Violet Dennison
Chapter Four: Disappointment
8 June – 21 July 2019

Violet Dennison deals with the dynamics and fragility of complex technological and biological systems. Her installations refer to ecosystems and infrastructures that permeate and shape our lived environments in ways that often go unnoticed.

In her artwork—created especially for the exhibition *Chapter Four: Disappointment*—the artist works with coding techniques, as well as methods of information storage and transfer. She continues her sculptural examination of inconceivable systems and their material manifestations, hacking technologies, combining high-tech with the occult. In a world increasingly determined by digital megastructures, in which biospheres and infospheres merge into one another, Dennison investigates possibilities of self-expression, as well as communication and inter-action with such systems. Code and information techno-logies thus become structures that are imbedded in and incorporate human life and its subjective expressions, but at the same time act upon it as material agents following their own machine laws.

Exhibition Hall

Space, material objects, and sounds are as much elements of Dennison's exhibition as personal memories, spiritual prophecies, digital codes, imperceptible signals, or metadata from the Kunstverein's Wi-Fi. Three objects, reminiscent of oversized baskets, are placed on the exhibition hall's central axis. Pink and green plastic tubes form a tangled mesh of knots, covering a bowl-shaped volume. The net-like structure translates the artist's private writings—excerpts from chapter four of her memoir—into a code of knots. At every crossing within each knot, a tube lies either above or below another, creating a binary system, in which every knot represents a letter, a number, or punctuation mark. Through a multi-faceted string of translations from speech, writing, and the digital code of knots developed by Dennison, a subjective impression, a private memory, or a personal experience of the artist is inscribed into the baskets' materiality, without the information being readable.

With this knotted structure, Dennison uses an ancient cultural technique. Knots can be traced back to the Stone Age. Many cultures use them to encode, save, and share information, for example: counting days, remembering events, or as knotted cords for prayer, of which the rosary is a variation. Another prominent example is Quipu, the language of knots used by the Inca to record quantifiable information, like inventories or taxes, but also important events or myths. According to recent research, Quipu is based on a series of binary decisions and therefore can be understood as a digital system. Dennison's sculptures remind us that codes and binary systems are an important part of human culture and experience, and not only conceived as a recent invention since the development of computers and their interconnection via networks. The idea of information as immaterial and transparent, however, is not fulfilled. Rather, the materiality of the sculpture with its complex twists and turns of colored plastic tubes is foregrounded before the embedded text. The encoding works like an operation, which takes out the private and allows an outsider's view on subjective experience, thereby making communication altogether possible. Yet, without a key, the stored information remains inaccessible. Our everyday experience of interacting with digital devices and infrastructures becomes virtually reversed. While information usually appears to be immediately accessible through a user interface, the underlying system, its material requirements and mechanisms, remain in the dark. Here, materiality and spatial structure stand before the embodied information. At the same time, it is a question of reception modalities—as well as one's own viewpoint—pre-existing knowledge and interests, which information can be decoded from the sculptures' noise. In addition to the artist's private text, the works contain innumerable other sediments of data. For example, the molecular structure of the plastics, their industrial production or origin from fossil oil and its formation through millions of years. In fact, reflections on how an object can compress myriads of data within itself stood at the beginning of the artist's work on these sculptures.

Dennison interprets human perception as an interface, as a point of intersection between a human and the world. Dennison's sound installation, *Divination 2*, suggests this interface allows only limited access and is just one of many possible ways to filter and decode information from unlimited data. The horizontal grid 0f cables and smartphone speakers spreads across two walls, like a circuit board. It emits a high-frequency cheeping sound, a fast rhythmical signal of beeps filling the hall with digital chirping. The installation uses a new technology, transmitting "data-over-sound," which can be used in smartphones alongside Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. The sound waves transmit the digitally encoded prophecies from the spiritual medium Dainichi Lazuli about the artist's future. Parts of the transmission are ultrasonic frequencies, making the signals inaudible to humans and resulting in only machines being able to receive and decode them. The visual appearance and the chirping of the installation can be read as elements

made for the human interface, whereas the code sent can only be received within a machine-to-machine interaction. For Dennison, this is similar to the spiritual medium's ability: they have access to another level of reality, other strata of data, inaccessible to most people, but always surrounding us much like the radio signals of our data networks and devices.

