**Light and Cold Conversation: Agency and Technology**

Curatorial statement for Imaginary Z

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Juntao Yang

We are forced into the ongoing present of a hegemonic narrative of technological progress, and all discursive exercises surrounding this apparently solid concept read as indestructible, deeply entrenched, and difficult to dismantle. This certainty regarding the bright prospects of technology and its benefits permeates the grand processes of post-colonial strategy, petro-extractivism, and algorithmic governance, relentlessly fossilizing alternative futures into specimens of inevitability. These processes collude with surrounding official discourses, establishing a stratified topographical order of life and non-life in a posture of total domination, ceaselessly reproducing the ruling power of the present moment. This exhibition attempts to interrogate the language of truth used in describing and constructing the technological landscape, turning instead to reveal the agency of non-human materials rendered transparent (political machines, 5G base stations, data centers), confident that such digital agents will generate uncertain turbulences within an overly stable state of oppression, breaching the banks of self-evident norms. As a counter-thrust to a repeatedly affirmed reality, the exhibition does not hesitate to recall the speculative, the imaginary, the fabricated, the intuitive, the anecdotal, the fictional, the daydreamed, the conspiratorial; it treats contemporary art as belonging to the ranks of "imagination, incomprehensible experiments, uncertain documentaries, strange apparatuses, and failed prototypes," pointing directly at fractures in the bedrock with lighthearted fantasy and cold paranoia.

