Bodies Born Backwards, 2018. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2018. Nils Ekman

Nils Ekman

Etox Alba (SSZ), 2018. Inkjet print, 28 x 21 cm. Nils Ekman

Etox Vernalis, Etox Coronfolia, Etox Alba (SSZ), 2018. Inkjet prints on frosted glass, fluorescent light, MDF shelf, 120 x 60 cm. Nils Ekman

Blind Swimmers

In June 1999, a thirty-six-year old man in India is forced to seek emergency care. What appears to be a tumour within the abdomen has begun to push against the man's diaphragm, making it hard for him to breathe. During surgery, however, something unexpected is found: a small distorted body, consisting of four limbs, a spine, intestines, and an anus.[1] What was believed to be a tumour turns out to be an example of a very rare phenomenon called foetus in foetu or endadelphos, a developmental abnormality in which a mass of tissue resembling a foetus forms inside the body. It occurs when embryonic cells from a vanished twin are absorbed by the sole survivor and continue to grow inside the host body in a random kind of fashion. To be defined as endadelphos, the cyst requires a hint of a skeletal structure, its own skin, and the beginnings of a vascular system. It may also have a rudimentary amniotic sac, hair, teeth, extremities, and genitals.[2] Within oncology, the phenomenon is regarded as a highly developed form of teratoma. The word derives from the ancient Greek "*téras*"—monster.

Like a small piece of fleshy jumble. A lump of randomly selected organs, shuffled like a somatic anagram; a carnal abstraction. An absorption of the bodily plethora in a blasphemous form of immaculate conception; a mock virgin birth. Each limb is contracted and placed in the wrong order like the fleshly equivalent of a syntactic error. An interrupted sentence. Interesting, however, to reverse it—to understand the host body as the circumstantial choice of words and the teratoma as the precise expression. Perhaps endadelphos is the perfect result, the finished product, pruned from the vulgar somatic ornament that adorns its kitschy host being; elegant minimalistic design. The philosopher Catherine Malabou has argued, that, as a result of a trauma, the body can die without being dead, that there is a destructive mutation that is not the transformation of the body into a cadaver, but rather the transformation of the body into another body in the same body.[3] Endadelphos could be the physical realisation of this idea—an actual embodiment of an elegant philosophical concept. An autistic reading of an allegory; the terrible consequence of a literal interpretation of figurative language.

Hydrographics, water transfer printing or hydro dipping, is a method used in the automotive industry to apply two-dimensional design to three-dimensional surfaces. The technique is used to decorate everything from motorcycle helmets and dashboards to entire vehicles. A transparent film consisting of polyvinyl alcohol is printed with an image and then placed in a water tank. The hydrographic film is water soluble and disintegrates when a specific solvent is applied. As the object to be printed is slowly submerged, the surface tension of the water allows the image to follow its three-dimensional shape. The adhesion results from the chemical components of the solvent softening the object's base coat, which allows it to be combined with the ink.

For one of my works, I bought a fragment of a conch shell on the Swedish auction page Tradera. I then took a photograph of the shell, transferred the image to a computer, and manipulated it in Photoshop using the software's built-in effects such as noise and emboss. The digitally manipulated image was then printed on a hydrographic film and through hydro dipping pasted on the inside of the shell fragment. The image is fixed obliquely over the original texture, and in some places the film has been cut up where the shell was too sharp to allow the image to completely adhere to its shape. The result is a distortion of the original texture of the shell. A strange analogue glitch. It is difficult to distinguish the true texture of the shell from the digital copy. If observed closely, the digital noise can be seen.

Like a failed facelift, the object carries its own distorted representation. The accidental abstraction, caused by the mutilation of the real shell, is doubled by the digital distortion of the photographic image. A double perversion that causes a seamless integration of the virtual and the real; the distortion becomes a link unifying one with the other. With its outside left in our material world, its inside is digital, as if the shell is in the middle of becoming unreal from within. Dissected, as in an autopsy, the shell exposes its digital flesh. Exquisitely displayed, on a hovering plinth, like a rare artefact, the object appears as the exclusive occurrence

of a three-dimensional manifestation of a Photoshop effect—an archaeological finding from a digital ocean. Or a pristine design prototype made for a semivirtual world. Is the shell becoming unreal, or is it the other way around? Something unreal transcending into this afterlife of the real.

