PROJECT SPACE

Xpace Cultural Centre

Digital Bodies: Loops of Desire
Lingxiang Wu

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The screen is the retina of the mind's eye. Therefore, the screen is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore, whatever appears on the screen emerges as a raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore, it is reality, and reality is less than the screen.[1]

As a quasi-allegory for the soon-to-emerge digital space, David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome* offers a hailing mantra to the recursive digital strata of the present day through its striking finale: "long live the new flesh." The transmogrification between the corporeal and the digital points to a recursive feedback loop that was already latent in television transmission, but has since become far more omnipresent in today's media ecology. The ceaseless algorithmic thirst-traps via TikTok, OnlyFans culture, mukbang videos and YouTube shorts have made images into agents of desire, and the process of image consumption has become a psychotic wrestling of vital signs produced via

[1] A line reappropriated from David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome*. The original line was spoken by the character Brian O'Blivion, and goes as follows: "The television screen is the retina of the mind's eye. Therefore, the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore, whatever appears on the television screen emerges as raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore, television is reality, and reality is less than television."

cloning, with the proliferation of bodies online making quantifiable flesh regurgitated as animated beings.

As a critical reflection on the biocybernetic reproduction underpinning present-day image culture, Lingxiang Wu's installation *Digital Bodies: Loops of Desire* in the Project Space at Xpace Cultural Centre attempts to trap the new digital flesh in its own echo chamber through the line of thinking on what he calls "the itch"—a condition born out of the compulsive cycles of consumption within the contemporary attention economy. It is a phantom sensation that emerges at the void between the consumption of immediate stimuli and the premature gratification that it promises. However, these expectations of fulfillment are never truly granted.

Entering the gallery space you immediately encounter Wu's experimental video, *Work It* (2026), comprises a set of GIFs created from TikTok footage, organized into a sequence of actions premised on the uncanny similarities of their content, actions, and movement. A set of slogans cast over Wu's video collage—"the internet says, WORK IT for me," "the internet says BOUNCE IT for me," while blobs of TikTok dance videos come to form imageries eerily similar to a Rorschach inkblot test. Like the VHS in Videodrome that breathes and demands action, these images behave like "quasi-agents" endowed with desire—bodies that no longer function simply as representations of identity, but operate as animated entities that solicit, seduce, and demand attention.

Mounted at the rear wall of the gallery, *The Mist* (2026), a series of thirst trap videos from TikTok pulsate upon a soft sculpture, lumpy, bulging and made of pillows, almost resembling an inflamed organ that is alive. It speaks to a certain futility of training social media algorithms and the inevitable succumbing to one's own desire, with an unscratchable itch that pulsates along our bodily fibres. The corporeality to which the

thirst-trap videos come to form almost suggests an eerie process of transmogrification between the body and machines, which render our psyches malleable and penetrable to the allure of the algorithms.

Hanging on the north and south gallery walls, *Digital Insatiability* (2026) features a series of Mukbang video stills sublimated on polyester fabric and organza. If *The Mist* speaks to the allure of lust, *Digital Insatiability* forms a gluttonous body horror where the algorithmic feedback loops are caught in its own autophagic cycle. The repetition of bodily motions renders what was previously isolated as a form of identitarian expression into a machinic rehearsal, and acts of consumption become quite literal via infinite clones of Mukbang stills, constantly devouring and excreting themselves with no beginning or end.

On the one hand, Wu's work makes visible the process of image consumption in which both our corporeal and virtual bodies have become the performer as well as the infrastructure for consumption, endlessly optimizing themselves for visibility while dissolving into abstraction. The exhibition encloses a cybernetic feedback loop that flatlines any progression of meaning, trapping the spectator's desire through the infinite cloning of visual stimuli, while foreclosing genuine novelty and escape. It prompts a compulsive search for the new, only to produce variations of the same. On the other hand, Wu's work is a quiet resistance to mindless consumption perpetuated by the "unscratchable itch." In an eerily erotic and voyeuristic manner, the multimedia installation attempts to turn Medusa's head back to itself, petrifying moments where desires are kept in suspension, revealing the hollowness of a digital Cornucopia with false promises of abundance and relief, delivered through the aesthetics of immediacy, while withholding depth.

– Yantong Li