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Men Photographing Men

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The mouth of the anorexic wavers between several functions: its possessor is uncertain as to whether it is an eating-machine, an anal machine, a talking-machine, or a breathing machine (asthma attacks). Hence we are all handymen: each with his little machines.

-- Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended and repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.

-- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

The warm glow of the monitor, that most gentle and nurturing of baths. Mom and dad—mom and dad who got rich after we left for college and got the plastic surgery to replace their old cathode rays with brand new LCD screens. Now they kiss you goodnight as you go to bed once more in a continuing loop of neoteny that inevitably reaches *Groundhog Day* proportions.

Why can't we just be *men*? sez your friend incredulously, flipping through pages of Butler and Irigaray at the new gallery down the street. Little Red Exhortations against "toxic masculinity" everywhere, an ode to the air conditioned offices and the majestic seas of xenoestrogens and bisphenol A (#imwithher #imwithher #imwithher) for the new supranational bodies. Those endless pages upon pages defining the Application Program Interfaces (APIs) you put, get and plug into every day: an exposed method for everything—for commuting on the 4 train, for taking the Q when you have reason to change it up, for your twice weekly trip to the gym, for ordering your favorite sandwich at the bagel shoppe, for looking at art; rumor has it they've just added one for participating in the national day of unplugging—merit badges for your combinatoric adulthood.

Under the warm glow you "forget" everything. System standby. Penetration now only happens on the virtual machine: you stare at it, simulating penetration, the machine penetrating you in a merely virtual way as it extracts and encodes every pattern of interaction. This is pornography, this is society! A good safe space, a secure network to plug your machine into, I think; maybe not, those cops could be on duty, watching, penetrating the

security protocols as we speak. They're probably also just here for the porn, for the glow, to fall asleep for just a few hours.

Who are the cops? What a stupid question, for the love of God they wear uniforms! We've given them uniforms to demarcate them as a different limb, an auto-amputating extension; the servomechanism of Narcissus. In dreaming we paralyze our physical body, only noticing in those rare and terrifying instances when we know we're in a dream and can't leave; paralyzed by our own collective hallucination, each day a different take. But where's the lights, camera, action? That's you, friendo: men photographing men, each of us a cameraman and a cam girl all the same—except there's no girls allowed here, no room for feminine wiles in legitimate business. We gaze at the porn and gaze back as porn, that's a *man's* job!

Surveillance isn't passive, it's theater; a triad of penetration, policing and pornography. It's virtual, everything reduced to zeros and ones, a common interface between loops of endless tape that never halt; but also inconveniently real, an act that makes it possible: the irreducible act of penetration, shit and skin, clumps of hair and blood we can't rid ourselves of, toxic masculinity, entropy we sweep under the rug and cast out to sea as it coalesces into a single barge to traverse the five oceans. There's no room for that farkatke anywhere, especially not in pornography: leave that to the domestic and emotional laborers, the Drano dripping between the digits passively eating away the gunk, actively encouraged to purge any friction that would interrupt the collective computation and make us aware of the paralysis.

Ah, yes, neoliberalism! There's so much we need to talk about—shut the fuck up, I'm trying to watch some smut. Courtesy, Penetration, Respect, it's as simple as that. The rest speaks for itself: shadows and afterimages of cops and their flashlights lovingly watching over obsolete Craigslist encounters; the rest cached away in symbols, mask4mask within exquisite Jungian garnish. And don't forget plenty of closeups, one last gasp to make oneself "present", to dream lucidly, to do something more than just watch; very clever, but it's voyeurism all the way down.

-- Alexander Boland

The title of the show references Luke Cohen's Forthcoming study **MEN PAINTING MEN**.

Heji Shin is an artist and commercial photographer born in Seoul, Korea. Previous solo exhibitions include *Baby* at Real Fine Arts, New York (2016) and *#lonelygirl* at Galerie Bernhard in Zurich, Switzerland (2016) and recent group exhibitions include *True Lies* at Night Gallery and *The Love Object* at Team Gallery. She has also shot for Eckhaus Latta's SS17 campaign as well as Purple magazine, Interview Germany, and 032c.