

REFRESH
RATE: ON
THE AGE
OF FLUX
AND AFTER
AFFECT

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Introduction

We live in a time where the act of the refresh is both physical and metaphysical, poetic and yet very scientific. A period of constant transition / mission; an Age of Flux.

Feeling of weightlessness, of absolute fluidity and the constant interchange. A constant refresh rate. The emptiness that is full and fullness that is empty. The quasi condition. The sea creatures, the data banks of metaphysical states and keys of evolution. Functional and dysfunctional beings passively and actively participating in the background processes of complex economics of natures.¹

The quote from my short film “SSD SEA/A” (4min, HD, 2017), which is both the beginning and the summary of my writing. This essay is about constantly refreshing hyperobjective human conditions - the after affects of posthumanist thinking in the age of constant flux. I use the term constant flux to describe the intensity of change in the technological world where one feels somewhat dysfunctional or like a misplaced object, who can't process all of the incoming data. This is an essay about one day as a hyperobject human being in constant flux.

I will be focusing on a human as a hyperobject, or to be more precise, consciousness as a hyperobject from posthuman critical theory². This latter idea I was introduced to by Italian philosopher Rossi Braidotti³. The term *hyperobject*⁴ I am borrowing from Timothy Morton and adapting it to my meaning. Term “Hyperobject” as mentioned before Morton uses to describe objects that will withstand their creators and will have affects long after human are gone. My interest is in 'human as hyperobject' from the perspective of posthumanist theory. This stems from observation and reflections on everyday life of an Interlinked world.

The beginning of my day will start with After Affect and so without further ado let's immerse ourselves into this journey.

¹ V.Kovalevskij. 2017

² My sense of posthumanism is thus analogous to Jean-François Lyotard's paradoxical rendering of the postmodern: it comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture) of which Bernard Stiegler probably remains our most compelling and ambitious theorist—and all of which comes before that historically specific thing called “the human” that Foucault's archaeology excavates. Care Wolfe (2009). What is Posthumanism? Published by the University of Minnesota Press. ISBN: 978-0-8166-6614-0

³ Rosi Braidotti (2013) The Posthuman. Cambridge: Polity press. ISBN: 978-0-7456-4158-4.

⁴ Timothy Morton calls “hyperobjects”—entities of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place. Morton explains what hyperobjects are and their impact on how we think, how we coexist, and how we experience our politics, ethics, and art. Timothy Morton (2013). Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World (Posthumanities). University of Minnesota press. ISBN:978-1-4529-4056-4.

After Affect is the name of this chapter and the name of the show I exhibited in Tromsø, spring of 2017. The resulting exhibition was composed of: "Affect Affect" (2016/17) an 11:50.18, HD video on a loop, which illuminated the whole space (fig.1), "HummingBird" (2016) 1:31min, HD video on a loop of BBC One televised program "Planet Earth II". These video works were accompanied by objects made of silicone. The exhibition came month after DIS curated the 9th instalment of Berlin biennial, an event that was heavily focused on fictions and artifice. At that time I was pretty tired of everyone's art looking more or less similar, social media bias of "everyone is happy" and the "right" image of how one should portray oneself. Everything seemed fake. Everyone felt like a carefully planned advertisement campaign. *"It is as if, after the great explosion of theoretical creativity of the 1970s and 1980s, we had entered a zombified landscape of repetition without difference and lingering melancholia"*⁵.

And thus DIS was called at the time innovative in their approach to curating the Berlin biennial. The feeling of zombification and melancholia was present in every step of the show in Berlin and across the rest of the art market. This zombification, I think, was a manifestation of what seemed to be happening on a bigger scale in Western contemporary society. I saw this as being because of an arrogance of those in power and the passive participation in mass disseminated fictions. Here are the examples of what I am talking about. On 31st of August 2017 The founder of the Freymond-Guth gallery published a public letter about the closure of the gallery. This letter consisted of a very personal, but yet very critical message addressing the illusionary image of the art market.⁶ Or this quote from Christy Lange's published article after USA 2016 elections, title An Epic Fail "I have consumed media voraciously throughout this election season. I considered myself well informed. But I was reading *The New Yorker* and *Slate*, listening to NPR's political podcasts and relying on FiveThirtyEight. I considered their voices inherently more objective than outlets like Fox News or the *National Review*. And I thought believing that was enough. But in doing so I was tacitly dismissing other views as invalid, even ignorant."⁷

Advertisement and the image of SELF became too important. Do this and you will become liked, swipe left and you'll get more likes. Be the star, be special. But in fact, no one is special and never was. This messages has been perpetuated through liberalism and the humanist project. Neoliberalism has taken this and made it commodifiable. Posthuman theory counters this human exceptionalism. This strange illusion that one is better than someone else became an interesting field of study. By coincidence or fate, Adam Curtis's documentary "HyperNormalization" (2016) pointed out the specifics of my interest towards hyper-realistic pictorialism and problems of hyper-productivity. Curtis states this vision of the world was

⁵ Page 5, Rosi Braidotti (2013) *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity press. ISBN: 978-0-7456-4158-4.

