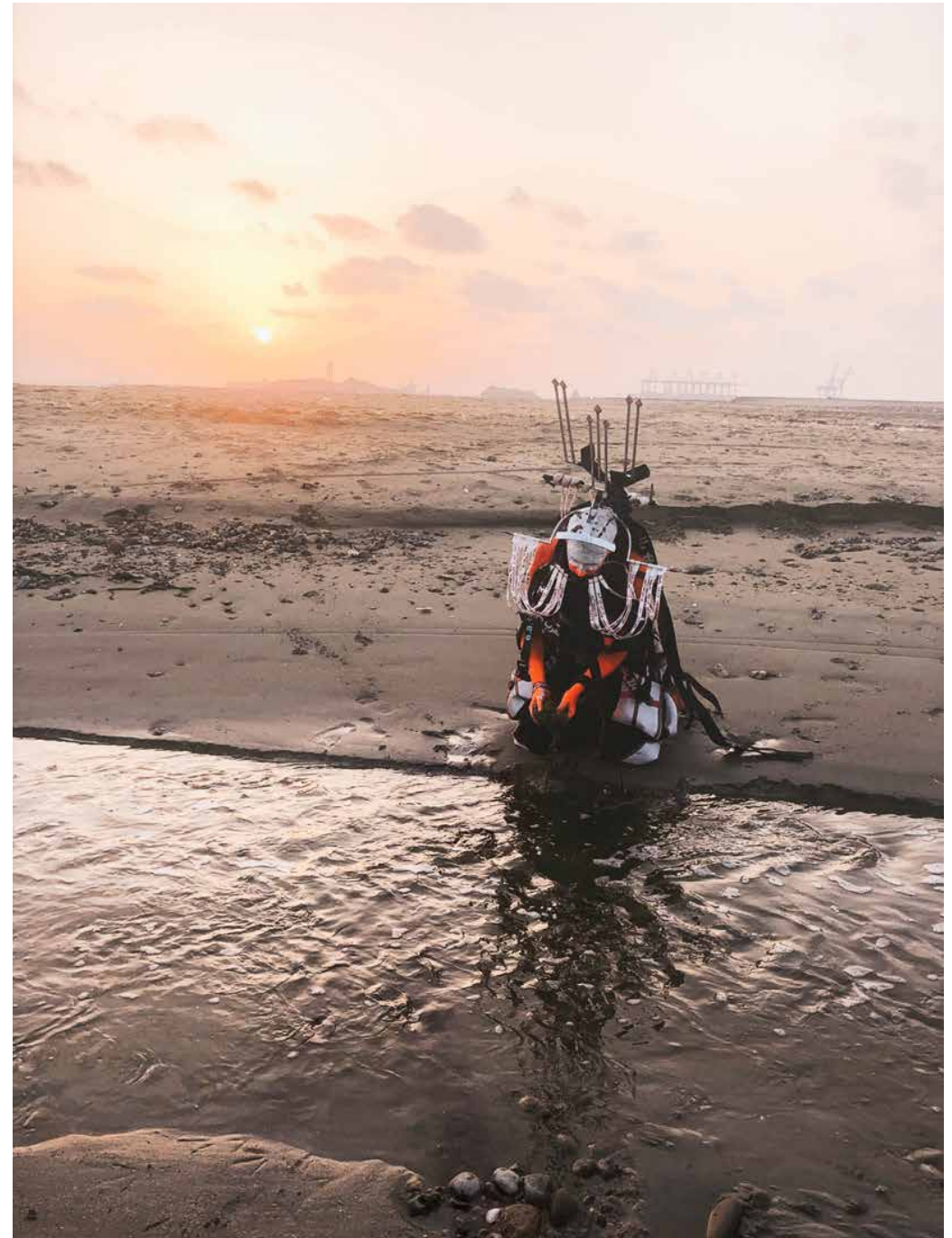


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JP RAETHER'S  
ALIFVEFORMS  
IN CONVERSATION  
WITH SAMO TOMSIČ

SPEAKING AS,  
SPEAKING THROUGH  
AND SPOKEN BY









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JPR I would like to start this conversation by rendering the production of this text visible as a multiplicity of distinct acts and various forms of artificial speaking. We—in a very expanded sense of we—were speaking through Zoom windows, AI transcriptions, share-point documents stored on locally scattered platforms accessed from various time zones by means of various smart devices, their screens translating, morphing ideas into symbols, signs and digits running through cables and processors to be re-formulated as this text.