While many species escape their predators by mimicking the appearance of other animals or objects, there are certain butterflies that take this approach to a paranoid extreme. The two-tailed pasha butterfly, normally found in the Mediterranean and Africa, employs an elaborate optical illusion that allows it to take on different appearances depending on the angle it is viewed from.[4] In order to hide from every possible threat, its wings are covered with numerous pastiches in what looks like a surrealist collage. The butterfly manifests a confusion of what it *is* and how it *appears*. Of course it is a butterfly. But it is also a collection of images of non-butterflies. Nevertheless, these images shown on the butterfly's wings are not make-up. Or if it's make-up, it's engraved in the butterfly's DNA. It's in the insect's genome to be both something and an appearance of what it is not.

As a perverted mediation of itself, the shell fragment constitutes a corruption of the language it intends to *use* and at the same time *be*. Sculpture as a kind of speech impediment, a stutter. A lisp. As a failure to coincide with itself, the object illustrates what the philosopher Timothy Morton describes as an ontological gap between being and appearance. A rift that all objects have in common. A fragile inconsistency that completely permeates everything. Like a Möbius strip whose outside is also its inside: nowhere are what things *are* the same as how they *appear*. This ontological gap constitutes the very being of objects as such. In order to exist, an object must fail to coincide with itself totally.[5]

Drakaea, or the hammer orchid, has a single flat, thumbnail-sized, heart-shaped, fleshy, ground-hugging leaf and a long, thin, wiry stem. The stem bears a leaflike bract about halfway up and a single flower at its summit. The flower is remarkable in that the form of the labellum resembles the body of a female wasp. The appearance of this flower has evolved to attract pollinating male wasps.[6] Like a trompe l'oeil for insects, the flower is haunted by its own appearance in a necessary duplication of itself—the display of an appearance that is not the plant's own but a plant appearance for another entity. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, the orchid emits an *unheimlich* double of itself in a beautiful illustration of the ontological fragility of objects; to constantly emit a ghost of oneself.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the relationship between orchid and wasp in terms of becomings and assemblage rather than mimicry and representation. Their theory uses the example of the orchid and the wasp to illustrate an understanding of relationships in which parts, instead of being fixed, can be moved around and exchanged inside and between bodies in an uninterrupted flow of becomings. Instead of understanding the appearance of the orchid as the imitation of an insect, like a flower in wasp drag, Deleuze and Guattari contend that the image the orchid emits exceeds the notion of copy, as it is no longer bound to what it represents. Rather than imitating an insect, the flower appropriates the wasp's appearance in a process that alters them both. The wasp becomes a real part of the orchid's reproductive apparatus in their mutually created assemblage, one that dissolves the boundaries separating one from the other. Orchid becomes wasp, wasp becomes orchid.[7]

Jan van Eyck's painting *The Arnolfini Marriage* from 1434 consists of a double portrait of the Italian wedding couple in what is believed to be the Arnolfinis' home in Bruges. The painting is considered to be one of the most original and complex paintings in Western art history, largely due to the expansion of the image space through a round mirror placed in the centre of the painting. The convex mirror reflects the space backwards, and in the mirrored image the depicted couple as well as the artist can be seen. The fact that the artist himself is present in the portrait has led art historians to consider the painting to be a unique form of marriage contract. Ernst Gombrich states that the mirror magically fixes a corner of reality on the canvas: "For the first time in history, the artist became the perfect eye-witness in the truest sense of the term."[8] The painting represents the culmination of an endeavour among artists of this period to represent reality as it appears to our eyes. In a passionate search for truth, this generation of artists defied older ideas of beauty in favour of a higher degree of realism. Man was seen as God's alternate on earth and the artist's purpose was to reproduce the beauty of God's creation. As an undistorted representation of reality, the mirror in van Eyck's painting stands for purity and clarity and has been interpreted as a representation of God's eye regarding the promise of marriage. The reflection authenticates a specific time and place and confirms the existence of a fundamental reality in which the depicted event takes place.