⁶ <https://news.artnet.com/market/read-closing-letter-freymond-guth-1067177>

⁷ <https://frieze.com/article/epic-fail>

conceived through the utopian thinking of bankers/politicians, and as pointed out by Peter Sunde in the article Pirate Bay Founder: 'I Have Given Up'⁸, the founder of ThePirateBay, later utopian internet and post-internet thinking. In the global ecologies of economics and societies driven by illusions and false ideals. We live in many worlds, in overlapped realities, or dimensions if you please.

I was interested in the post digital life – one of constructed memories and ideals. A meticulously crafted delusion, which is being constantly reinforced through interlinked technologies and the background fictions – I call this Hyperconstruct. In the AfterAffect project as it was showed at Kurant Art Space (see: fig1, fig 2, fig 3, fig 4, fig 5, fig 6), the wide video projection titled “After Affect” acted as a hub to the whole user experience. The camera is panning across a pixelated still image of colours, pink and blue. These are widely used in the industry of advertisement and culture. As pointed out in the article written by Lauren Schwartzberg:

At first, in 2012, when this color really started showing up everywhere, it appeared as a toned-down version of its foil, Barbie Pink, a softer shade that looks as if all the blue notes have been taken out. By the time everyone started calling it Millennial Pink in the summer of 2016, the color had mutated and expanded to include a range of shades from beige with just a touch of blush to a peach-salmon hybrid.⁹

In its pervasiveness over the last 6 years, millennial Pink has been used cynically to emulate warmth. In using it myself I wanted to both reference this cynicism, but sincerely wishing to affect a warm environment. The softish Macintosh computer voice named 'Alex' was acting as a guide throughout the different parts of the exhibition space. I deliberately chose to use the 'Alex' voice, as it was the most recognised male computer voice at the time - a monotonous, almost tired of everything, human voice like expounding to every corner of the show unwillingly without a juice but with pre determent rules, delineating the narrative with acceptance¹⁰. On an HD LCD TV (fig 2) that was installed opposite the video projection, the excerpt about hummingbirds from the BBC One Documentary Planet Earth 2 was shown (fig 3, fig 4). In the excerpt, the birds looked fake. In fact BBC ONE was accused¹¹ of altering the footage and using CGI to make the image look more entertaining. The questions for me were: Why do we need this hyperreal image and when is it enough? These two questions can be applied directly when thinking of notions of neoliberalism and the capitalistic world. Why do we do it and when will this be enough? Thinking even on the bigger scale Rossi Braidotti ask somewhat similar questions on the different, but yet very connected theme:

How to develop critical thought, after the shock of recognition of a state of ontological uncertainty, and, secondly, how to reconstitute a sense of community held together by affinity and ethical accountability, without falling into the negative passions of doubt and suspicion¹²

⁸ https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/qkjpbd/pirate-bay-founder-peter-sunde-i-have-given-up

⁹ Lauren Schwartzberg, www.thecut.com. Why Millennial Pink Refuses to Go Away March 19, 2017

¹⁰ <http://www.vkovalevskij.eu/projects/after-affect/>

¹¹ <http://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/734464/Planet-Earth-II-Viewers-accuse-hummingbird-footage-CGI>

¹² Rosi Braidotti-The Posthuman-Polity (2013)

SSD SEA/A was made to be an intermission between colourful “After Affect” and almost monochromatic “Refresh Rate,” which I am going to talk in the further chapter. Retroactively thinking about SSD SEA/A, I would say that it is the most poetic out of the three works. It was made sincerely on intuition and melancholic feeling that were accompanying me after completing After Affect. The work SSD SEA/A consisted of drawings of sea creatures that spectators have encountered in the previous project, and a new 4 minutes video work bearing the same name as the chapter title. This video was the centre point of the show. Narrative was driven mostly by the image. In contrast to the other works I have made this one consisted of landscapes and ambient sounds. The story repeated of an ocean of memories, as suggested by the only vocalised words in the video. And a work about memories it is.

