

Do Digital Sheep Dream of Androids?

By Chris Bors

The immersive world of Jeremiah Teipen's video environments and digital artworks are both welcoming and alien. Max Headroom, the computer-generated fictional AI television host created in 1985, should be giving the audio tour. We are certainly more prepared now, in 2021, for Teipen's digitally manipulated artworks after living inside our homes for the past year staring at our phones and meeting other humans on the Zoom app, a necessary, albeit sometimes uncomfortable virtual conferencing tool. Zoom, whose main screen mimics the gridded look of the opening credits of the *Brady Bunch*, with white letters taking the place of sheepish or unwilling participants, has made the virtual meeting ubiquitous. Teipen's world however, is so much better than our own reality that you may want to live inside it for a while, letting it cascade over your eyes and brain like a never-ending stream of bits and bytes. Although challenging and intellectually rigorous, you are not confronted like a video game with having to bend the will of these visions, but are allowed to drink it in. While Teipen's artworks are pleasurable, he certainly mimics our present reality where Theodor Adorno's critique of Hollywood is no longer our main concern or the only opiate of the masses. Instead could our digital life be lulling us into a dream of contentment that will ultimately fail us? Or are we already there?

In *Spatiotemporal Interventions*, 2019, 360 degree mediated and distorted video footage with animation overlays of the space all around the viewer is projected over the entirety of the room. Warping our perception by placing the inside all around us, this work can be thought of as an invasive species, and could be seen as not only a computer virus, but also a calm parallel to the deadly Covid-19 pandemic we are dealing with worldwide. Teipen's *Postconcept*, 2010, uses individual found media that is layered and animated become something else when the individual parts are shuffled to the point of confusion. You may zone out, as ideas are replaced with information that is too scrambled for our minds to process.

With *Topographies of an Aerosol Archipelago: Topologies of the Transparency Grid of the Authentic Psyche*, 2019, Teipen presents a trippy mapping of one's unconscious. Staring at his ceiling as a child and projecting his own thoughts mentally was an impetus for this work (think *The Queen's Gambit*), but trying to unwrap its many layers is a complex task. Animated inkblots are projected on impasto covered canvases whose surface is reminiscent of a topographic map, while a transparency grid and a screen test image are projected onto a wall with three-dimensional prints of islands on top of two-dimensional prints featuring latitude and longitude lines. The well-known Rorschach inkblots were meant get patients to open up and explain their thought process, while Teipen's further obscures it by taking a trip at the brain, do you know what I'm saying? If not, imagine having your inner thoughts digitized, then projected for all to see.

Even more psychedelic is *Ice Cubes Melting in a Plastic Cup*, 2016, which could be described as some sort of digital rave minus the glow sticks. Images from Google are put through different filters and then used as a textures on a rotating cube which rests on a blurred background in one part, while ice cubes tumble through visuals of a chic interior space in another. The accompanying prints help make sense of the explosion of color and movement

seen in the silent video, whose soundtrack could be the Beatles' *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*. In contrast the calming, *Still Life* and *Still life, Cactus/Virus*, both 2018, takes the centuries-old genre of the still life and breaks it down into its elemental forms using digital technology. The monochrome palette Teipen employs alludes to the raw umber hue often used in an underpainting, most significantly to great effect during the Renaissance period.

If the blinking, dazzling *Lithium*, 2009, is meant to be calming like the drug of the same name, it may be because it's perfectly balanced. The chemical element Lithium has an atomic number of three, and in Teipen's sculpture each vacuum-formed acrylic ball has three rods with three additional balls that light up, while the color scheme of the flashing LEDs is based on the standard RGB (red, blue, green) monitor colors for computers. *Buckey Balls*, 2007/2021, makes reference to the carbon-composed molecule that was developed by researchers in 1985 and named after U.S. architect and designer Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983), who coined the term "geodesic" and popularized the usefulness of a convex polyhedron made from triangles, as it is exceptionally strong and stable in relation to its size. With reflective mylar, LED's and vibrating motors, Teipen bridges the world of science, industrial design, and fine art to stunning effect.

The voyeuristic *Nedezentaipan*, 2012, features two individuals donning a skintight zentai suit covering their whole body on a park bench in a kinky public performance. The suit becomes a moving greenscreen, allowing Teipen to cover them with collaged bits of digital ephemera, while the grass and the leaves of the trees are themselves made of these human figures.

Perhaps nothing of Teipen's speaks more to the earlier days of social media than *Social Network*, 2009, in which a chaotic cluster of images and animated gifs define a portrait of the user. In a similar fashion, *Together*, 2009, resembles a web browser window, where scrolling content rains down, mocking the glut we bombard ourselves with on the daily, while *Robots Don't Smoke*, 2009, contrasts celebrity deaths with the metal machines meant to replace us. Teipen comments on the cultural phenomenon of the 27 Club, a list of celebrities who died at the age of 27, such as Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, while noting robots will outlive us all, only expiring when they are literally smoking from overheating.

In director David Cronenberg's 1999 science fiction masterpiece *Existenz* (IMO), a virtual reality game designer loses the ability to decipher what is real, when her biotechnological console goes awry leading to a violent series of events. While Teipen's world is not populated entirely by shiny happy people, there is nothing overly sinister afoot and the blurring of reality is wholeheartedly welcomed. Teipen long ago realized the inevitable link between our natural world and the artificiality of the digital and is willing to embrace and celebrate it, while sharing his enthusiasm for our own gratification and contemplation.