This is opposed to how the reflection works in the film *Made in 'Eaven*, a work by Mark Leckey from 2004. In the film we see Jeff Koons's sculpture *Rabbit* (1986) placed on a plinth in the middle of an empty room. The glossy surface of the stainless-steel object reflects a clear image of the surrounding space. The camera hovers softly back and forth, pans and circulates slowly, with the sculpture always in focus. Sometimes the object is so close that its outlines disappear and the reflection of the surrounding space fills the frame. For a while, the camera stays on the reflected image. Only if we see the film from the beginning do we know that what we see is a reflected image,

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since the recording camera is nowhere to be seen. The difference between the real space and its reflected image is thus dissolved. *Made in 'Eaven* consists of a digitally reconstructed version of Koons's sculpture, a 3D-modulated copy. By deliberately zooming in on its shiny surface, Leckey emphasises the absence of the camera, an obvious impossibility in our reality, since a mirror by definition reflects what's in front of it. While the mirror in van Eyck's painting serves as a confirmation of truth, the reflective surface in *Made in 'Eaven* exposes the absence of anything real. Namely, the sculpture is in a space that is not our reality but a totally self-reflective space—the digitally simulated universe.

In his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard describes the difference between simulation, desimulation, and pretending. While desimulation gives a false impression of missing something it has, simulation gives the impression of possessing something it lacks. The difference consists of false absence (desimulation) and false presence (simulation).

But simulation is not the same as pretending; while desimulation and that which pretends to imitate symptoms, the simulation actually generates them. Therefore, desimulating and pretending leave the principle of reality intact, as the difference between sign and reality is merely masked. The simulation, however, threatens the difference between true and false, reality and fiction. In order to transcend from a good representation to a simulation, the image must pass through four phases. In the first stage, the image is a reflection of a fundamental reality. This is an appearance of the sacramental order—a good appearance. In the second stage, the image is a distortion of a fundamental reality: an evil appearance. In the third stage, the image masks the absence of a fundamental reality. The image is then an appearance in the form of sorcery: a desimulation. In the fourth stage, the image has no relation to any reality whatsoever. The image is then no longer in the order of appearance, but in the order of simulation. This image is what Baudrillard calls the "simulacrum": a copy without original.[9]

Z(I)iN - C(R)dQ, 2018. Water transfer printed shell fragments on black glass, 200 x 40 cm. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2018. Nils Ekman

Untitled, 2018. Water transfer printed shell fragment, 11 x 15 cm. Nils Ekman

If the mirror in van Eyck's painting represents the eye of God, which maintains the truth, there is in Leckey's work as little truth as there is any God that can separate it from the lie. Van Eyck's painting is in the first order of appearance, where the image reflects a theology of truth. The image in *Made in 'Eaven*, however, is of the fourth order: the inauguration of simulation in which there is no God that can recognise his own creation, no last judgment that can separate the truth from the false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and resurrected in advance. This was what the iconoclasts of the Middle Ages were afraid of. What happens to the divine when it appears in icons? Is the transcendental power only incarnated in images, or does it destroy itself by its own representation? For the iconoclasts, a fear arose

with the possible situation where the icon simulates God to reveal that God never existed, that only the simulation existed, and that God was never anything but his own simulacrum. From this came their urge to destroy icons.

Michel Foucault describes the mirror as a heterotopy, a space that is both virtual and real.[10] The mirror is utopic in that it represents a placeless place, a virtual, nonexistent space that opens up behind its shiny surface and gives us our own visibility where we are not. But the mirror is also a real object, existing in reality where it exerts a counteraction against the reflected space. From the gaze directed at me in the surface of the glass, I return to myself; my eye is directed back and reconstitutes me where

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I am and thus makes the place I occupy absolutely real and connected to all the places surrounding it. In the simulated universe, however, the mirror is only utopian. It is derived from its heterotopic trait since it no longer affirms any real space. The digital mirror is a nonexistent object, reflecting nothing but its own virtual inside—an endlessly extending non-space, an inwardly blooming universe. The digital mirror is an utopia, just not ours.