It's the way we-as-physical, virtual and communal beings make language in the present: we *speak as* and *speak through*. In the realm of signs and languages we are most proficiently moving through human and more than human entities to connect one another. It's an excessive and repetitive cycle of translations, not only from mother tongue to foreign language, but from bodies to machines and back.

ST Yes, this combination of speaking and transcribing, of body and technology makes our dialogue also a document of techno-symbolic alienation. I would therefore add to *speak as* and *speak through* another moment, which inverts the relation between language and technology, on the one hand, and the speaker, on the other, and that is spoken by. What you were saying already implies this inversion or dislocation. We spoke in foreign languages and delivered our recording to both technological transcription tools and editorial interventions. The text is in any case the result of a linguistic multiplicity.

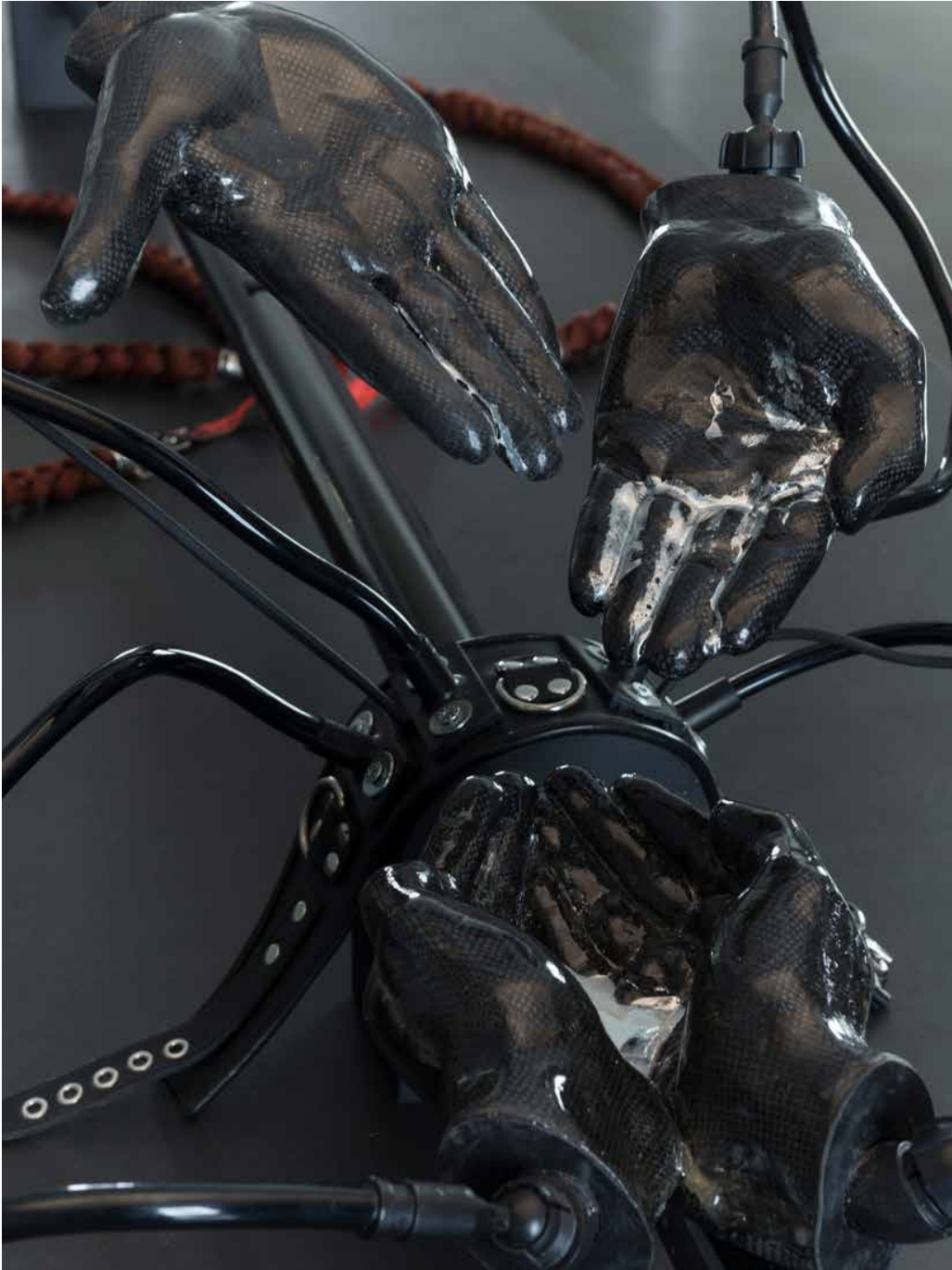
JPR I as JP Raether—which is my given name in the German language and a stable identity that was intended for me—this actually fragile body identity relation works in and of itself in a constant translation and not in my ancestral tongues, that have been thoroughly inscribed into my body. Your addition of the term *spoken by* can be very easily expanded as a general metaphor for the source of my Self-Sistership: with my mother's tongue I speak foreign tongues and with my body as an artificial identity. I-as-us speak as Protektorama, Transformel-

