

Henriette Gunkel: Your exhibition 'As Spaces Fold, Companions Meet' provided an insight into your entire corpus of work from 2003 to date, including earlier works from the series *A World of Our Own* (2009-12) and *Companion Species, Emergency Weave* (2015) [see pp. 108-113]. The exhibition title, as well as the titles of some of the works in the show, reminded me of Donna Haraway's writing – in particular her book *When Species Meet* (2008). And if you look carefully at the different stages of your work, it seems as though your art practice runs parallel to, and in conversation with, Haraway's different theoretical endeavours: from her essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1991) to *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) to deep time and her tentacular thinking around the Anthropocene and the Chthulucene. So while some might consider your recent work with seed capsules as a move away from earlier political interventions, you seem instead to remain committed to a queer-feminist political practice that implies an understanding of different forms of being in the world together. It encompasses more than just human beings and machines, but also multispecies organisms that form a contagious relationship with each other.

Eline McGeorge: That is a really nice observation, that there is a parallel in my work with the development of Haraway's writing. I haven't thought of it in that way before. Haraway often turns up as a reference in writings about my work, but it is only recently that I have felt a strong connection to her thinking and also rediscovered some of her earlier ideas, which is why I refer directly to her concepts in some of my latest titles. I am not a very structured reader when it comes to theory – I most often draw inspiration from talks and from jumping back and forth in books when they resonate with my work. So it is interesting that you see a more consistent parallel development.

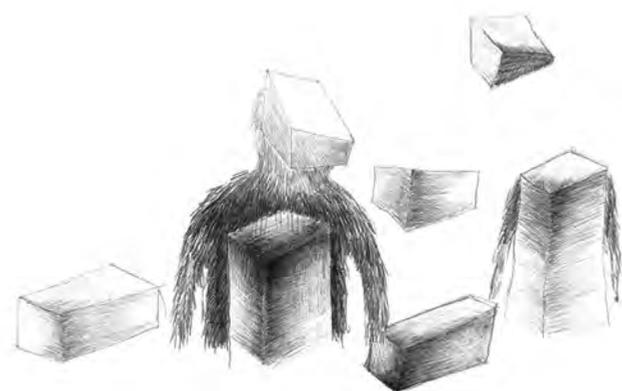
How Haraway regards art and fiction as vital to the never-ending need to reconfigure responses to the political present is important to me. Her cyborg from the 1980s recently re-emerged with relevance to my work, as a feminist myth that is coded to

intervene in the political trajectories of networked information technologies. Haraway takes digital, fictional, social and material realities into account in her search for strategies and responses that suggest a recoding of the feminist self. I realised that her cyborg might be a relative of some of the hybrid characters in my work, for example in the video *With the Free Rider into the Oil Age and Beyond* (2014) [see pp. 134-143] and in the project *A World of Our Ovn*, as well as hybrid characters that have evolved from my drawings and collages throughout my practice.

Her emphasis on the potential capacity of art and fiction to reconfigure political thinking supports the motivation for my work. I believe that there is a correspondence between the capacities of the political imagination and that of contemporary art thinking and making, with significant potential to contribute to the political present – a time when political imaginations seem so narrow, polarising, simplified, closed down by a rhetoric of fear and divisive populist discourses.

Haraway's involvement in a recoding of feminism is important here, opening it up to a multi-gendered, multispecies feminism – a feminism that includes gender equality, gender struggles and women's rights but expands upon relevant strategies for many of the pressing and entangled political questions of today. Ideological systems of oppression and domination do intersect. Works in 'As Spaces Fold, Companions Meet' merge questions about extraction and growth ideologies, speciesism and gender discrimination into a network to think within. As part of this thinking, my work has always contained many hybrid figures; hybrids between humans, nature, animals, architecture and machines, as well as real and fictional characters. Sometimes these figures appear alien or point towards alienation. Paradoxically, they are also about de-alienation, as they are figures that embody inclusion into an entangled community of life, both in a material and political sense.

H G : The hybrid figure, as well as the title of your exhibition, are also intriguing in that they provide a direct reference to your practices of collage, montage and weaving. The fold seems to recur thematically in your work, which allows different or



alternative spaces to emerge. I am particularly interested in your weaving technique as a form of folding – as employed, for example, in *Cosmo-Deren Weave Collage (A World of Our Ovn)* (2012) [see p. 91] and *Companion Species, Emergency Weave*. Here you create new worlds by literally cutting the line of association in relation to one image and weaving it into another. You reassemble new worlds through practices of collage and weaving in particular, but also montage in your video practice, and challenge our understanding of an assumed reality while allowing alternative spaces and subjectivities to emerge.

