Glass Bead’s journal began by exploring Castalia, the equivocal utopia Herman Hesse imagined in *The Glass Bead Game* (1943). In Hesse’s weird fiction, Castalia is projected as the apex of transdisciplinarity, a highly aestheticized and ludic vision of knowledge in and for itself, an institution where a select number of men devote their lives to the advancement of knowledge in all domains, ascetically secluded from the turmoil of concrete existence and utterly removed from its own political implications. In our first issue, we mobilized Castalia as a particularly apposite site for addressing the catastrophic predicament of contemporary art understood as an indeterminate negation of knowledge and power: its bankruptcy in the face of neoliberal capital, its ineffectuality as a generalized critique, its empty posturing of radicality, its washed-out irony, and its exceptionality from reason and purpose. As such, Glass Bead’s journal set about attempting to morph the image of Castalia, arguing that it was necessary to reconceive transdisciplinary reason, in order to rethink the relation that art entertains with philosophy, science, and politics. In the second issue, we pursued this effort to transform the classical image of reason by focusing on computational culture and the computational account of cognition, with a particular emphasis on logic as a critical vector for engaging the project of artifactually elaborating freedom. In both cases we rejected the customary depiction of philosophical and scientific rationality as disembodied contemplation and detached observation. Nevertheless, as we directed our gaze on the conditions of knowledge, the body and its politics receded into the distance.
In this issue, we resolved to turn back to the concrete conditions of embodied thought. From the assessment of historical attempts at grounding critique in the body, to the exploration of contemporary issues surrounding situated knowledge; from the analysis of the aesthetic and political economy at play in the encounter with advanced human-like sex robotics, to that of the ways in which algorithms are transforming our sense of intimate relationships; and from reflections on the ways in which cruising practices subvert dominant discourses on architecture and the city, to the analysis of the sexual economy at work in specific art forms: the contributions gathered in this issue navigate the fault line at the juncture between erotics and rationality. The contention here is that contemporary upheavals concerning love, sex, and reproduction are not mere side issues that can be safely dealt with in various already-existing discursive regimes (e.g., biology, psychology, identity politics), but crucial transformative vectors for developing a renewed understanding of transdisciplinary reason.

**Dark Room**

Produced in the framework of Okayama Art Summit 2019 ("IF THE SNAKE," curated by Pierre Huyghe, September 27 – November 24, 2019, Japan), the framing of this issue was partly inspired by a striking piece taken from the history of Japanese cinema: Kazuo Hara’s *Kyokushiteki Erosu Koiuta 1974 (Extreme Private Eros: Love Song 1974)* (1974). Depicting both a candid and violent love triangle, this film is first and foremost the portrait of a radical feminist (the filmmaker’s ex-wife Miyuki Takeda) who defiantly transgresses the normative constraints of Japanese society by striking out on her own as a single mother; affirming her homosexuality and arguing openly with her new lover; giving birth, completely unassisted, on camera and in full view, to the illegitimate daughter of an African-American GI; crusading in Okinawa’s nightclubs in order to berate men in general and American soldiers in particular; and unapologetically emasculating Hara to his new partner, sound recordist and producer Sachiko Kobayashi.

*Extreme Private Eros* is significant because it operates a reversal of the cinematic gaze that has now become prevalent in social media life, but that, at the time of its making, was truly revolutionary. Implicated in the events of the film as its object rather than its mere representing subject, Hara’s camera’s ‘open-air’ depiction of intimacy is simultaneously the sign of what could be now seen as an all-revealing, male, normative gaze, and the concrete axis of its subversion. By relentlessly tracking Takeda’s body while ceaselessly producing equivocations in the relationship the camera entertains with it, Hara allows the film to become for the viewer an experiment in subjection and objectification, as well as in subjectification and objection. Doing so, *Extreme Private Eros* aligns the ‘dark room’ to which intimacy has been confined and that the film breaks open with the ‘dark room’ of the recording apparatus, thus putting them in multi-stable variation.

