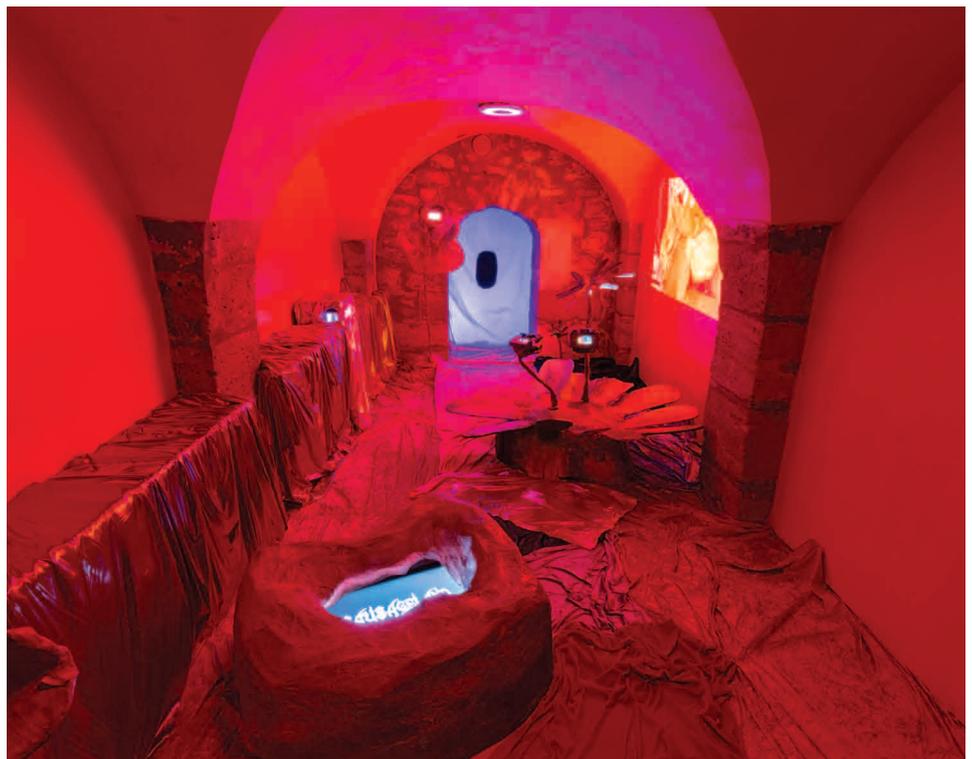


**Texte de Vanina Saracino  
sur le travail d'Hilary Galbreath  
GENERATOR #4**

*Becoming, evolving, mutating:  
Symbiotic evolution and self-  
sustaining human architecture  
in Hilary Galbreath's work,  
Vanina Saracino, juin 2018*



Hilary Galbreath, *Sausageland*, 2018, Arondit, Paris.  
Production GENERATOR, 40mcube/EESAB/Self Signal.  
Crédit photo : Salim Santa Lucia.

One of the first images that comes to mind when faced with Hilary Galbreath's work is the one of the *ouroboros*, the ancient symbol depicting a serpent eating its own tail. The *ouroboros* symbolizes a completely autarchic system in a perfect bodily architecture where any potential waste becomes a source of nourishment and growth in an eternal cycle of self-sustaining, autonomous evolution.

Historically depicted as a serpent or dragon, Hilary Galbreath's *ouroboros* is both a human being and a worm, each evolving into the other, or co-evolving into a new superior being. Galbreath's worm goes beyond Kafka's metamorphosis to seal a sort of inter-species collaboration with the human resulting in two main outcomes: a symbiotic, continuous evolution, and the elimination of all waste. This initially puzzling co-evolution can be seen as an overarching metaphor embracing some of the most pressing issues our societies face today, as well as cardinal aspects of today's philosophical, ecological and feminist theories.

