



084

# ArtWIDE

Culture & Arts  
Information  
문화예술매거진  
March  
201803

## *Vishtauroborg*

(2011–2012)

‘Vish-’ (Vishnu), ‘-taur-’ (Minotaur), ‘-robo-’ (Robot), ‘-org’ (Organ), and ‘-borg’ (Cyborg)

Doo-Sung Yoo



Photograph ©2011 Justin Luna

## Artist Doo-Sung Yoo *alongside* Posthumanism

Editor-in-Chief Youn-Jeong Rho

Art used to be stuck in the confines of the ‘White Cube’, but currently it requires unlimited temporal and spatial configurations. Contemporary art mirrors our societal surroundings and blurs the boundaries of art media. We are living in the Posthumanism era, in which art and technology are overlapped in a confluence and the meaning of human nature has been vague since Walter Benjamin’s concept, ‘the loss of Aura’. The advent of Media art generated by advanced technology enables art to undergo transformation: monitors replace canvases; and pixels replace paint brushes in an infinite digital world. The human body has emerged as a practical medium for artists who create correlations between humans, animals, and machines.

Artist Doo-Sung Yoo attempts to materialize new meanings of humans, animals, and machines in his art and performances, which are based on the concept of Posthumanism in the twenty-first century. He explores the aspects of contemporary issues and discourses in the Posthumanism era which reassess and traditional humanism’s problematic issues and errors. He demonstrates his stance and engagement with Posthumanism through his artistic sensibilities.

His artistic discourse explores the interrelations and boundaries between art, performance, and technology. He attempts to create new forms of New Media Art, which interweave various forms and multiple genres, such as bio-robotic art and computer animation-based electronic/mechanical installations and art games, visual performance-based performative art, performing arts, dance, music, and theatre. While implementing these experimental multi-forms of interdisciplinary art, he probes the ambiguous boundaries between nature and technology, art and science, and humans-animals-machines. Yoo carries out provocative artistic experiments, where he combines animal organs, such as pig hearts, bladders, stomachs, and cow tongues, with electronic/mechanical devices, which then mingle with organic living things, such as humans, fish, and leeches. He illustrates the inter-reactions and interrelations between humans, animals, and machines, which are articulated in ways of thinking that disturb and challenge traditional modes.

Regarding one of his projects, the Vishtauroborg project, the interrelation of characteristics in his work is quite interesting. Vishtauroborg is a hybrid that consists of a human (performer), animal (cow tongue), and machine (robotic



prosthesis). The artistic hybrid destabilizes the concept of traditional humanism. Looking at his artistic expression in the feature of the hybrid, it disintegrates binary oppositions between, ‘human-animal’ and ‘human-machine. The hybrid character, animal organ-machine, in the Vishtauroborg performance illustrates the possibility of the artistic collaborations between ‘humans and animal.’ The human performer’s improvisatory choreography in the Vishtauroborg performance cooperates with the animal organ-machine, controlled by the computer system, which harmonizes with the gestures of the human body, mechanical motions of machine, artificial human speech sounds, and computational manipulations of music. Those human-animal-machine’s harmonic inter-reactions visualizes the performative actions and gestures in real-time.<sup>1)</sup>

Vishtauroborg’s correlations between the human-animal-machine in the theatrical mise-en-scene follow the Posthumanism philosophers and theorists. One of following agendas considers Katherine Hayles’ view about the cooperative partnership between humans’ consciousness and intelligent machines in the extension of human cognition environments. Rosi Braidotti’s view, as another example, is implied in Yoo’s artwork, in which humans could have multiple identities as a result of advanced technology. Vishtauroborg’s artistic implications suggest a new type of humanity, which is re-embodied by the concept of cooperative partnership and coevolution between human-animal and human-machine, and ultimately deconstructs manmade hierarchical classifications.<sup>2)</sup> The materialization of Yoo’s articulations about the concept of animality is that animals are not merely consumable products and instrumentation in the industries, but they can be implanted as a part of the human body in the process of becoming interspecies alongside technology and forge ontological evolution.<sup>3)</sup>

In Yoo’s art works, multiple concepts, such as the ‘uncanny’, ‘grotesque’, and ‘cyborg’, are overlapped, which are rediscovered as cultural issues in the twenty-first century. The feeling of the uncanny was inaugurated a psychological discourse in Sigmund Freud’s essay, “The ‘Uncanny’” (1919).

1) “Interviewee: Doo-Sung Yoo Interviewer: Jennifer Parker-Starbuck”, *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture* 39, no. 2, (2017), 53.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid., 57.

4) Ashley Woodward, “Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998)”, *The Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy*, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (IEP), <https://www.iep.utm.edu/lyotard/>

5) Ibid.

6) Kiff Bamford, *Lyotard and the ‘figural’ in Performance, Art and Writing* (A&C Black, 2012), 115

7) Ashley, “Jean-François Lyotard,”

8) Ibid.

9) “Interviewee: Doo-Sung Yoo”, 57.

10) Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (McGraw-Hill, 1964), 7.

11) Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.