E M : The folding, montage and weaving allow visual journeys across time and space that I think correspond with how our minds work. For example, a political imagination interweaves past ideologies, movements, characters and events to try to understand the political present and its potential power to be different. Visually and thematically I work with methods that bring together real as well as fictional references across different times and spaces in a 'novv' – a form of time travel that allows the merging of references, visuals, characters and ideas, both from the past and the future.



Weaving allows an emphasis on entanglement that I like. I attempt to let the work 'practise' what it is arguing. My working processes often intervene with image-making technologies themselves and engage in a conversation with the materials and techniques to formulate artistic and political 'messages'. This is motivated by a fascination for visuals as unique tools for thinking, perception and open-ended investigation.

H G : It is important that you highlight the potentiality of the practices of collage, montage, and cut-up to also disrupt/collapse the supposedly distinct categories of past/present/future. As such your work not only seems to provide alternative spaces (and the effects and potentiality of such spaces also for the political present, as in folding spaces), but it seems to also contain a temporal dynamic: folding times, or rather weaving different times into each other, and as such providing a form of time travel. The *Cosmonaut-Woolf Portrait Weave* (2012) [see p. 3] from the *A World of Our Ovn* series, for example, brings together two images of the past: Virginia Woolf and Valentina Tereshkova. The cut-up

and subsequent weaving of the images that represent figures and events of different pasts results in the deployment of other times in the present. You pay homage to female figures before you – other reference points in *A World of Our Own* are Maya Deren, the protagonists in Lizzie Borden’s wonderful science fiction film *Born in Flames* (1983) and Nina Hagen – while being radically open to the future.

As such your practice disrupts a common understanding of time as sequential or linear and invents other space-times. Similarly, as your work seems to suggest, political struggles are never sequential (overcoming one thing and moving to the next), but are in fact extended, mutated, recurring in different forms and places. The memory of previous struggles is folded into the present. The focus on a sense of otherworldliness that is produced in the image, but also in other works of folding time, is compelling here – less as an escape into other worlds but as a communal effort of working through history and memory in the attempt to imagine a different world to come.



E M : Yes, in the case of the Cosmonaut-Woolf Portrait Weave, the working process started when I came across a portrait of Virginia Woolf as I read her essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). At the same time I came across another portrait of the first woman in space. I sourced the photographs from the internet and printed out the slightly murky images. The ink level was low and the printer added its own marks – leaving another layer of visual elements and traces of the journey the images make across time, and across platforms and numerous translations between analogue, digital and material realities.

I cut the portraits in strips and wove them together. A poor resolution image appeared inside the cosmonaut helmet of Valentina Tereshkova, a coarse pixellation of interwoven paper strips. The Cosmonaut-Woolf character in this collaged paper weave became one of several characters in the project *A World of Our Own*. She

is a space explorer, a combination of Woolf and her exploration of space in *A Room of One’s Own*, and Tereshkova, the first woman exploring outer space.

She travels across folding spaces to meet companions of her own hybrid nature in the animated montage video with the same title as the project itself, *A World of Our Own* (2012) [see pp. 96-105]. Here the characters are edited together as they travel through one of the world’s biggest financial centres, the City of London, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Their voices are raised against the injustices of their own times and against the backdrop of the political moment of the video’s making. Cosmonaut-Woolf is one of the characters that travels through the folding spaces of this project, following the time-travelling moments of the political ‘now’ and joining her equally hybrid companions.

H G : One of those companions, another hybrid/otherworldly figure that recurs in your work, is the figure of the biomat – a character borrowed from a Norwegian science fiction TV series of the 1970s titled *Blindpassasjer*. *Blindpassasjer* means stowaway or free rider, and in a way also provides a reference to your work with emergency blankets, which are used to cover refugees who survived life-threatening journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. The biomat is the protector of nature that can dissolve itself and reassemble itself somewhere else.



