**The Hypnotised Machine**

Francesca Zappia

When I was a child, I was hypnotised by my dentist. The hypnosis went like this:

“Dentist George W. Fairfull Smith attached 4 balls of cotton wool onto the length of rotary dental drill. These, he said, were three little rabbits, being chased by a hungry fox. Needing a place to hide, the rabbits wondered if I would allow him to drill a hole in my tooth, into which they could run. Fairfull Smith would then plug that dental burrow quickly, before the fox had a chance to catch up. I agreed straight away. I watched the cotton wool rabbits go round and around, while Fairfull Smith gave me a filling, without anesthetic. The whole thing was filmed by a BBC camera crew and broadcast on TV in 1982.”

– Jane Topping

Visualise these little rabbits and the fox. They are going around and around, caught in an endless loop. The more your vision tries to catch them, the less you distinguish their form. They become an enormous spiral. Perhaps this spiral starts to be brightly colourful. Then visual noise breaks in. Images are blurred, distorted. They mix up. You fall behind the looking glass, and you find yourself flying without gravity in space. Your image is also deformed. Is that still you? Are you someone else? Reality is never the same twice.

rabbit cotton tooth cotton rabbit

rabbit cotton tooth cotton rabbit

rabbit cotton tooth cotton rabbit

This looped, hypnotic, narrative has a sci-fi touch. It unfolds parallel worlds into the work of Glasgow-based artist Jane Topping. The hypnosis is the starter for a rhizomatic project, called Peter & nou, within which works that compose it multiply. There are videos and images, publications and prints (1), as if, for a moment, the project would try to contain (or to make sense of, perhaps) the endless amount of images that circulate in the media. And then it loses control, again.

Because [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com/) is born from Peter & nou, but also contains it. It is its component and at the same time its manifestation.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com/) is like a gigantic hypnotised machine.

But how does this machine work?

In her essay Digital Divide (2012) Claire Bishop identifies repurposing as a new creative strategy of the digital era. Post-Internet artists use existent content to create new bodies of work – “the act of repurposing aligns with procedures of reformatting and transcoding—the perpetual modulation of preexisting files” (2).

This new strategy requires that the artist now operates with the littlest creative gesture: selection. Selection becomes the manifestation of the authorship the artist applies to former contents – found texts, or objects, or images, or films. Their rearrangement and recontextualization create new meaning and original narrations.

In Art Power, philosopher Boris Groys analyses the importance of the installation in contemporary art, which “installs everything that otherwise merely circulates in our civilization. It also shows the artist’s sovereignty at work: how this sovereignty defines and practices its strategies of selection. (3)”

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com/) is a glitch in the well-oiled mechanics of the new creative gesture. It makes all things circulate again. Even more… it produces a new selection just for you, it entitles you to watch a new artwork until the time you decide to click on the elements of the page, or to refresh your browser. Then, it creates another new artwork. Over and over again.

You follow the circle and the Peter and nou links, and a new visual dimension opens to you. It’s composed of found images, audios, videoclips and snippets, the artist’s works and pieces of her research… all combined in randomly processed arrangements that create original associations. You are in a new narrative every time.

Hypnotically, you navigate this art generator and get lost in it.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com/) is the cyborg playing dice with the universe (4).

Jane Topping feeds the machine with contents, and then entrusts it to create the selection.

The hypnotised machine produces synchronicities. Those “coincidences of events in time and space meaning something more than mere chance, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer (5).

The synchronicity is the new narration, and you are caught within it.

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**1 The Peter & nou project includes the videos Peter (2014) and nou (2018). Both reference the hypnosis, while they are respectively inspired by film Blade Runner (1982, dir. Ridley Scott) and by Scottish novelist and poet Naomi Mitchison’s sci-fi book Memoirs of a Spacewoman (1962).**

**2 Claire Bishop, ‘Digital Divide’, in Artforum, sep. 2012**

**3 Boris Groys, Art Power. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008, p. 94**

**4 “God doesn’t play dice with the universe”, says Einstein.**

**“I’d rather be a cyborg than a goddess”, says Donna Haraway**

**Einstein had not reckoned with quantum mechanics. This comes to disrupt the principle of causality, intended as the relationship between cause and effect, on which Western science has always been based. Quantum mechanics rather opens towards an approach to natural phenomena and laws of the universe which only predicts the probabilities of possible outcomes. As chance was introduced in physics, artists turned towards other systems of knowledge. Conceptual artists were inspired by the I-Ching, or Book of Change, and introduced chance operations in art.**

**The cyborg, as Donna Haraway has defined it, is a hybrid of human and machine, a “creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”. See Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.**

**5 Carl Jung, ‘Foreword’, in Wilhelm, Richard, and Cary F. Baynes. The I Ching: Or, Book of Changes. New York: Pantheon Books, 1950.**

**Jane Topping** is a Scottish artist and academic, currently Lecturer on the MLitt Fine Art Practice programme at Glasgow School of Art and formally Associate Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts. Her post-net interdisciplinary practice draws from subjects including sci-fi, feminism, the archive, the screen and the life and works of writers, including Naomi Mitchison. Topping’s video, Peter, won Best PKD Short at The Fifth Annual Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival, New York, 2017.

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**Francesca Zappia,** Immaterial salon‘s guest curator, is an independent curator based in Glasgow. Her research focuses on the transmission of memory and the fabrication of new knowledge. Central to her practice is the online platform past-forward.net focuses on the Internet as a place of memory and a new system of knowledge, while putting in place collaborative practices inspired by open source. Focusing on the “spatialisation of research”, its work is materialised in the use of different formats: exhibitions, publications, online platforms, discursive forms. Francesca is a laureate of the Cnap curatorial grant, in the framework of which she published “Les Flâneuses. Copies, quotations, appropriations in the collections of the Centre national des arts plastiques”. Among her other projects: The Curator’s Workshop (CCA|Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 2020), L’intrigue se cherche dans le dénouement de son nœud (la compagnie, lieu de création, Marseille, 2018), Raoul Reynolds: A Retrospective (Scotland Street School Museum, Glasgow; La Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille, 2016) and East End Transmissions (The Pipe Factory, Glasgow, 2014). Francesca has also worked as an exhibition officer and an archivist for the FRAC Ile-de-France, the François Pinault Foundation, the Cnap), the Fonds municipal d’art contemporain de la Ville de Paris, and Vidéomuseum.

Available at: <https://immateriel.art-o-rama.fr/en/gallery/six-years> Accessed 24 August 2022