Olivia Abächerli's video-installation theatre, Polsima (2019), imagines a set of highly sophisticated political decision-making simulation machines named Polsima; this utopian apparatus, having assimilated the accumulated knowledge of all fields, proclaims a future in which human political speculation and failed decisions no longer exist. Yet by inscribing traces of a handcrafted aesthetic and the intimate cadence of a public address into the materiality of this conceptual tool, the artist shows how such a political apparatus—founded on strict logical deduction—slides toward privatized emotional desire and the neoliberal powers that fully mobilize it. Polsima is best read as a pervasive anxiety about apathy toward activism, an imaginative remedy for a crisis of trust in public authority within a value-relativist society, and in the artist's austere humor this materialized anxiety reveals its own autocratic attributes and fascistic tendencies: crisis constantly reverberates between the twin poles of progressive political inaction and the normalization of the alt-right, and any all-encompassing solution, while exerting utopian appeal, simultaneously replicates legitimized injustice. The ever-present sense of danger in Abächerli's enactment (which is at times diffused by appropriate humor) concerns the erosion of the legitimacy of public political debate by binary digital devices, and the negation of speculative imagination by a digital infrastructure that serves algorithmic authoritarianism.
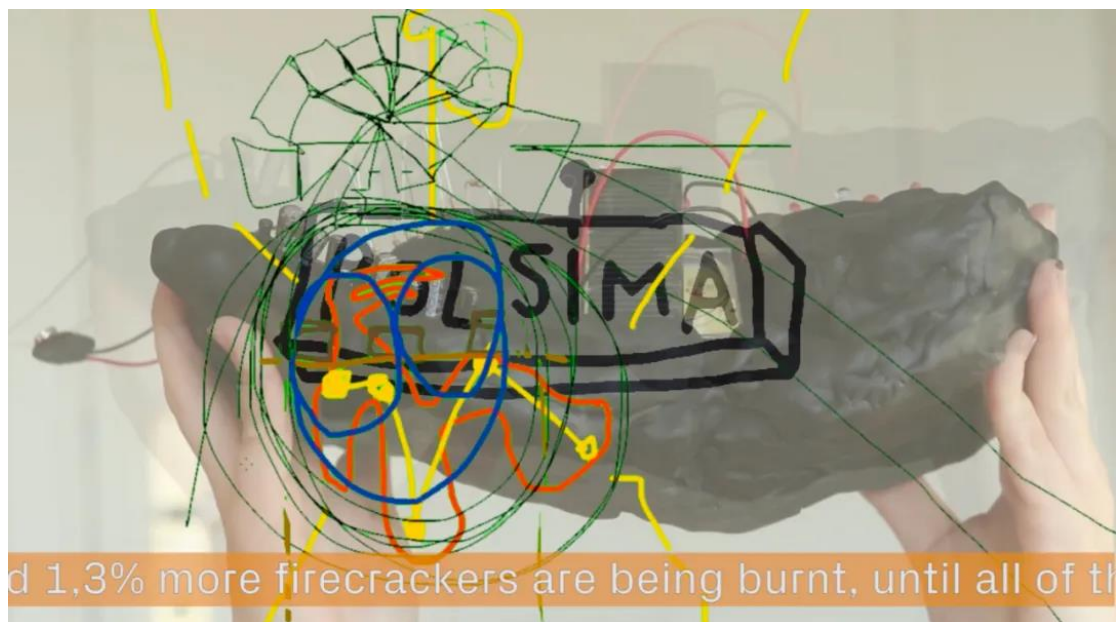
polsima_The event chain (2019), video, 7mins 24secs
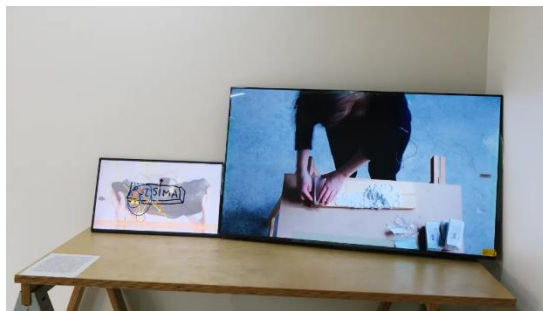
Zhang Ruiqi's video, The Bruning Tower (2020), begins by imagining the intimate process of disseminating a conspiracy—the ASMR sermon of the internet—and proceeds to unpack and supplement the tangled genesis of conspiratorial imagination and alternative interpretation. The controversy around 5G base stations should not be dismissed as mere nonsense; though public conspiracy theories about this digital infrastructure—perhaps overly zealous, perhaps pathological—harbor a "real theoretical surplus" that continually drives conspiracists to produce and disseminate theories that resist full digestion, those distorted and displaced fictional interpretations nevertheless contain fragments of reality. It is on this basis that Latour tends to treat conspiracy theory as a counterpart to "traditional" critical theory: conspiracists and critical scholars alike pursue an "alternative truth" to official statements, and in an exclusionary, ontological theoretical clash attempt to identify the face of the big Other and the traces of power's operation. Burning Tower-like Objects excavates this facet of conspiracy: hysterical accusations and virally spreading rumors become a guerrilla battleground outside authoritative discourse, and witchcraft-like imaginings about 5G base stations appear as a romantic strategy of resistance to the
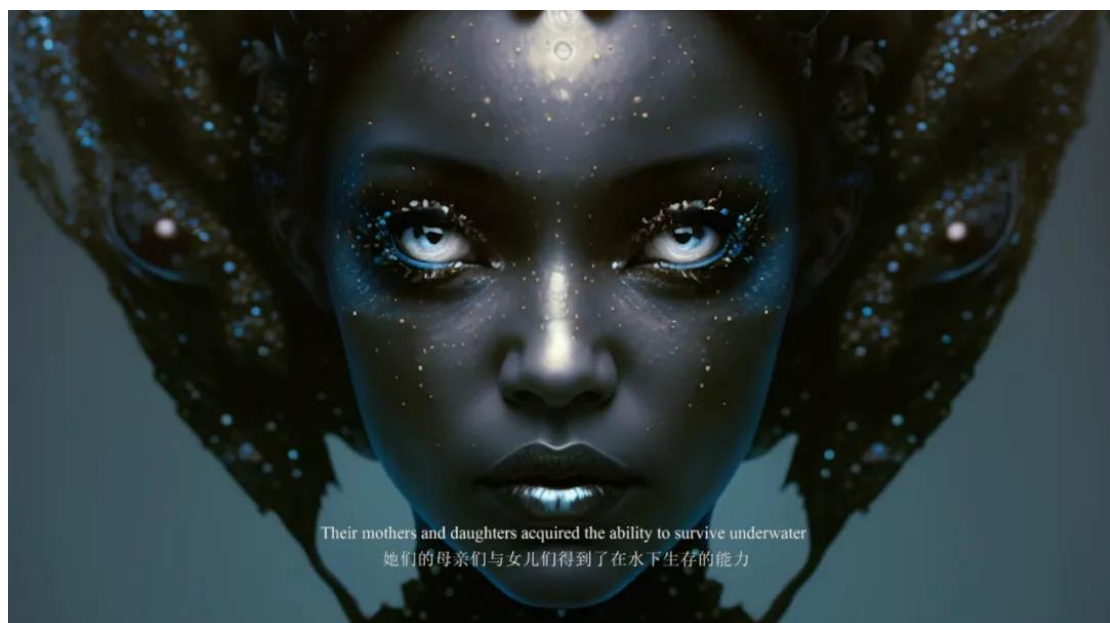
sovereign state's expanding power within anonymous domains (the "free internet")—notably, Romanticism is the historical birthplace of conspiratorial imagination in art history, where exotic and eccentric visions become forces for change. Here the ASMRtist, as provoker, self-reflexively positions her performance as the artist who supplies stimuli for imagination—that is, the artwork itself.