After watching the video for a long time, I realised that it was subconsciously referencing Andrei Tarkovsky’s 1972, *Solaris*. A beautifully crafted psychological film about miss communication between humans and other species. The lack of comprehension and different state of thought perception. The constant feeling of melancholy through the film were constructed with the help of long shots and colour tones. But most importantly for me was the last scene of the film. In which main protagonist Kris Kelvin, played by Lithuanian actor Donatas Banionis came to partial realization of entrapment. I had the same feeling while in Tromsø reflecting in the surrounding on both local and global scale. In my video work, I was trying to capture the idea of living illusion and another flow of thought. The information flow became the vast ocean in which the silicone object (fig.5) transformed back to the sea creatures (fig.7). Those primordial-like creatures are my metaphor for human without body, a digital entity, and ghost of a virtual world and it’s cross over with the physical reality. Reading my own word seems like I am a bit exaggerating on the subject, but this is how I interpret what I hear and see my surroundings. This is the feeling that one got from communication on the daily basis. The more I think about it the more I realise that this is a critic towards western idealisation of let’s call it conformist capitalism. The human consciousness became minute in the vast ocean of the bigger melancholic picture of the world.

REFRESH RATE

the last of the three pieces made in 2017; although it is hard to write about something unfinished, it is important to identify it as a crucial component to the body of work as a whole. All three works in one way or another are interlinked within the main theme, as discussed in my introduction. The structure of the three pieces also reflects the overall concept as it is divided into a depiction of: a hyper-image of the collective self, the journey of memory, and realisation of melancholy, as the state of procrastinating society. The hyper-image of the self is explored in 'After Affect'. 'SSD SEA/A' explores the melancholic feeling as a reaction to the image of self and 'Refresh Rate' continuous a reflection of 'After Affect', delving deeper into the idea of a virtuous, augmented and hybridized (human) image. The video work is fragmented. In the beginning of the film spectator see a black screen from which abstruse figure vaguely emerges and disappears back into the void. Like deep ocean sea dweller, it appears for a brief moment through the video reminding of its presence. Architecture and movement is an important vista in the video, as for me it is the manifestation of constant flux. A movement in predetermine paths. As with all of the architecture one is free to the extent, but one will always move the way architect intended one to move. This architectural thinking can be transferred to how the social media control the virtual and augmented reality. An interesting observation in the recent years of Reality TV gives an interesting ground of idea where a viewer no longer differentiate character on TV or Online character from its persona in everyday life. The line between life and virtual became so deemed that the one (if he is technologically disabled) has difficulty making distinctions in this two parallels. This notion in a video I depict as Facebook feed recorded on phones. The more prominent example would be fake news scandals. A term in recent years falling in to the radar. Here is a quote from The Telegraph online article: "Fake news: What exactly is it – and can it really swing an election?"

Before the internet, it was much more expensive to distribute information, building up trust took years, and there were much simpler definitions of what constituted news and media, making regulation or self-regulation easier.

But the rise of social media has broken down many of the boundaries that prevented fake news from spreading in democracies. In particular it has allowed anyone to create and disseminate information, especially those that have proven most adept at "gaming" how social networks operate.

Facebook and Twitter allowed people to exchange information on a much greater scale than ever before, while publishing platforms like WordPress allowed anyone to create a dynamic website with ease. In short, the barriers to creating fake news have been undone.¹³

But this is just one of many examples that piece Refresh Rate is dealing with. I planned this work to be always refreshing. Always up to date. Changing and evolving together with the surrounding world until we reach the point where one cannot do anything or we as a society change in the way that this work will be irrelevant. The combination of the three works acts as an explorative theorisation into the human consciousness as the hyper-object, and the human hyper-object ignorantly functioning as the semi sentient waste-product of society as it is, and as it has come to be.

¹³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/0/fake-news-exactly-has-really-had-influence/>

ALTERNATIVE ACTS, this is how chosen to summarise my works. It should be

easy to write the ending. But it is not. This chapter is going to be concentrating on the last step. A summary of both my theoretical process and the physical manifestation of the final exhibition.