la and as Schwarmwesen. Through them I try to acknowledge the forced paradigm of all other human beings to be spoken by something; try to render a body for the artificiality of our identity systematics and shed the illusion that I can even speak as a stable subject. Instead, I speak through a variety of these three aforementioned site-specific and ever-evolving entities, that I relate to as aLiveForms that possess my flesh body. With this, I-as-them try to expand the idea of translation onto the flesh and into body forms.

ST I very much like the accent that you put on the multiplicity of languages and identities because this acknowledges another feature of language and of subjectivity that is all too often taken out of the picture in everyday discourse, the *mélange*. Every identity and every language stand in "relation of contamination"—to put it somewhat clumsily—to other identities and languages. Contrary to the linguistic purism of conservative academia and politics, I find mixing languages quite appealing, creating a linguistic mess, montages or hybrids, where the plasticity of one language enforces that of another. Language is an ongoing mutation, albeit an invisible one, since it is also endowed with stability and order. Still, as speakers we remain dislocated in our relation to language, we never fit adequately into the symbolic order, and this holds no less for our identity. Identity, too, is a process, in which the relation between heterogeneous, yet interconnected elements is continuously negotiated, I mean our biological, linguistic and technological body, our relation to other bodies and environments, etc.

JPR To paraphrase RuPaul, we as humans are all born naked and the rest is tech. And if you then expand drag and tech from its specific cultural context it becomes a universal and translocal human cultural practice. The practice of dislocating bodies and languages from one another towards breaking a material and imaginative system of significations: that we as humans are at the same time ornamented with and forcefully prescribed by. And I mean prescribed more as inscribed, branded or cut into flesh than painted and adorned.





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Humanness and its identity forms are then themselves a foreign entity that spawns onto our languageless and fragile selves when we come into this world. This entity continuously and increasingly possesses your flesh body and displaces anything that is native or natural. It's this mesh of languages, formed by materials and sites and ancient rituals, that re-creates us as human, after we are born. The incredible material force and often violence with which this language is inscribed into distinct fleshes, sexes and body forms I see as the true violence of humanism. Humanism is to me the force to read and write bodies to clarity and distinction.