From a damp coarse stone mould follows a thin conical stem that protrudes into an upside-down tulip skirt in gummy dark mahogany brown synthetic leather. The petal of the leather skirt gracefully enfolds an egglike shape that shines in fluorescent orange terry. A transparent hose is attached to the coarse rock and forms an elegant circle before it proceeds by running vertically along the right-hand side of the synthetic leather flower and then finally disappearing behind the orange egg. On the left-hand side of the skirt, the tip of a large marble phallus penetrates a shiny glass ball. In the glossy surface of the ball, a distorted reflection of a room with large skylights can be seen. As in Leckey's *Made in 'Eaven*, no camera can be seen in the reflective surface of the sphere, only the reflection of an empty space with large windows. The described thing is an artificially generated sculpture, a digitally modulated object, which is part of a series of images that I have been working on during my master's studies, in which I render 3D-sculpted objects in high resolution and print them as photographs. These digital sculptures are totally computer generated, made in a virtual vacuum provided by a software application called Blender. In a time-consuming process of 3D modulation, each object has been sculpted from a grey digital mass consisting of an intricate geometry, a dense weave of points, which has been adjusted using a mouse. As an extension of my hands, the mouse has kneaded, smoothed, stretched, and pulled this immaterial dough into various shapes, which I've watched through the window of the computer screen. Telekinesis as a sculptural process.

Following the modulation, the work proceeds with the determination of what materials the different parts of the image should simulate. In a kind of cutting and pasting of algorithms, the sculpture is stored with information about how the virtual light is to be broken, which colours will be generated, how shadows should fall, and to what extent the different surfaces should mirror each other. This weave of code is the preparation of what is called rendering, the generation of the finished image. Rendering is the process by which the computer processes information from a coded data source and uses that information to produce and display an image, a remarkable ectoplasmic process in which the object transcends from a colourless mass to a convincing representation with realistically portrayed materials. So what happens when rendering is applied to moving images? In film production, the

rendering is what creates an immersive experience —the sensation of being in another place at another time. After a scene has been filmed and all effects have been added to it, the scene is rendered so that all cinematic elements together generate a consistent sense of a specific atmosphere, like a sunny day in the Alps rather than a damp night in the tropics. This is often opposed to a more faithful reproduction of how things actually sound or look in reality. The rendering is what makes the simulated world believable. Tearing down our aesthetic distance, it plunges us into the simulacrum, replacing the real with the simulation of it.

In *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder describes how the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius challenged each other in a dare that would determine who was the most skilled painter. When Zeuxis removed the drape covering his painting, birds flew down to pick at the grapes he had so skilfully painted. When it became Parrhasius's turn, he presented a curtain "drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen. Upon finding his mistake, with a great degree of ingenuous candour he admitted that he had been surpassed, for that whereas he himself had only deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist."[11]

Around 1413, the Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi developed what later became known as central perspective: a system that could represent distances in a scientifically measurable way.[12] The key to this system lies in the observation that all parallel lines passing through a room in straight angles to the subject converge at a central point—the vanishing point—at the height of the viewer's eye. As an illustration, the canvas can be likened to a window where the artist paints what they see directly on the glass. This discovery, further developed by Leon Battista Alberti and Piero della Francesca, made it possible for artists in Europe to bring about more convincing optical illusions, refinements of the perspectival trick known as trompe l'oeil, or "deception of the eye." Motivated by the church's aim to transfer knowledge about the beauty of the divine to an illiterate population, fresco painters could now make the miracles believable. With help from the principles of central perspective, the ceiling could be opened and the angels could enter.

Within 3D graphics, the computer screen can be likened to the painter's canvas. An object's extension in virtual space is calculated according to the central perspective principles, where the lines originate from an imagined eye on the other side of the screen. What enables hyperrealistic representations is a technique called ray tracing.[13] This technique traces the path of the light rays from the imaginary eye through the pixels on the screen, where each pixel represents one ray. When a ray intersects with an object, the algorithm