The sculptures hold Dennison's personal memories of the past, while the text encoded in the sound installation predicts her future. The development and spreading of information technologies, from writing to machine learning self-learning coincide with fundamental changes in the understanding of time. Methods of digitally capturing and processing data allow for ever more fine-grained analyses of the past and the present. They decrease indeterminacy and make past and future seem to fall together into a perpetual present. In the age of Big Data, when intelligent systems are used to screen people with the goal of generating profit or implementing control mechanisms, Dennison's work contrasts this by focussing on encrypting records of her personal past and future, leaving them in the dark and melting them into the material.

First Floor Gallery

On October 21st 2016, a large part of the internet collapsed in the US and Europe. Highly frequented websites and platforms, like Twitter, Amazon, Netflix, Airbnb, New York Times, or CNN were inaccessible to users. As the biggest attack of its kind so far, the collapse was due to the malware Mirai (Japanese for future) that infected countless everyday objects connected to the Internet of things: cameras, routers and printers, or any physical device connected to the Internet. The botnet of infected devices attacked the servers of Dyn, Inc.—a company controlling the largest share of the domain naming system and thus an important part of the internet's infrastructure. Reports about this attack, and the implied scenario of the ability to turn a chunky printer for home use into a weapon, capable of shutting down one of the internet's central hubs, were the basis for Dennison's work, *WhisperF33d*, a hacked Brother printer that sits on the tiled landing leading to the upstairs gallery. During the exhibition's opening, it printed the metadata of all data traffic within the Kunstverein's Wi-Fi, a snippet of all the invisible, yet potentially always accessible, data streams that permeate the exhibition space. Stacks of pages filled with strings of characters, from which a layman can only discern a few names or occasional words, device IDs, brand names, or time stamps, also track the overwhelming amount of communication data each connected device sends, regardless of user activity.

In her essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986) the American science-fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin turns against a deeply entrenched narrative model of storytelling with one hero at the center of the story. In her proposal of a counter model, she starts from the proposition that humankind's first tool was not a weapon, a bone, a stick, or spear to beat and kill, but a container: "A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container. A holder. A recipient". Respectively, she encourages us to see a narrative or novel as a container as well: "A novel

is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and us." In analogy to this, we could develop a container or basket theory of technology. It would define technology not mainly as a tool of authorization, dominance, and control, but as something that gathers, carries and connects human life with other organisms and artifacts. Technology, understood as a net that is always creating new intersections between different actors, many of which are not designed for humans.

Violet Dennison (* 1989, USA) lives and works in New York City.

Solo exhibitions (s) and group exhibitions (g) (selection):

2019: *Tell me how to feel*, Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway (s); 2018: *Songs for Sabotage*, New Museum Triennial, New Museum, New York (g); 6th Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow (g); *Schau 5*, Kunsthaus Kollitsch, Klagenfurt, Austria (g); *Dinner that night*, Bureau, New York (g); 2017: *Transcend*, Jan Kaps, Cologne, Germany (s); 2016: *Cos only Difference can return my friend*, 83 Pitt Street, New York (g); *A human is not a duck*, Alma Zevi, Venice (g); 2015: *Limited Liability Corporation*, Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Germany (g); *O Earth, O Earth, Return!*, Allen and Eldridge, New York (s); 2014: *To do as one would*, David Zwirner, New York (g); Jan Kaps, Cologne, Germany (s).

1
Chapter Four: Disappointment continued... 1, 2019
Polyethylene, polyurethane, polyethylene terephthalate, copper, tinned copper, brass, and steel
The piece is composed of a binary knot code translated from an excerpt of the artist's memoir.

2
Chapter Four: Disappointment continued... 2, 2019
Polythylene, polyurethane, polyethylene terephthalate, copper, tinned copper, brass, and steel
The piece is composed of a binary knot code translated from an excerpt of the artist's memoir.

3
Chapter Four: Disappointment Epilogue, 2019
Polythylene, polyurethane, polyethylene terephthalate, copper, tinned copper, brass, and steel
The piece is composed of a binary knot code translated from an excerpt of the artist's memoir.