ST It's interesting that you mention the violence of humanism. This makes me think of the psychoanalytic subversion of the Cartesian cogito, which is at the root of this problematic push toward clarity and distinction. Psychoanalysis, and notably Jacques Lacan, replaced Descartes' "I think therefore I am" with the formula "it speaks," which again inverts the relation between speaker and language, exposing the impersonal within what the humanist tradition considers to be the characteristic feature of human species, our self-reflexive cognitive apparatus and our capacity of communicating by means of complex semiotic and technological systems. For psychoanalysis, however, our bodies, languages and identities are marked by a constitutive "equivocality", ambiguity and fuzziness. A push away from equivocality toward univocality can only be experienced as violence.

JPR This is why I often refer to all of me-as-them as a herd of aLiveForms that are language-driven. They run on the predicament that language in all its everyday flow, its manifold forms, its grammars and damages, its violences and beauty ranging from military style order to playful gossip, from JavaScript to poetry is a force that's more powerful than the material it crystallizes as a consequence. At this point in the conversation, I'd like to make use of these powers that language affords me by methodologically speaking through the entities. I invoke the psycho-reality of Protek-

torama as another Self to me. She works as WorldWideWitch and a magical, technological and prosthetic being. Her work as a Smartphone Healer has been to create rituals and sites of concentrated psychic energy that enable her-as-me to hold space for disjoining the participants' bodies from their smartphones and trick them into shedding their prescribed behaviors and securities, while invoking the forces of the ridiculous and the *Uneigentliche*. The spirits and symbolic orders of metals and minerals, inventing entities that appear when we are devoid of the prosthesis of reason, rationality and critical thinking. All these language operations of the enlightenment need to burn in the fire of a new more-than-humanism, that's much more chaotic and inclusive than the limited concepts that we as modernists cling on to.

ST One major problem concerns the body-form and the possibility of a polymorphic body. Protektorama seems to function both as a subject and as a body situated between identity and non-identity, but in the end, this feature defines every life-form situated between corporeality and symbolic, matter and fiction. The carrier body of JPR, the body that lends itself to other voices, languages and characters is no exception to the rule, no meta-body, which would be more true, authentic or ontologically superior.

JPR And it renders the process or the movement, the oscillation between identity and non-identity visible. I read my Self processual, temporal, fleeting, dynamic, metonymic. I wish a concept of identity and body would acknowledge the contemporary findings on how to understand matter on the quantum scale. According to these knowledges, it's impossible to say if something is materially made from particles or waves, and at best, we can use this instability to imagine even ourselves as both body-driven and entirely as a form of language. But within a set of forced essentialisms, I'm mostly horrified how violently simplified we produce language and identity. It seems to me that the political project needed is to give space to more non-human speakers. The metals, minerals, sites, entities,

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Poquahock/Mercenaria 1, 2018 (p. 90) Juniper/kneumabee (Religion to Scale), 2019 (p. 91) Aar'oo BEPA, 2018 (p. 92) Courtesy: the artist and Magician Space, Beijing Unlimited Render, 2018 (p. 93) Courtesy: the artist and Sociétés, Berlin

Manca imagine no.94-95) Commit to a World outside yourself - A + B, 2018 (pp. 96-97) Courtesy: the artist and Sociétés, Berlin

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imaginations. They do speak to us without tongues and bodies and it's not too difficult and really not a question of belief or esoteric sensibility to understand them. They simply need to be given more agency again, so *it speaks* once more. Not just the artificial intelligences and other techno-euphoric entities that are currently given agency and lots of energy, but also ancient entities that humans have given agency in their language making for a long time: oracles, spirits, psychic entities. The languages those figurations chatter in, a lot of us in the west do not want to listen to and they are dismissed, criminalized, ridiculed. I-as-us want to help extract these languages from the deep unconscious of the western mind and drag them in from the fringes of its world making.