Final physical manifestation, is a collage of all three works combined in in the upcoming show. And a true collage it is. These three installations were made in three different countries. The After Affect was started when I still was in Lithuania, SSD SEA/A was made in Norway, and the Refresh Rate is being made while I am in United Kingdom. Three different perspective of experiencing global world, three different approaches to familiar problems. A multi layered show that expand on every dimension of the theoretical field and practical field. As M theory¹⁴, my practice tried to grasp on many different ideas and bond them in a critical approach thinking about the ever-changing condition of the human creature. This resulted in a complex, but approachable installations, that allows different groups of audience to experience this installation in a different way, opening possibilities for further development of discourses. To deal with this as an artist I think is difficult, but at the same time it is my responsibility to address issues with hyperconstructed image of self that I have pointed out through this essay. My mission as an artist never was to please viewer, but to inspire him to start questioning surroudings. I was asked on many occasions to describe what worked and what didn't work in my practice. I do not have an answer to this question. They are not important. What is important is a discourse that this works might have opened beyond the space they were exhibited in. Thus, making work actually active in the subconscious level. At least this is how I used to experience works by other artists. I will however finish with the same quote that I started my essay.

Feeling of weightlessness, of absolute fluidity and the constant interchange. A constant refresh rate. The emptiness that is full and fullness that is empty. The quasi condition. The sea creatures, the data banks of metaphysical states and keys of evolution. Functional and dysfunctional beings passively and actively participating in the background processes of complex economics of natures.

¹⁴ “M-theory may turn out to be an overlapping network of theories, knitting together the universe's unwieldy fundamental forces: gravity, electromagnetism and the strong and weak nuclear forces. Gravity is the weakest of the four, and operates over long distances. The other three work on extremely small scales, dictating how the components of atoms behave.”
http://www.cleveland.com/books/index.ssf/2010/09/stephen_hawkings_the_grand_des.html

