

Text on Practice

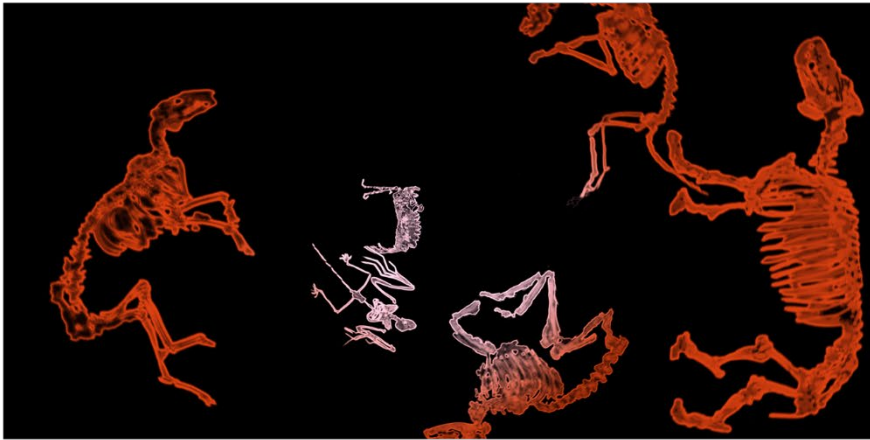
11th May 2022
LB1 Trimester 2
Aitan Ebrahimoff

Regurgitations

Using moving image as my medium, I turn text into scripts into constructed videos. I direct, perform, capture, and edit soundbites, anecdotes, essays, and a host of other samples into new works. I call this process Regurgitations.

How and when does a text become narrative? In *AVP (2022)* a mega collage of a thousand lizards is underscored by a remix of climate conference speeches. The content is thus restaged and recontextualized. To what extent can viewers generate new meanings from existing text? For the remaining duration of this text I will analyze *AVP (2022)* in relation to my practice and its wider cultural context.

Working as both a commercial director and a video artist, my interests are conflicted. This clash is central to Regurgitations, with its interest in the mechanisms of the attention economy. This chasm is addressed in *OOO (2020)* where I recount the labor demands of my former media employer while meditating on domesticity and ritual sacrifice. This video also plays a role in describing the next chapter of Regurgitations: Purge. This point of departure follows a Duchampian reflex whereby “the definition—and thus also the method of the work of art is determined again and again during the artistic process.” (Slager, 2015, p28).



AvP

year, 2022
dir. Aitan Ebrahimoff
film still
05:00, single-channel, color
2k video

AvP (2022) combines different image-making techniques, including machine learning GANs; line drawn animal fossils; and footage of the Kennemerduinen nature reserve. This visual assemblage is underscored by a selection of activist speeches made at climate conferences from the 1980s to the present day. The speeches include Autumn Peltier (2018) UN General Assembly; Hilda Flavia Nakabuye (2019) C40 World Mayors Summit; and Severn Cullis Suzuki (1992) Earth Summit. I gathered the texts from Youtube and spliced them together into one speech performed by a voiceover.

During my research I was struck by the position of the activist in institutional settings. Is their position tokenistic? The archetype of the Young Female Activist has been re-performing the same role since the 1980s without initiating a major shift in our response to the climate emergency. I began to question whether her role has been *HyperNormalised* (Curtis, 2016). Do we no longer question her presence? Is the performative falsehood accepted as reality? It felt appropriate for the voiceover in *AvP* (2022) to adopt an apathetic register, to evoke the listless feeling of performing to a disinterested political elite.

I worked with a dataset of lizard imagery swiped from Google to create textural, reptilian collages. Why lizards? I'm interested in points of slippage. For instance, my short film *Join O* (2021) operates at the fluid intersection between New Age religion and branding. The lizard occupies an in-between space: at once an endangered species and, according to the Lizard People conspiracy, a symbol for elitist power. I came to realize the predatorial lizard elite are a metaphor for the Jews. Lizard People is a re-hash of former antisemitic ideologies, as outlined in inflammatory texts such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), where "beneath the chaos of the market, the degradation of morals, and so on, there is the purposeful strategy of the Jewish plot" (Zizek, 2001, p. 214). As a Jew I realized I must be a lizard.



Join O

year, 2021
dir. Aitan Ebrahimoff
film still
03:03, single-channel, color
2k video

As a lizard, I decided I didn't want to be vilified. I wanted to be part of an ecosystem with other critters "to create, to fabulate, in order not to despair." (Haraway, 2021, p130) I wanted to decenter the human, to shift the gaze, to undermine our supremacy. "The idea of human prey threatens the dualistic vision of human mastery in which we humans manipulate nature from outside, as predators but never prey." (Plumwood, 2000) Using a stereoscopic split-screen effect, I mimicked how a lizard might see through independent eye sockets. I combined the reptilian machine learning collages with line drawings of animal fossils, for a "fossil is not merely a being that once lived, but one that is still alive,

asleep in its form.” (Bachelard, 1958, p132) All these beings could inhabit the Kennemerduinen, the landscape and physical loci of the film.

