

Katrin Hochschuh and Adam Donovan

CURIOUS TAUTOPHONE – TENSOR FIELD ONTOLOGY

12 April –4 May 2024

MMC KIBLA/KiBela

Adam Donovan is an old acquaintance of ours, whom we have hosted several times at KIBLA, both in solo projects and in collaboration with others. Since he moved from Australia to Europe, it has been easier to introduce his work to the audience here, which is characterized by the integration of various media: in addition to the physical robot or device, which works according to a programmed algorithm, there is also sound and image resulting from the robot's activity and its machine "intelligence". His or their work (he has been working together with Katrin Hochschuh), is characterized by the interaction between media, which is not only highly aesthetic, but also multidimensional in the theoretical field, since, in addition to the humanistic and broader social science aspects, it is also based on psychology, physics, philosophy and art, with quite a few multidimensional twists and turns.

A complex work, like some kind of creature (which it is), it rotates, turns, moves. On the floor on which it is placed, it emits voices according to its movements, like the whirring computer codes when modems are connected, which we remember from the pioneering days of the internet. It alludes to the Rorschach sound test, and manages the projection, starting from physical and psychological components, while establishing them with technological knowledge and correlating them with individual, personal and personality traits and the social and sociological components of our lives and existence in the analogue and digital realities of the 21st century, in the age of global communication and technological interactions, platforms and media of all kinds, from which we only receive constant information about catastrophes and an apocalyptic future, from epidemics or pandemics to conflicts and wars.

Apparently, all our technological achievements are geared towards destruction, towards the destruction of nature and living beings on Earth, towards the pollution and exploitation of nature and natural resources, and towards world domination, which has given and will confer the mantle of superhumanity on a select few, making them the supreme and final arbiters of our destiny, who already have power over repression and the economy. We are waging the war of capitalism against socialism, of the savage, ultimate exploitation of us all, of the insatiable greed for profit and the total absence of any social rights, and of individualism and the fight of everyone against everyone, on the one hand, and of free, accessible healthcare, education, culture, social support, in short, of the welfare state and of a social, cohesive approach to communities and to solving various problems and difficulties, on the other hand.

Today, technology is used primarily as escapism, as an escape from reality and as the best breeding ground for manipulation. But the ideas and visions of robots are not new. The word

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Opening hours: Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“robot” was first used by the Czech writer and screenwriter Karel Čapek in his play *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*, which premiered in 1921. In 1933, he explained that the word was invented by his brother Josef, who had originally wanted to call the robots “labors”. Čapek was one of the most influential Czech writers and one of the greatest and most visionary people of the 20th century. Above all, he is considered a pioneer of the classic European sci-fi movement, which focuses on sociological rather than technological topics. Aware of the dangers of Nazism and dictatorships, the ethical and sociological aspects of the rapid advance of technology, mass production, nuclear weapons, robots, etc. are frequent topics in his works. Similar ideas about human automatons go back (at least) to antiquity, when the Greek epic *Argonauts* (written around 300 BC) describes a bronze automaton Talos, which was conceived by Hephaestus, thus making him the first known mythological programmer and creator of a mechanical autonomous titanic humanoid. Later, in the early 19th century, in 1818, Mary Shelley made an artificially created, thinking biological creature the main character of her novel *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, and in 1863, the English novelist and critic Samuel Butler wrote a short story under a pseudonym, *Darwin among the Machines*, which was later expanded in Chapter 3 of the novella “Erewhon”, *The Book of Machines*. Butler describes the danger of conscious machines and their self-propagation, which is intended as a satire on Darwin’s theory of evolution. In the 20th century, Karel Čapek picked up on this and called autonomous machines “robots”.

In 1924, German writer Thea von Harbou and her husband Fritz Lang wrote the screenplay for the legendary and iconic film *Metropolis* (1927), directed by Fritz Lang, in which she portrays Futura, created by a mad scientist, as a robotic replica of a human being opposite the pure-hearted worker Maria. *Metropolis* is a dystopian film set in a futuristic urban environment and addresses the divide between the working class and the managers in capitalism, a common motif in science fiction during the height of the Weimar Republic when the film was made. In 1940, Isaac Asimov wrote the short story *Robbie* about a robot with artificial intelligence. We can continue with Arthur C. Clarke’s 2001 *Odyssey* and the fatal computer HAL9000 to today’s real robots and machine learning or machine memory or machine storage.