BARAKA, 2018. HD video projection on laser cut plexiglass, 80 x 175 cm, 00:20 min, loop. Nils Ekman
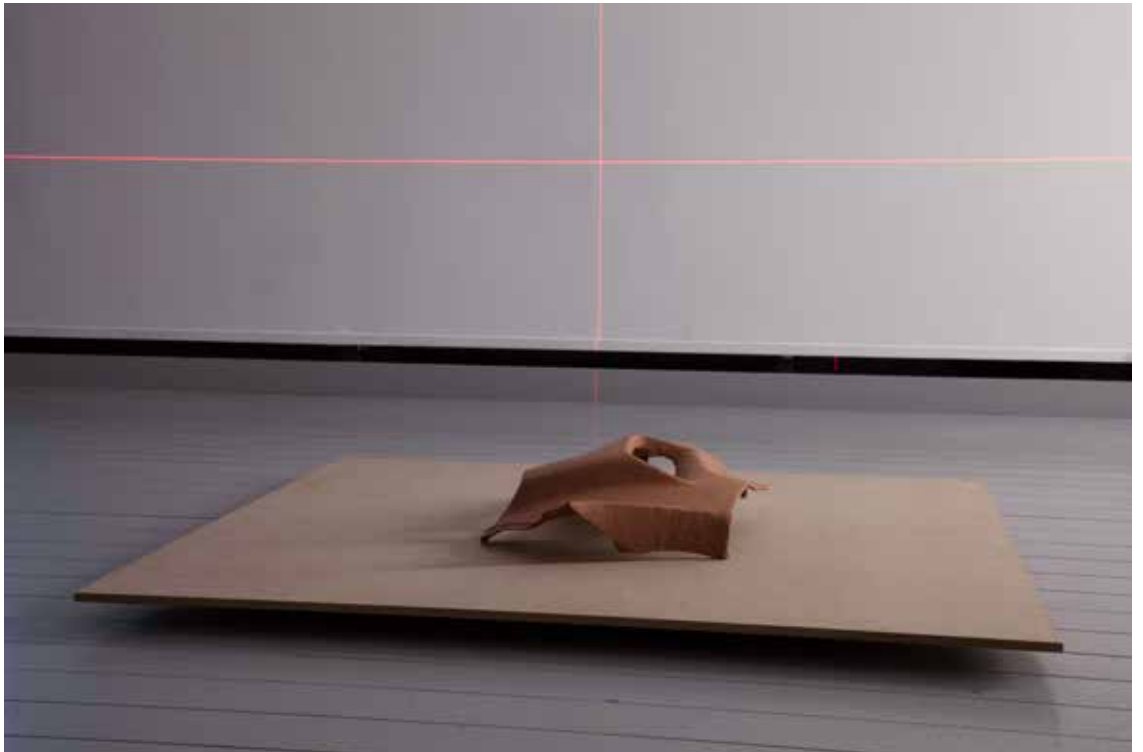
DR800S, 2018. Industrial clay, plastic, MDF platform, 120 x 120 cm. Nils Ekman

Borgatti, 2017. Digital object, dimensions variable. Nils Ekman

estimates the incoming light at the intersection, examines the object's material properties, and then calculates the final colour of the pixel. Ray tracing not only accomplishes accurate calculations of an object's extension in a three-dimensional space, but also calculates how light rays are broken depending on the different characteristics a particular surface may have. When something interrupts the progress of a light ray, one of four things can happen: absorption, reflection, refraction, or flourescence. Absorption means that the surface absorbs part of the light, which results in a loss of intensity of the reflected light. Reflection means that all or part of the light ray is reflected in one or more directions. If the surface is transparent or translucent, it will refract a portion of the light beam into itself in a different direction while absorbing some of the spectrum. A surface can also absorb a some of the light and "fluorescently" re-emit the light at a longer wavelength in a random direction. Precise calculations of the light's interaction with different types of surfaces are what enable the extremely realistic representations that digital rendering can achieve. Ray tracing not only creates an illusion of an object's extension in three-dimensional space, but also provides detailed sensory information; the rendering creates the tactile presence that makes digital textures hyperreal.

Leather, PVC, fur, metal, and skin. Intricate assemblages compiled into floral compositions. The digital sculptures in my series of 3D-rendered images represent strange combinations of materials and shapes. Organic textures are seamlessly integrated with surfaces reminiscent of mass-fabricated objects. The textures are so drenched in tactile information that they generate a direct bodily sensation. In one presentation of the images, the prints are mounted on a leaning mirror placed on a wooden shelf. When looking at these objects, we cannot avoid seeing ourselves in the reflection. We are thus forced to compare these heavenly textures to the appearance of our own fallible skin.