燃烧的塔状物 The Burning Tower (2020), 4k video, 17mins 32secs
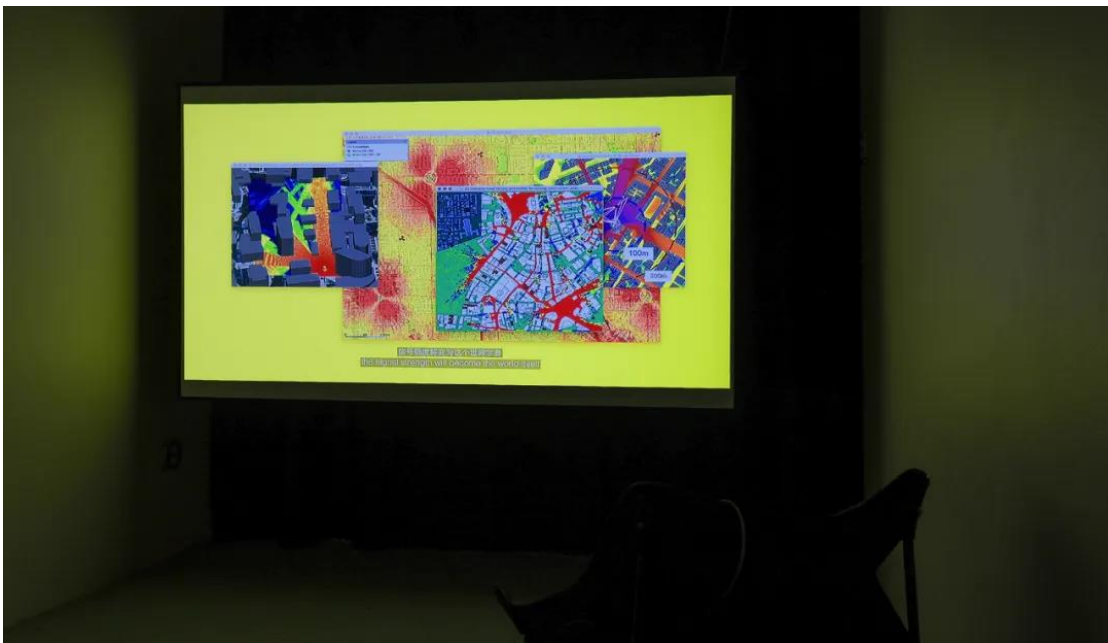
Light and Cold Conversations: Atlantic, Algorithms and Visibility (2023) is another work of historical speculative imagination. The artist Yang Juntao adopts and expands the mythic imaginaries invoked by the Afrofuturist duo Drexciya, using their imagery to link the Atlantic slave trade to the neocolonialities of the digital age. Material digital infrastructures—cloud servers, data centers, submarine fiber-optic cables—as active agents broadly shape the present conditions of racism and environmental crisis, while deploying strategies of transparency (rendering themselves invisible) that conceal their planetary-scale materialities and extensive harms; this deliberate invisibilization fuels techno-optimism and climate denial. Light and Cold Conversations mobilizes AI-visualized imagery to summon damaged and suppressed alternative imaginaries, to contest the dematerializing tendencies of authoritarian power and its dictatorship over visibility, and to experiment with the ethical deployment of AI-generated images.

Their mothers and daughters acquired the ability to survive underwater
她们的母亲们与女儿们得到了在水下生存的能力

轻巧而冷淡的对谈:大西洋，算法与可见性 Light and Cold Conversation: Atlantic, Algorithmic and Visibility (2023), video, 13mins 11secs

As the title suggests, this exhibition intends to be a conversation of both excess and indifference: provocatively suggestive yet deliberately elusive, willing to fabricate yet close to documentary truth. In this sense the exhibition becomes a mode of knowledge production for an uncertain era, helping us to steady ourselves between a world of futility and randomness and a world in which everything is premeditated and conspiratorial.