Technological development is nevertheless clearly the opposite of human development. Although the question arises as to what extent our situation can even be perceived as “development”, as technology offers further opportunities for the total destruction of the planet and our lives, while we are increasingly manipulated, misinformed and dumbed down by the media: we are just staring at big and small screens and losing ourselves in digital worlds of inter-networked supercomputers and other clutter, aimed primarily at our mental and physical destruction, when those in power have already succeeded in collapsing the society and the social. It is morbid to think today of the development of technology and of possible “self-aware machines” and miraculous algorithms that will create forms of “artificial life” while we observe the general destruction and devastation. Development is not inverse and is therefore also an oxymoron, because tomorrow or the day after tomorrow we may be gone.

– Peter Tomaž Dobrila

A field of light moving simultaneously with a beam of sound, both emanated from one source, a shiny metal tripod robot that is spinning a speaker around two axes. Like a swirl of sound and light the visitor is drawn into the piece with all his senses and finds himself enveloped in a transforming spatial sound sculpture. A moment of precious intimacy is created and a door between the subconsciousness of the visitor and the robotic machine is opened, both aurally and visually. The decidedly non-anthropomorphic robot is the source of this transcendent

atmosphere and shows that the Curious Tautophone is as much an apparatus of art as it is a tool for music and an instrument for psychology and physics.

The name Tautophone derives from projective auditory tests developed by psychologists Skinner, Rosenzweig and Shakow that can be understood as a form of Auditory Rorschach Inkblot where a sequence of vowels was repeated in an attempt to trigger latent speech hidden in the listener’s psyche. The curious aspect of the name induces a sense of the Tautophone’s motivation to explore its surroundings and to learn. It reflects the human capability to feel attachment to inanimate objects as already demonstrated by psychologists Heider and Simmel in 1944 and speculates about the human desire to give birth to new forms of life as part of a subconscious reasoning surrounding mortality. Tensor fields expresses the mathematical representation of the visual environment creating a different kind of adapting and continually changing set of inkblots of light. Using the physical phenomena of directional sound as a medium of robotic expression, the unusual, even uncanny nature of hearing these auditory hallucinations opens the observer’s perceptual engine and intensifies the multitude of subliminal stimuli.

BIOGRAPHY

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Katrin Hochschuh and Adam Donovan met in 2016 through a mutual network of artists, architects and researchers in Zürich, Switzerland.

Katrin Hochschuh is a media artist with an architectural background in digital design and robotic fabrication. Her artwork connects the digital and the physical realm, exploring robotic behaviours, algorithms and interactivity, always seeing the human, his perception and social implications of technology at the center of her work. Writing her own software allows her to connect deeply with technology and to implement her ideas and concepts without constraints.

Adam Donovan is a hybrid media artist working in the area of science, art and technology. His artwork incorporates nonlinear acoustics, robotic sculpture, game engine environments and camera tracking. Donovan pioneered work into ultrasonics and acoustic beamforming as an artist in residence with the Defense science and technology organization in Australia since 2001. He explores the intangible aspects of physics to amplify their effects creating new mediums and experiences. Specializing in designing custom hardware and his own electronic circuits his creativity has no bounds in creating new robotic companions.

As a duo **Hochschuh and Donovan** amplify their strengths of working in software and hardware, combining matter and information in their unexpected artworks. Since first prototypes in 2018 during their EMARE residency with Kontejner in Zagreb, they research and develop their ongoing project *Empathy Swarm* which premiered as a swarm of 50 robots at QUT Art Museum in Brisbane in 2019. At the intersection of technical and conceptual development, they showed different iterations as Performative Installation at WRO Media Art Biennale 2019 and HEK’s Oslo Night 2020.