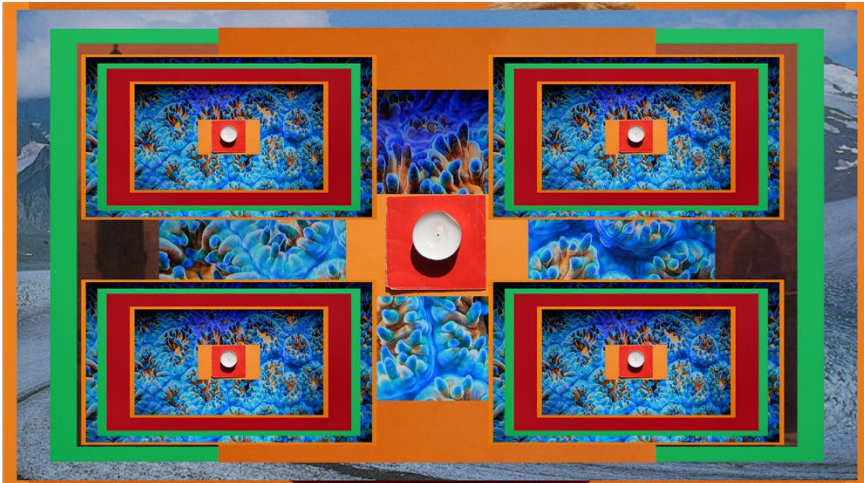
For some viewers the apathetic tone of the voiceover is perceived as cynical, as if mocking climate activism. The deadpan irony is intentional, given how climate activists are used in political settings as “proxies” (Steyerl, 2014) to sugarcoat the climate catastrophe. But I also sought to echo their frustrations. The ongoing challenge of artistic production is delving into research without alienating audiences. I don’t want to simplify the reality we live in, but I wish to create productive ambiguity.

Purge

This is a turning point. If *Regurgitations* de-centers the human or meditates on our relationship with the "more than human" (Haraway, 2021), *Purge* is a return to the flesh. Eating, drinking, ingesting, and consuming, the ritual of feasting is central to my kin. It is a site of slippage, fat, and warmth. But it drags with it fragility, vulnerability, a yearning to escape the confines of the body by expanding its borders.

By starving or overloading the internal organs, feasting and fasting overlaps with Cronenberg's (1983) body horror and Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' in which "bodies [are] like screens through which will-power and relinquished will-power pass." (1978, p97). If *Regurgitations* is about reperforming text, restaging media, or inventing avatars, *Purge* comes from the gut. As a bodily process, it involves exporting inputs with the addition of the host's saliva, fat cells, DNA and so on. Culture shapes experience but it is also embodied. *Purge*, the next chapter in my practice, relates to exorcising deeply embedded body memory.

Whereas *Regurgitations* relied on single .mov files where text, image, and sound are unified, *Purge* invites the viewer to physically step into a deconstructed film; a space where text, image and sound are disjointed but flow rhythmically together. *Regurgitations* is concerned with masks, surfaces, re-performing reality through uncanny replicants. *Purge* is a way to go beneath the surface to the intestinal, to the heart, to the kidneys.



OOO

year, 2020
dir. Aitan Ebrahimoff
film still
01:51, single-channel, color
hd video

OOO (2020) encapsulates the potentialities of both *Regurgitations* and *Purge*. Taking self-isolation as the starting point it is revealed that there's a deity in my house that needs feeding. The text for the video is ripped from personal anecdotes, Jung's 'Liber Novus' (2009), and meditations on human sacrifice and ritual feeding. I act as a vacant avatar, an uncanny vessel uttering the text during the performance. The video dips in and out of present/past, personal/alien, real/unreal, swinging between matter and memory. The now-future is central to *Regurgitations*. The now-past is *Purge*.

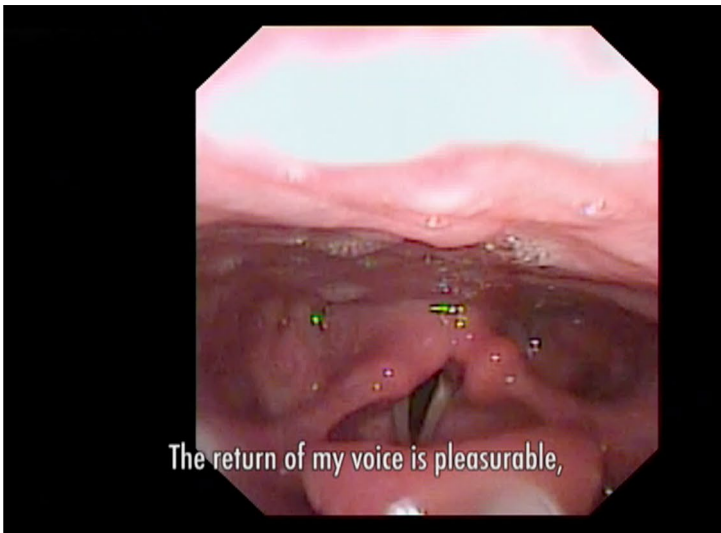
As I research decolonial theory and practice, notably through Laura Millan's intensive decolonial workshop, I'm starting to consider my migrant history and how trauma seeps into our bodies. I'm interested in a new intersection: the relationship between the stomach, food, ingestion, and the hunger created by a history of displacement. Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) research on how to alleviate trauma through language and mindbody practices - such as deep-tissue massage, meditation, and dance - is a helpful starting point in considering how to relate and represent the experiences of previous generations, now ghosts. How do I relate to the turbulent histories of my ancestors? To what extent might I exoticize my own heritage, creating mythologies in place of realities? My grandparents were exiled from their homes under nationalist and fascist regimes,