The objects possess an explicit fetish quality with clear sexual connotations. A pornographic aesthetic. Glossy, smooth, slightly moist. Illuminated by white lights, spread-eagled, and centrally placed in the image space. The writer Paul B. Preciado suggests the pornographic image is characterised by its capacity to be activated inside the body of the viewer; to stimulate—regardless of the spectator's will—the biochemical and muscular mechanisms that regulate the production of pleasure. He explains: "It's enough for a body, whether natural or artificial, 'living' or 'dead,' human or animal, to be very well lit, and as desirable as it is inaccessible, possessing a masturbatory value directly proportional to its ability to act as an abstract and dazzling fantasy."[14] The pornographic image is an "embodied image," one that incorporates itself as a body and captures the viewer's body at the encounter with an eroticised technological device.[15] If trompe l'oeil is an optical illusion, an image that deceives the perceptual system, the pornographic image is a bodily deception, an illusion of physical intimacy made possible by the ability of the image to transfer bodily sensation.

The digital objects I've made constitute a catalogue of fictions, an archive of imaginary objects. The project is thus a visually enigmatic manifestation of an impossibility; a photographic index of nonexistent objects. As a sort of categorisation of phantoms, the series represents an homage to Karl Blossfeldt's elegant taxonomic studies from the 1920s. For many years, the German teacher and sculptor photographed plants in extreme close-up. The photographs were meant to serve as a basis and inspiration for designers. With the help of a self-made camera, Blossfeldt could enlarge his subjects up to thirty times their size, thus visualising details previously hidden from the human eye. The result is exceptionally beautiful photographs of plants appearing as curious beings from another world. Centrally placed in the image space, delimited sensitively by the shape of each specific plant, rested against a matte black or white background. Sharp, concentrated, highly contrasted, the plants constitute a threatening and erotic presence. The extreme detail of something so small makes it difficult to determine the scale. They resemble monumental industrial buildings as well as enlarged microscopic organisms. Grasping leaves, intricately developed ranks, stems covered with small rhizoids that seem to mutate into architectural structures. Complex patterns cover surfaces that resemble modernist design. The images reveal what Walter Benjamin calls the optical unconscious: what the retina of the eye receives but that is not converted into information by the perceptive system.[16] Like a psychodynamic dream interpretation that reveals our unconscious drives by decoding the metaphors of our dreams, these photographs reveal a hidden retinal reality. The photographic technology allows a portal to what is hidden by the limitation of our own personal technology for seeing—the human eye.

In his 1932 book *Magic Garden of Nature*, Blossfeldt speaks of nature as "a teacher of beauty and inwardness and a source of the noblest delight."[17] His photographs, however, can be seen as an account of something quite different: an exposure of a deeply strange quality of nature. By placing these plants in the foreground, something eerie is revealed in what was previously a decorative background. Something that we previously saw from a comfortable aesthetic distance appears in these photographs with an unprecedented monstrous presence, and through this uncanny presence the plants brings to the fore a ghostly aspect of the very term "nature"; it is hard to point at what nature actually is. The more we study nature, the more clear it becomes that the term hovers between

things: it is both/and, neither/or. Timothy Morton describes nature as a transcendental term in a material mask.[18] Nature stands at the never-arriving end of a potentially infinite metonymous list of terms: fish, grass, flowers, trees, heterosexuality, chimpanzees … nature. Like a ghost, it searches through the universe for its reflection, only to find none. It is both animals and weather; both the set and the entities. Nature wavers between the divine and the material. If it is another word for supernatural power, why not call it God? But if now God is not outside the material sphere, why not just call it matter? Nature should be natural, but we cannot point to it. It becomes either supernatural or it disappears and leaves us with only matter.

Blossfeldt's plants are naked, spread-eagled, and saturated with tactile information. Our harmless virgin nature appears in these photographs as something strange, sexual, and threatening. *Unheimlich* nature pornography.

But despite their ghostly appearance, Blossfeldt's photographs possess something that my digitally sculpted objects lack: a relation to reality. The plants are representations of real plants. The image status as an index is thus intact. The digitally rendered images on the other hand lack any relation to any reality whatsoever. They are no longer in the order of appearance, and to describe them as an index is thus fraudulent. They are simulations, beautiful lies. If Blossfeldt's photographs, as Benjamin states, manifest our optical unconscious by making visible that which we see but does not register, this hyperreal ghost index constitutes a fabricated optical unconscious. An attempt to implant a false retinal reality. Like the trick of a skilled magician, by pointing at something hidden, the image hides the fact that what was hidden never existed. The lie becomes credible through the formation of another.