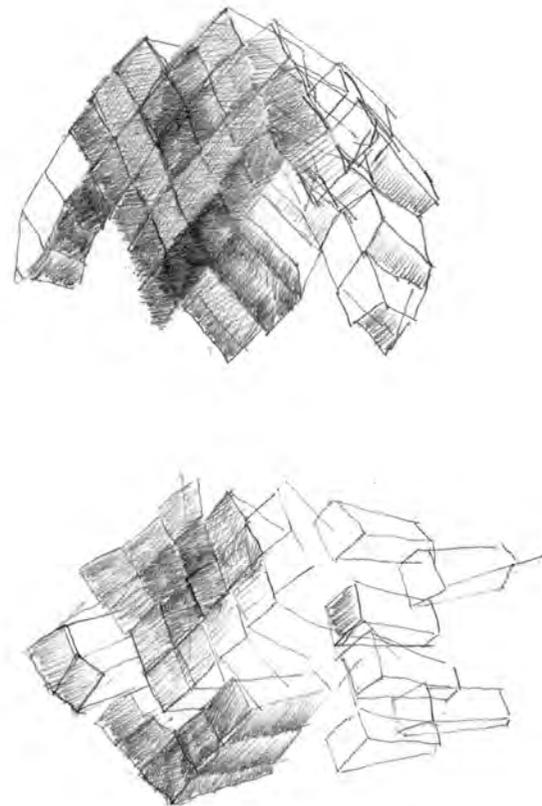
In your body of work, you have different versions of this rather androgynous character. As can be seen from the sketches you have included for this conversation, the biomat figure has the capacity to extend itself or to retreat by dissolving into fragments or pixels.

It is a powerful figure, unpredictable and evasive, disappearing and reappearing in different forms and shapes. The biomat is a shape-shifter that can take the form of a mutant, a figure at the interface of human/machine, human/animal or human/plant, a multispecies being, as visible in the drawings here. It also shifts between the analogue and digital as your drawings are also animations. Especially in your more recent work, the biomat figure seems to not only dissolve itself into zeros and ones, into distortion of information or wavy movement, but also into seed capsules.

The drawing-based digital montage print *When Species Meet, Biomatic Appearance With Butterflies and Flower* (2015) [see p. 129] was included in your show. Here the title seems to suggest that the biomat, or a biomat-like figure, forms an alliance or symbiosis with animals and plants, but you could also argue that the worlds of plants and animals are always already folded into the human/machine, that they are not only attached but part of it (a thought that might allow us to return to Haraway and her critique of the Anthropocene). In this image this fold in a way seems contagious, or radiant/electrically charged – producing wavy movements in all directions. In your current project you seem to be increasingly interested in this contagious folding – a process that you call cross-fertilisation?

E M : I haven't thought about the use of emergency blankets in my work and the stovaway/free rider link in the way you describe. That is a good observation. The material's reference to the body is important to me – its role both as a protector against the elements on earth and in empty space (it was initially designed for space travel), by reflecting our own body heat back to us.

The first time I worked with the biomat character was in my video work *With the Free Rider into the Oil Age and Beyond*. I borrowed the character from the *Blindpassasjer* TV series and thought of my video as a 'follow-up' to the plot of the series. The video was produced for the group exhibition 'We are Living on a Star' (2014) at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter outside Oslo. *We are Living on a Star* is the title of a 1958 tapestry by Hannah Ryggen, which hung in the entrance hall of the government building in Oslo when it was bombed in the right-wing extremist attack of 2011. Many of Ryggen's tapestries are explicitly anti-fascist, and one of her works was partly covered during the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937 because of its critical portrayal of Mussolini. While the hall of the government building in Oslo was blown to pieces, her



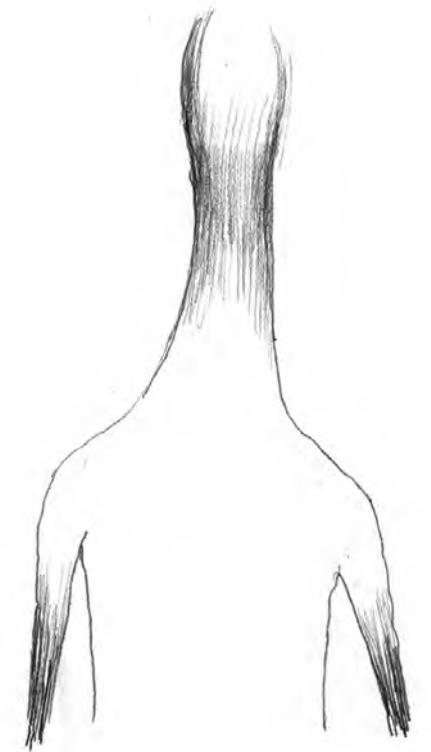
tapestry survived with just a tear in the lower right corner, due to the softness of its material.