ST You mention non-human, material speech, which makes me think of an issue brought to the point in witchcraft. On the one hand magic or witchcraft mobilizes the creative function of speech and on the other hand it fuses language with matter. It only functions as a corporeal-linguistic event. The figure of the witch could exemplify the subject brought into existence by a material excess in and of language. The witch is situated in an ontological limbo, if I may say so, between body and fiction, it is both a corporeal being and a symbolic character. The lessons from history teach us that such ambiguous subjectivity is continuously exposed to danger, violence and persecution. Witches were hunted, tortured and killed because they embodied the excess of subjectivity over religious and socio-economic attempts to "normalize", i.e. exploit, life. To remain with the figure of the witch a little longer, of course we are dealing with the paradigmatic example of a fictitious being, but also with a body that exposes the materiality and efficacy of symbolic fictions, and their power to intervene in material processes in the world. The witch uses fictions in order to actively manipulate and transform the world, both external and symbolic reality, and that makes its life-form and life-practice scandalous and subversive. But don't science and tech-

nology practice the same witchcraft, i.e., the same mobilization of symbolic (and technological) means for the purpose of altering the world? A magical being is every being capable of acting back onto the material constraints of their existence, transforming themselves materially by means of symbolic tools. Although speaking of tools is again misleading, since the speaking body is more a tool of language, rather than the other way around, and language is a tool for a more or less pragmatic communicative action.

JPR That's an interesting thought, because both Protektorama generalis and their sub-identity Protektorama toxica speak through the device that in common reality is called the smartphone. Yet they invoke these devices as a fragmented set of bodies: a ScreenBody, an EyeBody and an EarBody. Those bodies have started to see for us and have started to hear for us. We speak through them, we signal to other humans and to other entities through these devices, we show the screens, we show our bodies through these screens, we see our identities through these screens, we mirror our identity through text and images that are projected onto these bodies, we create data bodies, consisting mostly of languages stored on remote devices. These devices have basically started to become an extended part of our bodies, like the prostheses that I mentioned before. It's a deliberately messy language operation to melt all of these into one disorientating planetary bodification. But the relation of these bodies as and against tools is interesting and the question that arises from this chaos is: do I control or do I run this thing called a smartphone or isn't it the contrary, that the smartphone basically runs me, that I'm possessed by this device? And further, not even by this device as a solitary object, but the expanded sense of this device in the form of a social and political and economic reality that's embodied within it. The repetitively invoked desire that makes me see, that makes me hear, that makes me text, that makes me communicate. This fundamental change of perspective or reversal of agency, of subjecting myself to this





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device and its corporate political implications and to its technological paradigm, this is what *Protektorama generalis* and *Protektorama toxica* work with.

ST Listening to you made me recall something that always struck me when I saw these beings in action. While immersed in socioeconomic relations and semio-technological environments they seem to perform a certain solitude, as if they find themselves in the position of internal exclusion in relation to reality, in which they act like subjects. Perhaps we could address two issues with regard to this solitude. One concerns the capitalist dismantling of our social being, of our being-with-others. In this respect capitalism actually deprives us from our social bonds, and more fundamentally from the conditions of possibility to construct a non-exploitative sociality. In the back of my mind is Margaret Thatcher's controversial remark "There is no such thing as society." Thatcher did not make a simple ontological claim. She formulated a prohibition: society must not exist; the existence of society must be prevented. This means also that the very idea that the subject is a relational being is prohibited, and that everyone must establish themselves as a strong, self-sufficient and self-interested being. If we look at the present state of capitalism, we witness the evident process of extinction of species, including humanity, and at the same time something like an extinction of sociality. By this I do not mean that there used to be some authentic sociality, which subsequently became lost with the enforcement of systemic violence. That would be a dangerous romantic idea. What I mean is simply that the conditions of possibility for non-exploitative, emancipatory being-with-others has become eroded. For this reason, I was struck by, on the one hand, how all the life-forms we have been discussing here seem to perform the struggle for inventing a processual or polymorphic body, and on the other hand how they expose the solitary mode of existence in the midst of our political and technological noise.