J.G. Ballard's baroque sci-fi novel *Crash* revolves around a small group of people united in their mutual sexual obsession with car accidents. At the centre of this group is Vaughan, a man who sees the car crash as key to a new sexuality made possible by the progress of technology. Modernity has paved the way for new types of pleasure that were previously unthinkable. The book consists of in-depth descriptions of bodies being destroyed in car accidents and fused with technology through this violent act. Machine and body interact and form new experimental relationships where the human body and design objects blend into baroque assemblages. The border between human and world, inside and outside is repeatedly demolished by technology's penetration of the body. Within design, the term "skeuomorph" is used to describe objects with decorative attributes that lack function but refer to details that once had a function. In *Crash*, penis and vagina become skeuomorphs due to a reorganisation

of the body's functions that makes former sexual practices obsolete in favour of new technosexual practices.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, every human body, with its limited set of properties, also holds a virtual dimension. This virtual dimension, which Deleuze and Guattari call the "body without organs," consists of a vast reservoir of potential traits, connections, and affects open to reconfiguration.[19] No organ is fixed in relation to its position or function, and to make oneself a body without organs is to actively experiment with oneself to draw out and activate these virtual potentials. The characters in *Crash* construct bodies without organs when they allow themselves to find pleasure in the new relationships between body and machine caused by the accidents. The characters redraw the map according to which their pleasure flows, and their bodies are reconfigured as new wounds caused by accidents begin to act as sexual organs. The organic body becomes a sign that, together with the car, creates a new language of carnal abstractions and design.

In Ed Atkins's video *Safe Conduct* (2016), a young man performs self-mutilation at a calm and rhythmic pace. The man peels off the skin from his face, tears out his eyes, and pulls off his nose. The protagonist is a hyperreal 3D model: a dead-born body performing an auto-autopsy in a hypnotic loop. The video is like a mock illustration of the concept of making yourself into a body without organs. The character is literally debodying himself. Piece by piece, he frees himself from parts of his body, pours his blood out, and empties his intestines into the type of safety bin used at security checkpoints at airports. A redundant act, since a computer-generated avatar is already empty.

Like the body in Atkins's video, my digitally generated sculptures are nothing but rubbery shells. Their organs are replaced with algorithms, their flesh with strings of code. They are bodies born backwards; always already wounded creatures without beating hearts. Illuminated by the heavenly light of commercial photography, they appear like pristine prototypes for odd luxury products; utopian visions of divine design. Like predictions of future prostheses whose functions we cannot yet understand since we haven't undergone the bodily transformations that will make them useful.

In terms of representation, the prototype is a peculiar kind; it is a copy that precedes its original. It is thus a stand-in for the future, a prophecy. Describing a prototype as failed is therefore a misnomer, since the model and its representation have swapped places. The prototype is always perfect. A possible failure is then more correctly described as the future's maladaptation to its prediction. A failure to deliver the prophecy. But what happens to objects when they find themselves in a simulated world? If design is the production of prophecies, what happens to a prototype

when everything is already dead and resurrected in advance? In a simulated world, time is flat. Past and future are dissolved categories, absorbed by an all-encompassing now. As a consequence, the differences between archaeology and design disappear. Archiving and production happens simultaneously. Or rather: nothing will ever be produced before it gets archived. Stuck in a purgatory of either *have been or will be*, the object becomes disjointed from the specific time that gives it its unique identity. Fossils become prototypes. Prototypes become antiques treated as curious remnants of a past we have forgotten. Archaeology becomes an excavation of the future, filling its shelves with luminous design. Rather born than being, these objects have no aura, no provenance, just a coagulated surface of a never ageing skin.

As utopian visions of technosomatic transmogrifications, the work is an inventory of our blossoming desire for the perfect body free from the flaws that are the inevitable consequence of physical existence. With all the sex that sells, suspended in an übermaterial void, lubricated in the divine light of pornographic product photography. A fetishisation of the fabulous nonexistence we all seem to have a subconscious longing for.

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16   Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927–1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 513.

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18   Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 14.

19   "Body without Organs," *Wikipedia*, last modified February 17, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_without_organs.

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