First of all, to address the elimination of waste is to address one of the main problematic outcomes in advanced neoliberal societies that produce an exponential surplus and intentionally create waste for the sake of markets. In today's hyper-connected world, in which virtual clouds store books and pictures and albums in the form of binary information with apparent zero gravity efforts, things that once constituted an uncomfortable weight to be dragged with us during travels and relocations are now accessible with a lazy click from anywhere. The subsequent illusion of immateriality ignores the fact that the rapid evolution of technology and its planned obsolescence require an increasing amount of rare-earth minerals and resources whose extraction and abuse is damaging our environment at the same rate as the evolution of hardwares and softwares.

Nevertheless, the anthropocentric idea that humans rule the destiny of the planet could soon collide with epidemics or natural catastrophes or any cataclysm (man-made or not) that would re-establish an equilibrium on Terra, and from which life will certainly recover and re-evolve (although humans perhaps will not). As Hilary Galbreath clearly states, the human body is weak when compared to other forms of life: "in this world, I am rendered useless, my overly material organs and veins exposed, too fragile to exist in the new cosmos of dematerialized, streaming data". Will our technology outlive us? Will we develop AI to the point that it becomes a self-sufficient decision maker, baring its own consciousness? Will the existence of a superior techno-rationality, one immediately able to spot the insuperable contradictions of the human mind, put us all in danger? These are some of the questions that emerge in Hilary Galbreath's written narrative (*Golden Hole*), in riveting short stories highly influenced by the culture and iconology of science fiction—a genre that in the past decade has been widely redeemed by academia as a rich territory for the exploration of alternative futures and the creation of narrative speculations capable of influencing our present choices, or at least of staging their logical extreme consequences. Science fiction is not a prediction. It is a thought-experiment (Le Guin, 1969<sup>1</sup>).

In staging her thought-provoking work, Hilary Galbreath pushes the idea of the *ouroboros* so far that the human becomes worm and then becomes a sausage—to be interpreted, within this narrative, as the closest approximation to the *ouroboros* that human beings have been able to reach so far—a rather clumsy, grotesque evolution.

The sausage occupies a central role in her most recent practice, a body of work titled *Sausageland*, ranging across different media including

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1. Ursula LE GUIN, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, introduction, Ace Books, New York, 2010. First edition: 1969.

drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, installation, video and a web series on the artist's personal Instagram account. In *Sausageland*, anthropomorphic human-sized sausages made of papier-mache and found objects and materials are built and painted with great attention to their material and chromatic details. The setting in which these stories are staged evolves over time and increasingly seeks immersivity and sensoriality, as if to suggest that all our senses should be awakened in order to catch the mutation of our bodies in the act. Galbreath can perform for hours, interacting with her figures with both sensuality and violence, love and horror, never taking her gaze off the camera.

If our bodies are continuously evolving, what are they evolving into? Haptic interaction is the key to the coevolution of, on one side, human minds and bodies, and on the other side, technology. Approximately ten years ago, with the launch of the first smartphones, we entered into a haptic revolution that led us touch the interfaces of technology more often and for longer periods than we touch other human beings. Due to the expansion of haptic technologies and of touch as a mean of interacting with this increasingly pervasive technology, one could easily argue that touch has recently become another way of knowing, one that is becoming at least as important as vision, the primary sense on which our knowledge has been based for centuries. But vision is mostly binary, while touch opens up a much wider spectrum of possibilities and has therefore been employed to address transgender issues and the articulation of gendered embodiment (Halberstam, 2017<sup>2</sup>).

The sense of touch and technology, today so intertwined, together play a central role in Hilary Galbreath's work; the first emerging as a primary meaning for the creation and the experience of her installations, performances and web series; the second as a key to human evolution. Are we already cyborgs? Galbreath's techno-enthusiastic work answers affirmatively.

With an effort to sustain an ecologically extreme human evolution that erases waste and regenerates self-sufficiently, Galbreath's work also opens up to the idea of overcoming the boundaries between human and non-human, male and female, dead and alive—boundaries blurring in conjunction with the advancement of techno-pharmacological development. Galbreath's work embodies other ways of thinking and perceiving, other minds, other corporeities. What would happen, for example, if our brains extended to our extremities, as is the case for the octopus?

Galbreath suggests that technology is already enhancing our bodies and ultimately allowing us to direct our own evolution.

Vanina Saracino, 16th June 2018, Berlin

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2. Jack HALBERSTAM, *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, University of California Press, 2017.