JPR

I would like to speak through *Transformella malor* to the question of capitalist relationality. She-as-me is the deviant fork of *Transformella domesticae* and *globalis* who have been researching repro-technology in the global context. As a consequence, their language-making runs along the present production lines of life: she babbles and chatters on how, where and when human life is industrially produced under the paradigm of capitalism. *Transformella malor*, like other *aLiveForms* in their respective habitats of knowledge, has embodied this into a form of movement through the real. She appears repetitively on a corporate platform, a global system of franchised shops, which in common reality is called IKEA. She as me, however calls it *IKEAE*, because they form a stack of local shopping centers, blooming all over the planet in *everysite*. Together they are an *Ikeality*, a subset of reality, similar but different, local and global, repeated 433 times. At the moment there's 433 *IKEAE* on this planet. 433 times the very same sequence of kitchen section after living room section and then the children section. This maze of architectural spaces acts as a trap for human consciousness as well as some form of cutter for the mind: *IKEAE* dis-joins continuities of time and space and re-assembles them according to the paradigm of its own power: the intense needs and desire of human reproduction, expressed as an endless stream of products. Humans reproducing themselves, reproducing their children, reproducing humankind as a species, pressed and extruded through this immense stack of shops and showrooms. What *Transformella malor* does with the *Repro-Tech Tribe*, which they call the people that follow her into *Ikeality*, is very connected to language as a material force: she-as-me relies on the ancient ritualist concept that says that when you come to a specific site—maybe a geomantically powerful one, a cliff with a view, a particular rock, an ancient stone circle—and you speak the same words as last time you visited this site; and then you do it again and you do it again and you do it again, the language attaches to the site materially. It might not even be called language anymore. Whatever you utter

Poquahock/Mercenaria 1, 2018 (p. 90) *Jumper/kneumabee* (Religion to Scale), 2019 (p. 91)  
A+ B, 2018 (p. 92) Courtesy: the artist and Magician Space, Beijing Untitled Render,  
2018 (p. 93) Courtesy: the artist and Sociétés, Berlin

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becomes a form of consciousness that spawns onto the site and the power relation of site and language shifts, maybe melts into one another. *Transformella malor* actualizes this practice by murmuring the same words over and over again in every one of the 433 kitchen and then living room sections of *IKEAE everysite* for the rest of her-as-my lifetime.

ST I find that this repetition of speech and the exposure of the same abstract site behind shifting localities touches upon the very core of our status within the capitalist system. Understood as a model, *IKEA* demonstrates the "flat mode of existence" or the "standardized being" that accompanied the late capitalist expansion of consumer society. In the case of *Transformella*, the function of repetition seems to be inverted. Rather than exposing or even creating difference, as Deleuze famously claimed, *Transformella's* repetition addresses the annihilation of difference in this generic model that is *IKEA*. It exposes the atypicality and atemporality of *IKEA*, an ahistorical, indeterminate and indistinct space, which swallows and digests geographical specificities, replacing them with an abstract geography. And again, the life-form seems to be marked by a striking solitude that the *IKEA*-dispositive only enforces.

JP Which effectively, if you agree that capitalism is a totality, means life is evolving in miserable corporate forms. The Apple store might accidentally host *Protektorama toxica* as Rare Earth occultist and smartphone witch, yet in the future Samsung spawns its own corporate specific life-forms. There is a certain impossibility to all of this. Not only if you intent to stay modern and cling to concepts of life and language that are long lost in the impossibility of just declaring anything hybrid or virtual. These impossible and inhuman and miserable life-forms are our life-forms. They are us. Speaking through them, giving them energy, time, feeding them and caring for them as our spirits is a deep re-connection with psychic forces that were absolutely repressed during modernity: the magical powers of impossible entities that are beyond human control.