1. *Vishtauborg Version 3.1 – "Incompatibility"*, 2012, robotic devices and cow tongues, photograph ©2012 Cameron Sharp
2. *Becoming Leeches: Episode 1 – "Having Dinner, ver. 1"*, 2018, virtual reality (VR) game and visual performance, live leeches, 5 visual performers, 1 chef, photograph © 2018 Keida Mascaro
3. *Pig Bladder-clouds in downtown Columbus*, 2009, electronic devices, helium-filled plastic trash bags, pig bladders, photograph ©2009 Cameron Sharp



‘Uncanny’ is the psychological experience of an unfamiliar situation and the difficulty with making sense of the emotional impulse, which is similar to the feelings of ‘Déjà vu’ and encountering a ‘doppelgänger’. ‘Uncanny’ was initially mentioned by German philosophers Friedrich Schelling and Friedrich Nietzsche, and then focused on by psychological discourses by Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud. ‘Uncanny’ is a kind of feeling: it is opposed to ‘beautiful’ and ‘familiar’; but it would not be wholly separated from them; and it is something frightening. From those sensations, ‘Uncanny’ might transform into an aesthetic mode, ‘the Sublime’. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard points out, “art is privileged for its sublime effects” in the postmodern era and believes that “the sublime accompanies the attempt to present the unrepresentable.”<sup>(4)</sup> Lyotard also explains, “the rise of capital, science and technology linked through legitimization by performativity”<sup>(5)</sup>, which “concrete the infinity”.<sup>(6)</sup>

The traditional aesthetic criteria requires that artwork succeed with the task of ‘presenting’ that matches with ‘the fact’, while ‘the Postmodern sublime’ is to succeed “the contradictory task of presenting the unrepresentable”<sup>(7)</sup> without ‘the fact’ and sufficient conditions. Advanced science and technology enhances the task of ‘presenting the unrepresentable’ and stimulates the artist to “create new events, with their [creators and audiences] own energetic potentialities”, which “encourages the maximum release of intensity” for “full possibilities of the expression”.<sup>(8)</sup> For that reason, science and technology guides the creators and audience’s sensory intuitions towards the Postmodern sublime, which opens up more avenues for artistic expression. The emergence of the postmodern sublime indicates the radical effect of the direction of art, moving from the past to the future.

From those cultural and philosophical backgrounds in the technological society in the postmodern era, Doo-Sung Yoo’s artworks have implemented the ‘task of presenting the unrepresentable’ for creating the sublime, which is being continually conceptualized in his new art project, the ‘Leech Project’ series. His new project involves leeches and utilizes

technological intervention to continually explore a possibility of artistic collaborations between humans and nonhuman animals. The project is a performance-based long-term series that consists of several episodes, which ultimately leads to the final version in the contexts of a robotic performance and a virtual reality (VR) art game.<sup>(9)</sup> The ‘Leech Project’ series explores the augmented senses of live leeches through technological systems, such as robotics and computer vision systems. The live leeches’ augmented senses illustrated by the mechanical and computer system facilitates inter-reactions and collaborations with human performers and virtual leeches in the artistic context. Human participants and virtual leeches have a symbiotic relationship and help each other to survive within the post-apocalypse scenario of the VR game, accompanying various visual performance and performing arts.

Doo-Sung Yoo’s artworks create a new sensation that is associated with Marsh McLuhan’s concept and book title, “Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964)”. In current technology, the human body has been increasingly mediatizing, whereas McLuhan’s concept focused on just a medium that is “any extension of ourselves”.<sup>(10)</sup> The discourse about the concept of Posthumanism exemplifies the tendency of mediatizing the human body. Like Lyotard’s view that postmodern comes both before and after modern, a Posthumanist Cary Wolfe claims, “My sense of Posthumanism...it comes both before and after humanism”.<sup>(11)</sup> Since Aristotle’s binary opposition between ‘nature and artifice’, the binary of ‘immaterial soul and material body’ has been proceeding in the processes of deconstruction and reintegration. Doo-Sung Yoo’s New Media art works exactly indicate those ongoing progresses. New Media artist Doo-Sung Yoo creates his artwork at the forefront of confluence, where contemporary art and technology cross and merge with together. We very much look forward to seeing the next chapters of his art sensibility.

## Artist Doo-Sung Yoo is

Doo-Sung Yoo explores hybrid art, synthesizing natural and unnatural technology, interweaving arts, science, and technology, and discovering aesthetic possibilities for interactions between human and technological nature, and interspecies communication between human and animals. His works were exhibited, reviewed and published in many exhibitions, art festivals, conferences, journals, and art magazines, such as *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture* (England), *Art and Speculative Futures International Conference 2016* (Spain), *Borderlines IV: Resisting, Persisting, Performing 2016* (England), *Bodies on Stage: Acting Confronted by Technology 2015* (France), *Wi: Journal of Mobile Culture* (Canada), *NY Arts magazine* (USA), *Media-N Journal* (USA), *Prospectives.09* (USA), *Ingenuity Fest 2012* (USA), *International Symposium on Electronic Art 2012* (USA), the conference of College Art Association 2013 (USA), *Intertekst* (Poland), and *Evolution Haute Couture: Art and Science in the Post-Biological Age* (Russia).