own image, disembodied by the projected image, disrupts our physicality. Space becomes *metaphysical*, if only for an instant. And, much like Donna Haraway’s legendary dream of the cyborg, such instants free us from materiality: We become less attached to our bodies, even ‘alien’ to ourselves.

It comes as no surprise then, that the artist cites NASA footage of the Mars landscape as a major inspiration for this project. Upon seeing the pictures, “the whole of the cosmos and its extraordinary phenomena suddenly entered [his] field of quotidian representation.” (Dufaux) The alien visions offered by his work are deeply rooted then in its origins as both transcendental moment and technological achievement. The Mission Mars Explorer that transmitted these breathtaking images was a conduit in a cybernetic system, a feedback loop of visual information. Appropriately, this symbiotic gesture remains embedded in the experience of his work. *The Cosmos In Which We Are* is the dutiful recreation of Dufaux’s cyborg epiphany. But decidedly, the cameras are not heaven-bound this time—they are firmly pointed back on us. The cosmos in question is of the micro, interior scale. Dufaux is daring us to look closer at our own surroundings and ourselves. His work encourages us to stare sideways into the here and now, and, with any luck, catch a poetic glimpse of the present.

- Zach Pearl, 2014.

Works Cited

Dufaux, Pascal. "The Cosmos In Which We Are _ A Sculptural Kinetic Video Installation". 2013. pp. 1.