

ANN LISLEGAARD

EXTINCT

TYRELL

*Like you said, Mr. Deckard,
a machine can be a hazard.*

2050 is the year a recent Australian scientific report predicts the scenario for the end of human civilization. Now, let us imagine that we have reached the middle of this century and meditate on the state of human extinction, robotics, and nature justice. Ann Lislegaard's owl belongs to this future. It is a jarring crossbreed of an imaginary species resilient to adapt to the disruptive and accelerated effects provoked by digital technologies that have transformed the structures of nature and society. To the artist it represents an oracle, the bearer of a prophetic message, but the oversized bird can also be interpreted as an automaton created by a techno-taxidermist, the product of a mechanic hazard entangled in relentless logics of algorithmic processes. It is a powerful reminder that if human activity continues to jeopardize nature as it has done for the past five hundred years leading to the extinction of five hundred species of animals, we will be left to navigate our world in total blindness.

Taking cues from American author Philip K. Dick's allegorical description of the owl, Lislegaard appropriates the symbol to address the blindness of human perception and ambition, the futility in trying to understand. Set against a colorful background which is the twilight hour when crepuscular animals – among them owls – come out to hunt, the bird is mastered by an algorithm that determines its movements and speaking in tongues. The storytelling for earthly survival is uttered in digitally processed imagery and languages made of accents, rhythms, intonations, pauses, breaks that prevent us to understand its story.

Lislegaard deploys the SF genre (string figures, science fact, science fiction, speculative fabulation), narratives of apocalypse or salvation that are no longer just a hypothesis but a fact. When recognizable, the animal's language states the extermination of machines – whether mechanical or digital – as opposed to what we would expect: the denunciation of all forms of cynical, well-funded, exterminationist postcapitalism by Homo deus (to adopt the historian Yuval Noah Harari) responsible for the collapse of nature's biodiverse systems, as well as of human and non-human displacement and homelessness.

"[...] döhp\döhp\döhp [...]" gender on distant planets / echo echo [...]" it voices out.

The owl is a feminist speaking in tongue. As a non-human feminist, it deploys feminist theory to address the gendered "neutrality" of technology and overcome gender and multispecies differences. The work highlights the artist's interest in how digital spaces can break down social constructions around gender roles, sexuality and ethnicity. Lislegaard's life-long experimentation in and entanglement with the age of digitalization forces us to pause from our eroding sense of reality, reversing all bleak prospects.

by

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