4
Divination 2, 2019
Encrypted audio of a transcribed divination by Dainichi Lazuli, iPhone 5C Loudspeakers, iPhone 6G Loudspeakers, iPhone 5s Loudspeakers, iPhone6SP Loudspeakers, stamped copper, audio wire, amps, aluminum

Exhibition Hall
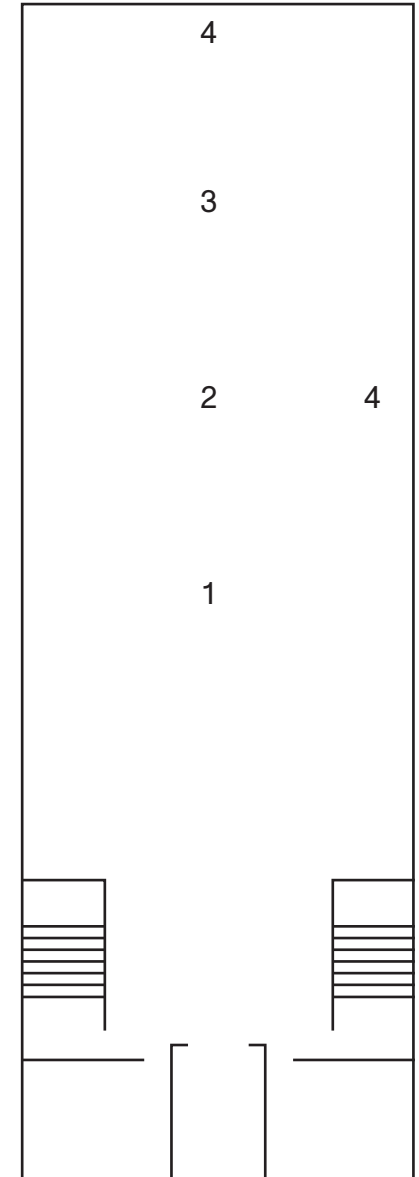
5
WhisperF33d, 2019
Hacked Brother printer, paper

5

WC   WC
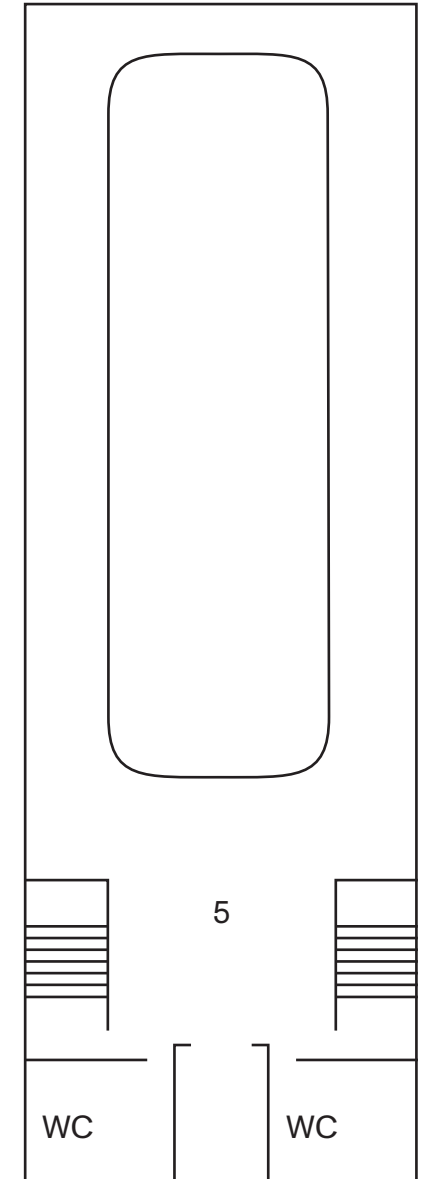
Opening Night

Fri, 7 Jun, 7 pm
Introduction: Heinrich Dietz, Director

Programme

Sat, 8 Jun, 3 pm
Talk with Violet Dennison and
Rindon Johnson

Thu, 27 Jun, 7 pm
Curator's Tour with Heinrich Dietz

Tue, 2 Jul, 7 pm
An Evening with Chaos Computer
Club Freiburg (CCCFr)

Sun, 7 Jul, 2–4 pm
Children's Workshop
(registration required)

Tue, 9 Jul, 7 pm
Occult Technologies
Panel Discussion with Eberhard
Bauer, Wolfgang Fach and Andreas
Fischer from the Institute for
Frontier Areas of Psychology and
Mental Health (IGPP)

Thu, 11 Jul, 7 pm
Guided Tour with Nelly Kuch

Opening Hours
Tue–Sun, 12–6 pm
Wed, 12–8 pm, free admission
Closed on Mondays,
members free