The tapestry is believed to refer to an epic science fiction poem *Aniara* (1956) by the Swedish writer Harry Martinson. *Aniara* also inspired the scriptwriters of *Blindpassasjer*. But in contrast to the poem, with its bleak ending to the human endeavours on board a starship, the TV series ends with an upbeat destruction of the biomat, suggesting an unproblematic future for the imperialistic efforts of the starship crew and their exploration of a newly discovered red planet.

I have a vague memory of the TV series from my childhood. I remember feeling sympathetic with the biomat when the crew figured out that it was a defence mechanism of the nature on the planet and decided it was a hostile threat to be terminated.

In my video *With the Free Rider into the Oil Age and Beyond*, I wanted to merge the ending of *Aniara* and the *Blindpassasjer* story, as well as the political ideas inherent in the brutalist-inspired architecture of the government building, and connect it to the political present of the making of the video.

The building plays the role of the spaceship's headquarters in the narrative of the video, which takes pictures of the building's construction in Oslo in 1958 as a starting point. The social democratic ideas that were developed and implemented at the time of the construction are expressed in its architecture and incorporated art. Its façade is an even grid of windows corresponding with the idea of equality and an anti-hierarchical order of society. Soon after the construction, and with the news that fossil resources might be within reach, the government proclaimed sovereignty over the Continental Shelf beyond the Norwegian coastline in 1963. The same year, a new law decided that the state was the landowner and that search and extraction was to happen solely by permission of the government. At the time of the *Blindpassasjer* TV series, the oil extraction took



off. The principles of wealth distribution from the oil industry within the welfare state, and the people as owners of these natural resources, were implemented in the foundation of the state-owned oil company Statoil in 1972.

I thought I could see a parallel with the ethos in the TV series, with the crew's self-proclaimed right to exploration of the red planet and the destruction of the biomat for the common good of their own species. But more pressingly, the timeline of the video work continues to today's version of Statoil as a multinational oil company, where its founding principles of wealth distribution and the people as owners of the natural resources form a paradoxical relationship with multinational oil extraction. Contemporary material from Statoil's tar sand extraction in Canada at the time of the making of the video forms part of the montage, with drawn animation, clips from the *Blindpassasjer* TV series and footage from the construction and destruction of the government building.¹

As you suggested in your reference to the pixellated appearance of the biomat – the figure in the TV series made out of a cloud of programmable molecules – analogue image-making techniques of the 1970s make the biomat appear as a gathering of digital pixels morphing into a human figure. It is a creature from the analogue era that nevertheless fits right into the digital age with its programmed and pixellated appearance, which also foresees a possible biological-digital age where molecules are programmed and assembled.



The seed capsules of *2000 Seed Capsules* (2015) [pp. 114-115], shown as a pixellated pattern on the floor of the exhibition, were designed to increase biodiversity and regeneration in soil local to the Oslo area. The pixellated pattern they made was of course pointing back to the biomat, which, as you point out, in digital spaces can be zeros and ones, and in material spaces can be seeds and clay. To tie in with the forces and intentions of the biomat, the protagonist of the *Free Rider* video also appears pixellated as she approaches the tar sand extraction plant in Canada.

I have discovered that the biomat has been in my work all along, right through from the earliest hybrid characters of my drawings and animations. The drawings accompanying this conversation are from the series *Departure of a Stranger* (2004-05), ten years before I rediscovered the biomat of the TV series.

So my work suggests that the biomat is still alive, and still on its mission. I look for its various shapes and forms and reference them in my work to suggest alliances with its forces and intentions.

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1 An artist book produced with the video contains a transcript and references for the narrative and footage material: *With the Free Rider into the Oil Age and Beyond*, 2014, Torpedo Press, ISBN 978-82-93104-12-4. Video synopses are presented in the exhibition catalogue *We are Living on a Star*, 2014, ISBN 978-3-95679-047-8, pp. 48-55, and in the Berlin Film Festival's 2015 Forum catalogue, p. 175.