

SCHINKEL PAVILLON e. V. AUSSTELLUNGSRAUM FÜR ZEITGENÖSSISCHE SKULPTUR

Goshka Macuga

Now this, is this the end...the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end? (part 2)
July 9 – September 18, 2016

Inside Schinkel Pavillon's octagon sits an android of male appearance entitled 'To the Son of Man Who Ate the Scroll' (2016). A hybrid between machine and organism, it resembles a human being in physiognomy and behaviour. In its speech directed at the incoming audience, the android links social realities and fictions. According to Donna Haraway, social reality – meaning lived social relations – is “our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction”.¹ The android's recited words, presented by Goshka Macuga, operate within such a construction and fiction: it is a speech about the beginning and end of human existence, a plea to be humane while at the same time to overcome being human. Via rhetoric and mnemonics, the android discusses productions of knowledge and culture. In this way, it leads us through human history and its technical, philosophical and inter-cultural developments and achievements. Its statements revolve around the human being in its extremes between creation, love, peace, unity – faith – fear, aggression and total destruction through terror and war, as well as global collapse.

In the second part of her double exhibition, 'Now this, is this the end...the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end? (Part 2)', Goshka Macuga focuses on the relationship between human beings and technology. The android works as an interface between a narrative of artificiality and the human perspective. The artist (born 1967 in Warsaw, lives and works in London) prioritises the generation of knowledge through language, rhetoric and intellectual exchange as a tool of human cognition in her work. In both exhibitions at pavillon, the overcoming of the human body through work on artificial memory and artificial intelligence is a topic that the artist negotiates and puts up for discussion. The first part of the exhibition implies – among reflections on beginning and end – the course of time as a factor as well as materiality within the production of knowledge and within knowledge, engineering. While in the first part Macuga focused on the organisation, operability and loss of knowledge, the second part emphasises the production of cognition.

The android's monologue is based on quotes from science, politics, film and literature; also from theoreticians represented in the first part of Goshka Macuga's installation: 'International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation' (2016): sculptural replicas of scientists and activists's heads which Macuga had brought into silent dialogue via metal rods as free-standing bronze sculptures in a molecular conversation cluster. With the work 'To the Son of Man Who Ate the Scroll' (2016), this polyphonic, fictional discourse transitions now into a conceptually reiterating monologue by the android.

The humanoid robot's speech (Geminoid HI-2) at first sounds technical in its structure. But the more the words change from a stereotypical reproduction of historical facts to formulations on the human condition and its perspectives, the more poetic and individual the android's statements become. Amidst its programming it proclaims a world-changing fiction. In its words, pre-formulated by humans, reproduction and imagination come together synthesising a reproduced past and envisaged future. Finally, it not only questions the dehumanization of robots but also that of humans, asking the viewer: “Who was I?”

Goshka Macuga collaborated with the artist Patrick Tresset in the installation 'Before the Beginning and After the End, Beginning' (2016), presented in the Schinkel Klaus. Ballpen drawings by a robot developed by Tresset, the 'Paul-n' system, are exhibited on a scroll of paper on top of a long factory table. In their progression they show the unfolding of life, beginning with matter and planetary constellations, through the emergence of plants and animals as well as the evolution of humanity, up to different forms of belief, of generation of knowledge and of the protection of ideas and data: from Big Bang via Adam and Eve to now.

¹ Donna Haraway, A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century, in: Socialist Review, 80, 1985, S. 65–108

These robot-programmed drawings are complemented by a selection of works by fellow artists, which in relation to the drawings function as human artefacts. A nest by Björn Braun 'Untitled (Zebrafinkennest)' (2015) or the bones of 'These are Our Bones, Grown then Cloaked' (2012), a work by David Thorpe, almost appear like relics in contrast to the robotic recordings. The robot's drawings as well as the android's speech contain a gesture of "appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other". A reflection on the existence in-between man and machine.

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