In the framework of this issue, taking the ‘dark room’ as a site has several meanings. Most literally, it refers to two places defined by their function. Firstly, the dark room is the name given to an architectural feature of certain gay cruising areas, a heterotopic
place unexposed to public scrutiny where normative expectations are different, where private desires are freely exposed, and where bodies expect to unexpectedly meet. Secondly, as alluded to earlier, it is also the place where photographic images are produced, which is indissociable from the machinic realization of the voyeur, the capture of the body on film, its exposure, development, and publication. In a psychological sense, the dark room has also been thought of as a site of reproduction or incubation: while Sigmund Freud considered the womb to be the quintessential dark room, his Hungarian colleague Sandor Ferenczi took this argument further by understanding the sea, taken as a site of primal gestation, as the original dark room. In this metaphorical sense, the dark room can be thought of as the ‘black box’ par excellence, a zone of epistemic obscurity, whose deeply sedimented operations are hidden from our understanding. Ultimately, the dark room represents what is disguised and unsaid, unconsciously repressed and deliberately concealed: the obscure or obscured architecture of desire and sexuality.

**Germ Cell**

Researchers estimate today that over 99.9% of eukaryotes do reproduce sexually. From bacteria to most higher primates, sex tends to be coextensive with reproduction. This, we are repeatedly told, constitutes the backdrop against which humans appear an exception, for human sexuality is singularly not restricted to its reproductive function (although it is attested that such socialized sexuality is shared by at least two other species, bonobos and dolphins). The problem of what led early humans to move from the socialization of sexual interactions to their normative regulation by types and tokens remains a highly debated topic\(^2\), but what is certain is that if human sexuality is haunted by the articulation between sexual intercourse and fertilization, the reasons are not merely biological but social-historical. In most cases, the constantly reestablished bond between sex and reproduction is not limited to the problem of passing on genes to the next generation, but loaded with various territorial, economic, ideological, social, and cultural functions. The violence exerted upon and against what are considered deviant sexual practices is in fact most often motivated by a conservative upholding of this bond: from homosexuality to asexuality and transgenderism (a term precisely not used by transgender and queer activists for its pathological connotations), the very definition of sexual deviance or abnormality nearly always rests on its divorce from reproduction.
In 1970, American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone advocated that a truly feminist revolution could only come together with the advent of artificial forms of reproduction, freeing women from the burden of pregnancy. Considering that “the heart of woman’s oppression is her childbearing and childrearing roles,” she called for technological developments that would not simply suppress natural reproduction, but question what is deemed natural in a context where feminism, she contended, could only be aligned to “a revolutionary ecological program that would attempt to establish a humane artificial (man-made) balance in place of the natural one.”

She further argued that “artificial reproduction is not inherently dehumanizing. At [the] very least, development of an option should make possible an honest reexamination of the ancient value of motherhood.” Although Firestone was lucid enough to say that to envision artificial reproduction and birth control in the cybernetic hands of the present powers was to envision a nightmare, she argued that this situation should not prevent us from speculating and working towards an ecological and feminist revolution that could imply a “qualitative change in humanity’s basic relationships to both its production and its reproduction.”
Illustration of an artificial womb patented by Emanuel M. Greenberg in 1955.

Nearly fifty years later, the antagonism between the ideological positions taken on this issue appears paroxysmal. From the already existing prospect of engineering barriers to sexual reproduction between otherwise incompatible organisms, to cloning; from recent developments in synthetic biology where technologically driven progressionist hypotheses often meet liberal forms of eugenics, to the transhumanist aspiration to remove sexuality from the reproductive equation through technological mastery; and from ecofeminist claims hastily translated into conservative calls to nature, to practices and policies attempting to redress lost natural balances, the articulation of sex and reproduction constitutes a politically contested territory, simultaneously exposed and obscured, a dark room which this issue sets out to perturb.
The Chromium Bower

As Michel Foucault famously stated in *The History of Sexuality*, “What is peculiar in modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret.”\(^7\) Sexuality, as a demarcated zone of somatic experience deemed to be deeply singular, has historically formed a decisive conduit for exploring the mutual reliance of forms of embodied life. As such, it has become in the modern and contemporary imaginaries the ultimate form of individualizing truth, to the extent that today, from incels to ecosexuals, from sexbots to teledildonics, it grew into the truth, *par excellence*, of the individual.

