Gazes Upon Gazes, Disembodied

on Clemente Ciarrocca's and James Krone's *If Tomorrow's Sun Finds You Within My Boundaries*
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by Emily Nill

When thinking about the contemporary politics of the gaze, we are confronted with a chaos of intertwined relations, almost impossible to untangle in a meaningful way. Everyone is constantly being watched while watching themselves, with past and future possibilities already embedded. Our technological extensions have intensified an introverted state marked by both alienation and narcissism. Being online has made us paranoid, angry, and apathetic, while still yearning for attention and satisfaction. Clemente Ciarrocca's and James Krone's shared show *If Tomorrow's Sun Finds You Within My Boundaries* takes this condition as its starting point, probing the entanglement of screens and bodies, the shifting dialectic between passivity and agency, as well as the disciplinary and libidinal economies sustained by an endless network of reciprocal gazes.

Clemente Ciarrocca's mixed-media work *Hr: 88, Rr: 39, Sc: 19, Pd: 57* draws on predicted biometric data generated by artificial intelligence. Based on a rough self-profile—including age, height, weight, medical history, professional routine, and emotional state—the system produced a set of physiological metrics numerically describing a state of arousal before a sexual act. Yet the work's surface offers no immediate visual cue to this highly intimate yet abstracted reference. What we encounter instead is a vertical black rectangle, roughly tableau-sized, composed of layered found materials. Most notably, two Plexiglass panels reminiscent of video screens reflect their surroundings, generating spatial complexity within the work. On one panel, perspectival depth is drawn, visualizing a room with a bed; a photograph of a flower punctuates the assemblage, interrupting the visual loop of mirrored surfaces and layered reflections, while simultaneously emphasizing the work's flatness.

On the wall next to this piece, a second work, *Hr: 71, Rr: 26, Sc: 12, Pd: 43*, captures the predicted biometric profile of a sexual comedown or *petit mort* state. For Ciarrocca, the corner between these two works functions as an almost orgasmic pivot, where surfaces activate as space and predictive data transforms into embodied tension. By staging the body not as mere presence but as algorithmic anticipation, the work subtly hints at the shifting contours of subjectivity in a computational age. Here, the body is referenced in a recursive loop of desire, arousal, and mechanical speculation—something that comes into being precisely through invisible predictions and their inherent expectations and biases.

The work is composed of two framed images hung vertically, with a metal attachment positioned between them and delicate mother-of-pearl-colored objects pushed into its holes. This element functions like a bridge between the images, emphasizing contrasts between materialities: delicate and hard, feminine and masculine, functional and decorative. The upper image shows text blocks and drawings of leaves and eyes on a rose-colored background, with words like *desiring*, *dancing*, and *smiling* circling around. Yet the text resists readability, as though seen through frosted glass; only a sharp vertical black line stands out. We must come very close to decipher these both encyclopedic and anonymous quotes, which associatively reflect on the complex nature of "property." We are encouraged to ask ourselves how our ways of seeing, perceiving, and claiming knowledge over others are also forms of possession—actions that erase the living, shifting nature of the other. And, thinking a few steps further, to interrogate the very notion of possession critically, recognizing that perhaps only desire itself resists reduction to ownership, precisely because of its inherently transitory and relational nature.

The image below presents a palimpsest-like montage: a graphite drawing of a white cube with subtly distorted proportions, topped by an empty bed traced from a stock photo. Layered over this is a small photograph of a public space, showing a crowd gathered, watching people hanging head-down from a beam. As we look closer, the historical violence embedded in the image unfolds. What we are witnessing is

photographic documentation of the public display of the dead bodies of Mussolini and his closest supporters, hung at a petrol station at Piazzale Loreto in 1945. The image space creates a strange tension between depersonalized intimacy and the charged voyeurism associated with the public exhibition of the defeated tyrant's body. But are there not also sexual undertones implicit in the spectacle of punishment—when the political body is reduced to mere flesh? Exposed, degraded, yet made symbolically potent precisely through its destruction. *Petit mort* is, after all, also death.

At first glance, James Krone's readymade *The Tarporley Painter's Mixing Bowl* masquerades as a classical Greek amphora, a perception reinforced by its museum-like display on a pedestal. Surely, we aren't fooled into thinking this is the real deal, but we at least assume we're looking at a faithful reproduction. For decades, we've been calling this kind of reflection on capitalist production pop, appropriation, or postmodern irony, quoting Benjamin's *Kunstwerkaufsatz* to death. But the object is no replica. A closer look reveals something both more complicated and, at the same time, more aesthetically banal. What we see is merely the materialization of the idea of a classical Greek object in the age of AI technology.