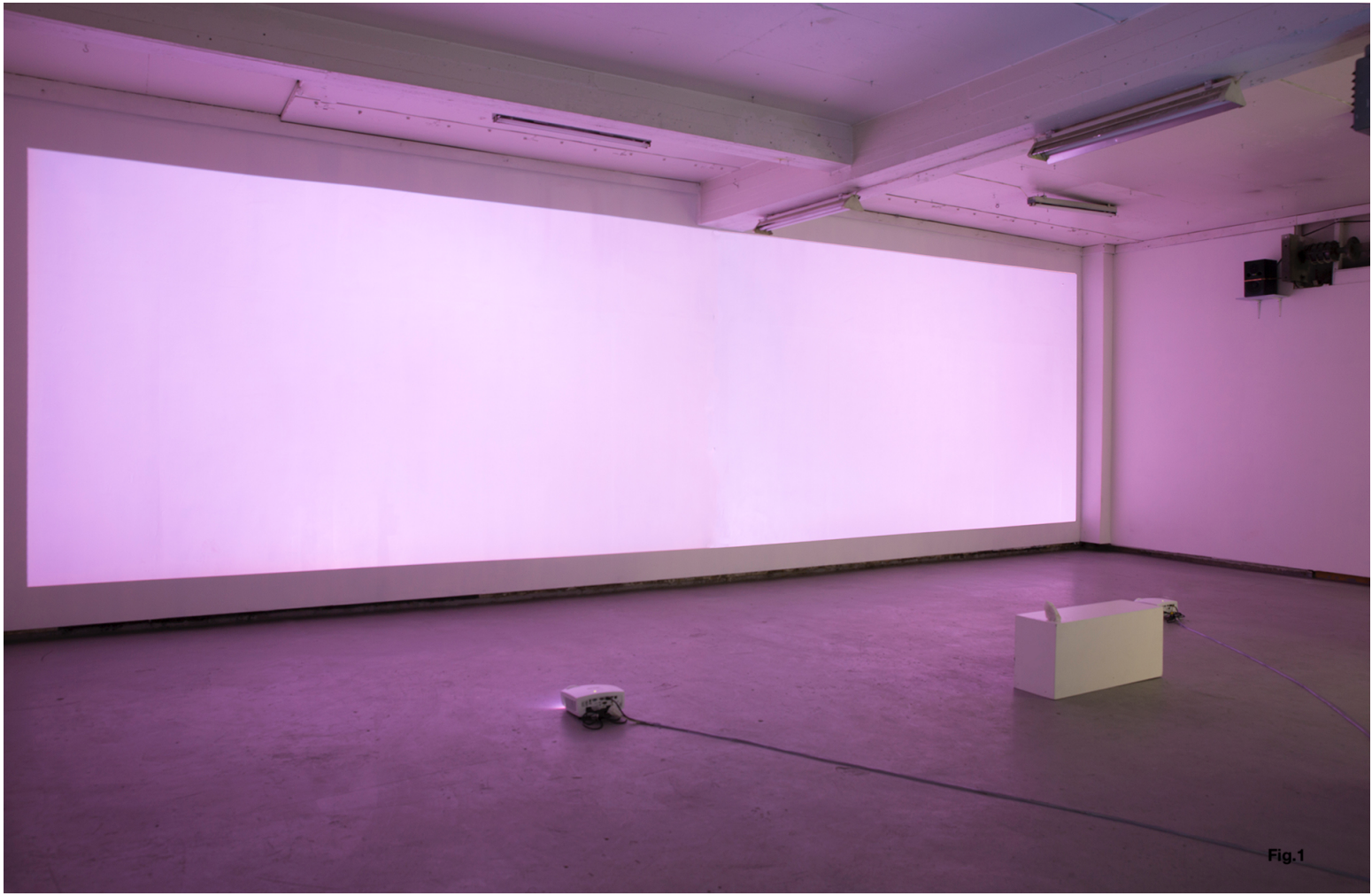


Fig.1



Fig.2

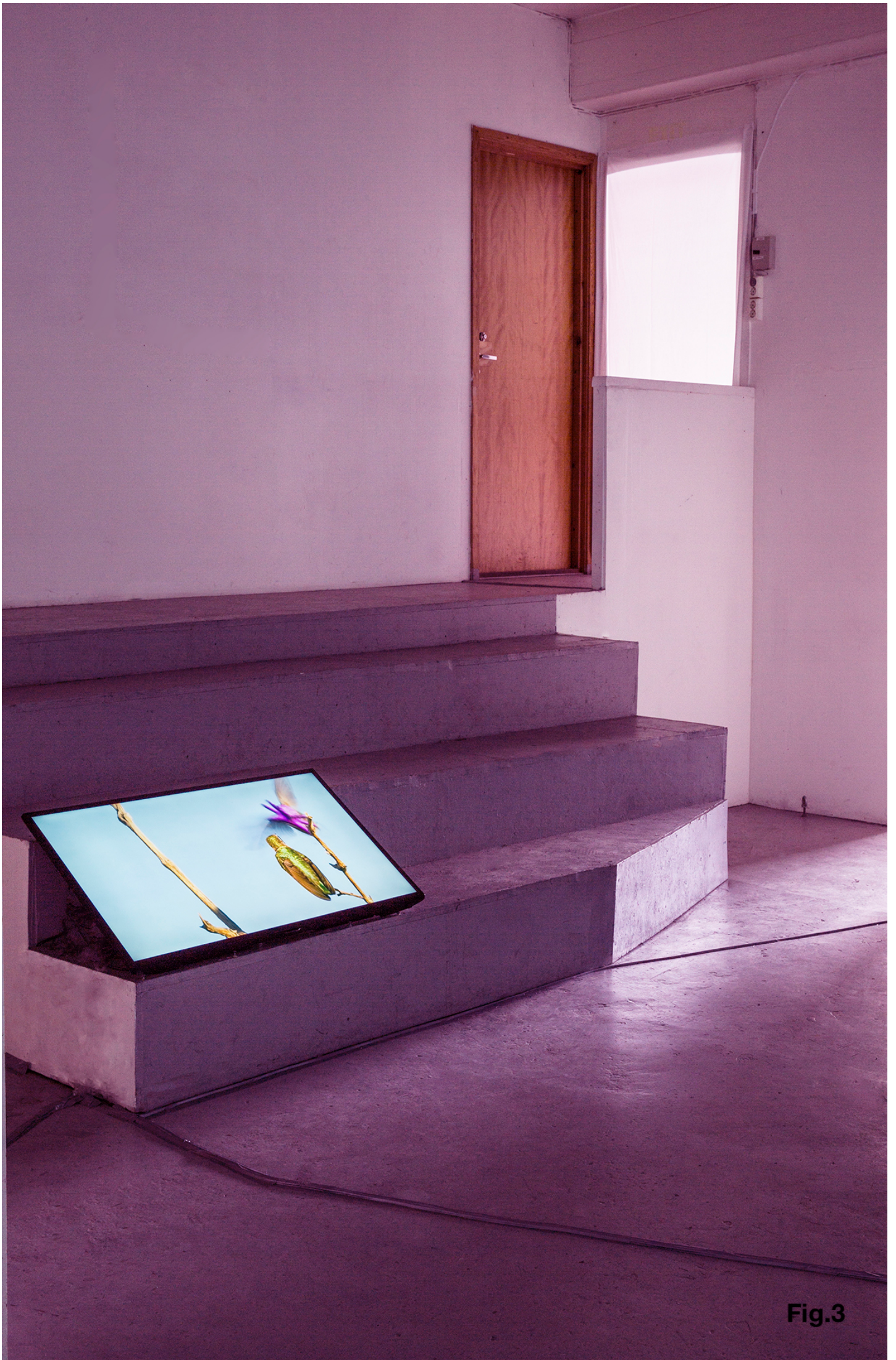


Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

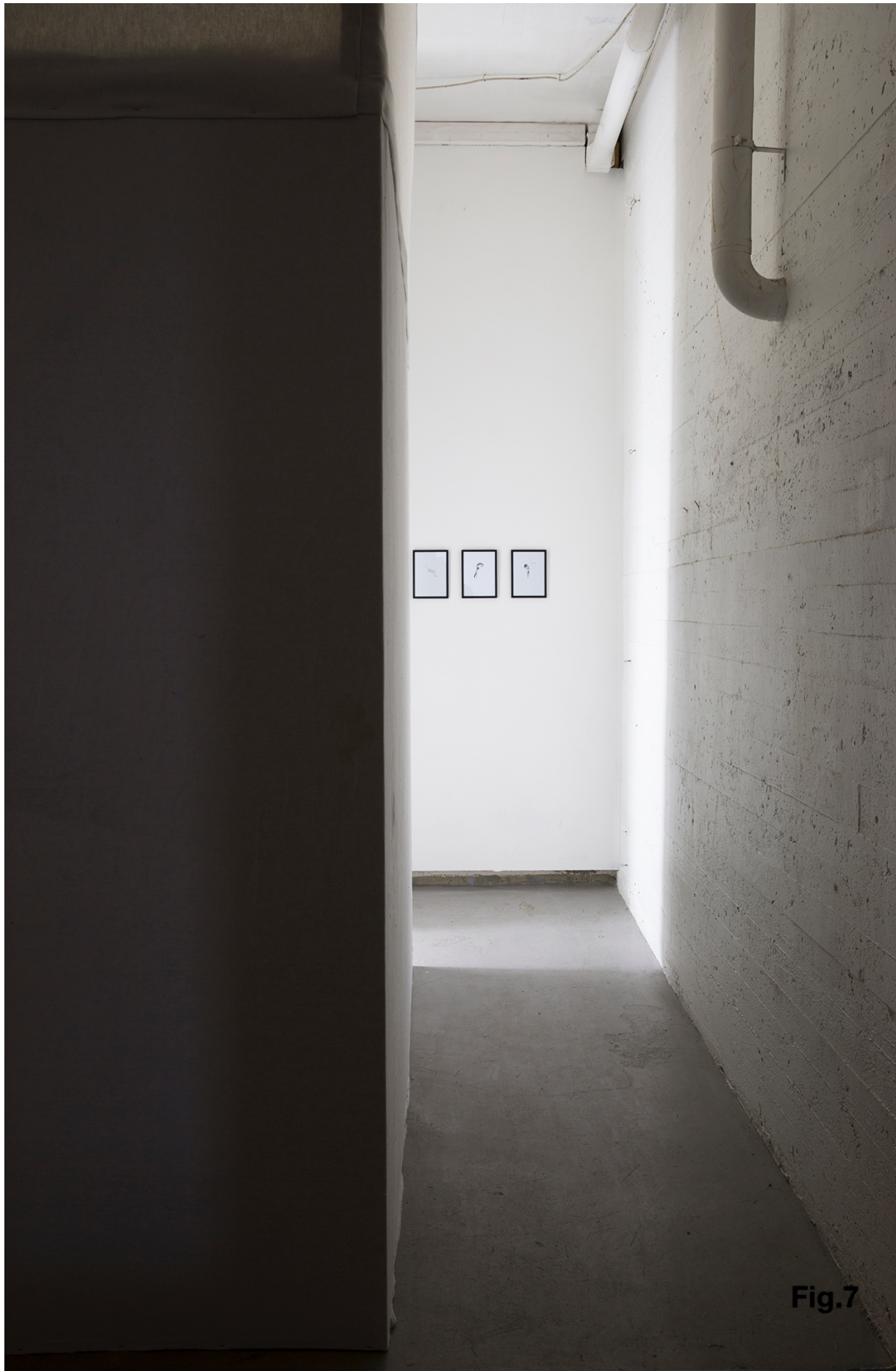


Fig.7



Fig.8