In this regard, nowhere can the advent and continuing unfolding of biopolitics be thought and felt more intensely than in the sexual realm. Life’s explicit inclusion in politics inaugurated modern sovereignty and its governmental and economic techniques: a new relationship between biological life and the state was created—one that politicized the body to foster, multiply, and “put life in order.”\(^8\) The repositioning of biological life at the center of both politics and economics brought the conditionality of the world upon the living under great scientific and social scrutiny, opening it up to new knowledge and interventions on a grand scale. One of the key insights of biopolitics is the acknowledgement that the decision over biological individuals (rather than classical subjects) serves as an elementary definition of what modern politics is. Crucially, the politicization of life as such within democracy has brought about an abundant labor force for capitalism, as well as regulated the rules of its inclusion or exclusion. There, sexuality has had an exceptional ability to stage the embodiment of a repressed unconscious material accumulated by its eschewal in the Western episteme, yet for this reason it has been equally liable to involuntarily repeat its subjections, to make life increasingly available as the core object of capitalism, and to become a vector of increased commodification of the flesh.
Deepening this logic, neoliberal policies have increasingly subsumed the old separation between production and reproduction. As Michael Feher underlines, human capital tends to become the dominant subjective form.\(^9\) This transformation, which is as much economic as subjective, abolishes the sovereignty of reproductive life (the part of life devoted to reproduction that supposedly cannot be exchanged for money) by opening it to the value-form. In other words: the putatively infinite open-endedness of techno-capitalism’s production of new life-forms, entities, partners, and bodies (anything from gene splicing to sex dolls), within which we become subject to accelerating morphological, affective, sexual, biochemical, romantic, inter-special, and phantasmatic mutations, is simultaneously legible as a cartography of power. As Paul B. Preciado has claimed, it is “possible to sketch out a new cartography of the transformations of industrial production during the previous century, using an axis of the political and technical management of the body, sex, and identity.”\(^10\) This axis, which is in fact nothing more than a regulative and aesthetic control of life inherent to capitalism’s subsumption of reproduction, calls for the “somato-political”\(^11\) analysis of the contemporary liberal quest to liberate life as aesthetic praxis (to “change life”) and has guided the construction of this issue, leading it to explore sexuality as a decisive conduit for the critique of ideology.
Abyss Creations

When the company Abyss Creations first released in 2017 their AI sex-robot *Harmony*, debates polarized around those arguing that sexbots are a deeply pernicious development that serves to reinforce and reproduce dangerous power structures and to legitimize the exploitation and sexual objectification of women and children, and those arguing that they may in fact serve a therapeutic and even emancipatory function. By claiming that there is something inherently instinctual or natural about the way we desire or have sex, both arguments however missed the profound articulation of desire and sex to artifice. The sexbot materializes and explicitly reconstitutes the “inhuman partner” that emerges in the wavering of love/sex/desire between the flesh and the artefactual, making explicit the libidinal economy at work in both love (and sex) and the uncanny encounter with Artificial Intelligence. As such, it inhabits and embodies an ontological void, from which it holds back at us a picture of desire and sex as abysses of meaning.

Love has historically embodied such an abyss, resisting reasons and justifications. Filial love is often qualified this way to insist on its existence beyond choice. Romantic love, by contrast, foregrounds a conception that oscillates between passion and decision. On the one hand, love is an extremely private, extra-discursively felt condition, a dark room in which we blunder around with no map and no compass. On the other hand, love is also necessarily a shared form of sociality, though this sharing is archetypically private or exclusive. Love, like sexuality and gender, is nothing if not a concept, bound up or structured in various discourses and norms. The unsaid and unseen of love and sex is constituted by what is said and seen of it: it throbs at the threshold of the private and the public, the said and unsaid, the discursive and non-discursive, it is a primary site for both thinking and feeling continuity and discontinuity, binding and the unbound, pleasure and pain, union and alienation. As such, love may be nothing else than the basic unit of political subjectivity, the feeling around which we take decisions and organize structures in which our rational and political commitments are ultimately tested.

Mapping the philosophical, aesthetic and political coordinates of the nexus of love, sex and reproduction, the contributions gathered in this issue navigate this abyss, trying to confront the difficult task of assessing how love and sex’s resistance to rational explanation can actually play a role in redefining what we understand by reason.
Footnotes


2. For example, normatively defined social roles—such as the bride—constituted types, while tokens such as shells acted as a primitive form of money constituting a social technology for the organization of reproductive rights.


5. Firestone, p. 199.

6. Firestone, p. 201.


8. Foucault, p. 138


Glass Bead is an international research platform and journal. Glass Bead was conceived and is run by Fabien Giraud, Jeremy Lecomte, Vincent Normand, Ida Soulard and Inigo Wilkins.