both in Eastern Europe and Iran. I don't wish to literally translate these materials but explore them in relation to my own subjectivity. This is a first-person point of view archival experiment.

Situating

Regurgitations and Purge are pipelines to help funnel my artistic research. They inform one another, but have key concerns and identities of their own, as well as existing in different artistic and academic contexts.

Regurgitations is concerned with text; how to gather, manipulate and use it as a tool to restage media. As an artistic direction, it is inspired by such works as Richard Serra's seminal video *Television Delivers People* (1973); Ryan Trecartin's absurdist *Site Visit* (2014); Lynn Hershman Leeson's (1995) multiple-identity video confessionals; and Hito Steyerl's (2014) video installation *Liquidity Inc.* which combines the language of commerce with mystical soundbites from Bruce Lee. Regurgitations is an archaeology of the near future, using post internet materials to uncover observations about contemporary humanity.



*i turn over the pictures of
my voice in my head*

year, 2009
dir. Valie Export
film still
12:00, single-channel, color
4:3 video

Purge is an anthropology of yesterday using first-hand and personal material. I will dig into personal archives, record lengthy interviews, and express the real and unreal histories erased from memory and stored in our bodies. It is formative, fragmented. As Kolk observes, "[the] different sensations that enter the brain at the time of trauma are not properly assembled into a story, a piece of autobiography." (2014, p223). I am discovering the output of Purge as I progress.

It comes from a place of curiosity, resonance, and a desire to build an enduring research-based practice. Artistic research is "characterized by the continuous movement between fluidity and rigidity, ...non-discipline and discipline, the particular and the universal." (Slager, 2015, p33) The personal is the gateway to the universal. Purge delves into personal matters.

Video Links

AvP (2022) dir. Ebrahimoff, A. 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 05:00 duration.
vimeo.com/651640109/baff9a59c1

Join O (2021) dir. Ebrahimoff, A. 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 03:03 duration.
vimeo.com/437219158/d17139f426

OOO (2020) dir. Ebrahimoff, A. 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 03:03 duration.
vimeo.com/411479414

Text References

Artaud, A (1978) *The Theatre and Its Double*, Editions Gallimard

Bachelard, G (1958) *The Poetics of Space*

Haraway, D (2021) *Staying with the Trouble*

Hartman, S (2008) *Venus in Two Acts*

Jung, C.G (2009) *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, Norton & Company

Kolk, B (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in Transformation of Trauma*, Penguin Books, United Kingdom

Metahaven (2018) *Digital Tarkovsky*

Nail, T (2019) 'Kinopolitics' in Braidotti & Bignall (ed.) *Posthuman Ecologies*

Plumwood, V (2000) *Being Prey* in O'Reilly, J., O'Reilly S, & Sterling, R. (ed.) *The Ultimate Journey*, Travelers' Tales, Inc. (pp. 228-245)

Slager, H (2015) *The Pleasure of Research*

Steyerl, H (2014) 'Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise' in *e-flux Journal issue #60*

Tagg, J (1988) *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*

Vázquez, R (2021) *Vistas of Modernity*

Zielinski, S (2006) *Deep Time of the Media*

Zizek, S (2001) *Enjoy Your Symptom*

Artworks

First Person Plural, The Electronic Diaries Of Lynn Hershman Leeson 1984-1996 (1995) dir. Leeson, L.H. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:15:00 duration, Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Germany

HyperNormalisation (2016) Curtis, A. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 02:46:00 duration, BBC Films, United Kingdom

I turn over the pictures of my voice in my head (2009) dir. Export, V. 1 channel film, Stereo Soundtrack, 12:00 duration, Austria

Liquidity Inc. (2014) dir. Steyerl, H. Architectural Installation with 1 channel film, Stereo Sound, 30:00 duration, Germany

Site Visit (2014) dir. Fitch, L & Trecartin, R. Installation, Sculptural theater with 6 channel film, 5.1 soundtrack, and multi-channel sound installation, 49:00 duration, Sprüth Magers, Germany

Television Delivers People (1973) dir. Serra, R & Schoolman, C. 1 channel film,, Stereo soundtrack, 06:00 duration, Babara Pine, USA, New York

Videodrome (1983) dir. Cronenberg, D. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:29:00 duration, Universal Pictures, North America, Canada.