Krone had been researching a classical mixing bowl from the MFA Boston collection online for years. The object, which depicts the myth of Medusa— a monstrous, woman-like entity with snake hair and the power to turn anyone who meets her gaze to stone—became a touchstone for many of the conceptual concerns central to his practice, particularly those relating to visuality, perception, and the politics of the gaze. Around the time the collaboration with Ciarrocca started, Krone began encountering online advertisements for a strangely distorted replica of the vase. Acting on this digitally mediated impulse, he purchased the object, fully aware that what he was acquiring was not a historical reproduction but a simulated artifact, a fiction born within the digital unconscious. The resulting object was the product of algorithmic inference and commercial targeting, shaped as much by Krone's browsing history as by his artistic intent. In typical AI "something in the style of" fashion, the mixing bowl had been transformed into an amphora, and the mythological motif had also shifted—subtly but significantly—before the object was shipped to the artist from somewhere in Europe.

Depicted is the moment right after the slaughter of Medusa: Athena holds up the severed head, reflected upside down in her shield, while Perseus stands by, both slightly bowing their heads. In the reference piece from Boston, the figures deliberately close their eyes to avoid the gaze of the Gorgon's head, implying she still holds her powers even after being brutally executed. This visual dynamic shapes the entire narrative structure of the scene, anchoring it in a choreography of looking and not-looking, of danger contained through controlled vision. But in the AI-generated version, this structure collapses. The interplay of gazes—who looks, who must look away, and who mediates the gaze (Athena's mirrored shield)—which defines the myth's power, is reduced to surface-level resemblance. The scene becomes a hollowed image, emptied of the tensions and dangers embedded in the original story, presenting figures and symbols in static arrangement, uncoupled from the logic that once bound them together. Yet, it would be too short-sighted to characterize the work solely through its visualization of the "dumbness" of so-called intelligent machines. When we look at these strange simulacra, it raises the question: what are we actually seeing? And more precisely, do referential objects like Krone's readymade still conjure fragments of the histories they are entangled with, or do they now possess their own independent histories worth investigating?

This questioning of historical and symbolic layers extends across other works in the show, which emphasize different notions of entrapment, for example, the layering of distinct audio elements confined within a heavy

Victorian closet. In Ciarrocca's sound work *Politics in the Closet*, disembodied voices discuss the history and politicization of sexuality in the public sphere, reflecting on the underlying power structures. Blending philosophical riffs with erotic confessions, they ultimately rise above being both literally and figuratively "in the closet" through acts of intellectual agency.

Interwoven with these explorations of pornographic transgression, Krone's sound piece *Enchanted Mirror* channels his fascination with a viral video trend that recently circulated across social media platforms. In these clips, a person holds a towel in front of a mirror, expecting it to block their reflection. However, due to basic laws of optics, their image remains visible—eliciting startled reactions such as the one sampled in the work: "It can see her!" What's striking about this "experiment" and its reaction is not the naive misunderstanding of physics, but rather the childlike wonder it expresses. More importantly, it hints at a deeper yearning for a more legible, less complex relationship with technologically mediated perception itself —as if not only nature, but this digitally produced second nature, were a kind of magic, mysteriously detached from the material and technical infrastructures that produce it.

A different sense of confinement emerges in Krone's photography series of pigeons. Positioned in strictly centered, back-facing compositions, the pigeons turn their backs on us, subtly reversing the gaze dynamic. We, as viewers, become voyeurs of these conventionally disliked urban creatures, whose indifferent outlook traps us in our own projections, reflecting the exhibition's broader exploration of how seeing, desiring, and knowing fold into loops of possession and alienation. Unlike the German Romantic *Rückenfigur*, who follows his sensual-intellectual longing through a widened gaze, imagining nature as the mirror of his inner life, the pigeons' lookout is undefined—or, when fixed straight onto a blank wall, strikingly bleak. Here, there is no promise of transcendence, no romantic horizon; only the repetition of confined gestures within a tightly bounded environment.

The exhibition is accompanied by a text that functions as a variation on Bruce Nauman's 1974 score *Body Pressure*—but with an emphasis on shifting its core focus from the body to the relation between eye and mind. Fittingly, the works in the exhibition take Nauman's insistence on the body's encounter with physical boundaries and extend it to the immaterial limits of the contemporary politics of (digitally) mediated perception and desire. Here, the body is no longer simply pressing against a wall; more than that, it becomes clear that it is impossible to speak of the body as an autonomous, contained physical entity any longer. Rather, it has become something constantly re-mediated and redefined—part of a discursive network structured through gazes, pressed against the confines of algorithmic prediction, reflected in the recursive mirrors of mechanical vision, or caught within the loop of its own digitally anticipated presence. Nauman's erotic exercise has, as Ciarrocca and Krone put it, become a *psychotic* one.

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