

Emotions Go to Work: The Film Series

Five Fridays between
January 24 & March 20



Ulrich Museum of Art
Wichita State University

Friday, Jan. 24
Sentient Objects
McKnight Art Center
Room 210

Friday, Feb. 7
It's Gonna Blow —
Gadgets Go Mad
mamafilm at The LUX
120 E. 1st Street N

Friday, Feb. 21
How Do I Feel?
Q&A w/ Zoe Beloff
McKnight Art Center
Room 210

Friday, March 6
Machines That Seduce
mamafilm at The LUX
120 E. 1st Street N

Friday, March 20
Our Aliens — Emotions
from the Other Side
McKnight Art Center
Room 210

All Programs begin at 6 P.M.
Free and Open to the Public

Program Notes

by Zoe Beloff & Rebecca Cleman

This film series accompanies Zoe Beloff's multimedia installation *Emotions Go to Work* and spans a vast range of moving image media from silent comedy to science fiction films to artists' videos, amateur YouTube videos, and technical infomercials. It is organized into five programs: *Sentient Objects*; *It's Gonna Blow – Gadgets Go Mad*; *How Do I Feel?*; *Machines That Seduce*; and *Our Aliens – Emotions from the Other Side*.

Multiple vectors connect these programs. Three major themes and queries emerge, starting with the feminization of the technological interface. From Hello Barbie dolls to Lara Croft to the conscious-synth Niska in the AMC series *Humans*, this project explores the machine as an apparatus or algorithm of seduction, triggering the terror of female sexuality.

The second question is whether the rebellion of the machine, be it a networked android or a simple washing machine, is a new form of class warfare? How is ownership, and the implicit master-slave dynamic, experienced today?

Finally, what might the "body electric"—that porous, shifting boundary between human and non-human, the strange mirror through which we glimpse the conscious algorithm—tell us about our human experience in a technologized, highly commercialized world?

Zoe Beloff is an artist and filmmaker who lives and works in New York City. Her work involves a range of media including films, drawings, and archival documents organized around a theme. Like *Emotions Go to Work*, a number of her film and installation projects have delved into film history, borrowing ideas and materials from silent cinema, cartoons, Bertolt Brecht's unfilmed scripts, and home movies, among other sources. In all she does, her work attests to a belief that critique and protest should be vibrant, humorous, and colorful.

Rebecca Cleman is a writer on film and media and the Executive Director of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), a nonprofit arts organization that is a leading international resource for video and media art. She has programmed screenings and special projects for such venues as the International House Philadelphia; the Museum of Art and Design, Anthology Film Archives, and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York City; and the Julia Stoschek Collection, Germany; and organized or co-organized many events for EAI. Her writings can be found on screenslate.com. She lives in Brooklyn.

The Ulrich Museum would like to thank Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), NYC for its assistance in providing the artist films included in this film series.



Sentient Objects

In these two films, technology and infrastructure rise up and rebel.

Ha! Ha! Ha! (1934)

directed by Dave Fleischer (7 min.)

In the cartoon *Ha! Ha! Ha!* (1934), objects start laughing hysterically. First the typewriter loses it. Its keys turn into teeth, revealing a gaping mouth and panting tongue. The clock guffaws. Automobiles rear up and collapse in giggling, quivering heaps of scrap metal. An overpass stretches into a monstrous grinning mouth. All at once in Brooklyn, at rush hour, the social order collapses...



Maximum Overdrive (1986)

Stephen King's *Maximum Overdrive* (1986) bears more than a passing resemblance to Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, only in this film, it is machines that suddenly turn on the human race, gathering in ominous clusters and organizing vicious attacks. The setting is a gas station where a lone band of survivors barricade themselves against the bizarre machine rebellion, hoping to survive against a marauding band of long-haul trucks.

These technological and engineered objects, clocks, typewriters, vehicles, even bridges are the very things that normally grease the wheels of capitalism and keep everything running efficiently. In full scale revolt, are they acting out what we, the workers, can only dream of? To turn on our bosses and refuse to follow orders? Should we join with the machines, or should we run for our lives?





It's Gonna Blow — Gadgets Go Mad

This group of films focuses on the home and household gadgets. In the nineteenth century, only the wealthy could afford servants. Since the dawn of the twentieth century, we have welcomed labor saving devices into our homes as mechanical servants that promise to democratize the social hierarchy. What could possibly go wrong?

One A.M. (1916)

directed by Charlie Chaplin (38 min.)

Like cartoons, silent comedy plays upon the fantasy/terror of objects gone out of control. Is the laughter of things an insurrection of the underclass? *In One A. M.* (1916), Charlie Chaplin plays a drunken dandy who, upon returning to his mansion, finds that all his gadgets have developed minds of their own. He is no longer the master of his home or of his labor-saving devices.

The Electric House (1922)

directed by Buster Keaton (22 min.)

The Electric House is the smart home of 1922. Everything is automated: the escalator, the books that reach out on command from the library shelf, Murphy beds, bathtubs on tracks, even a billiard table. But what happens when the house gets hacked? Both *One A. M.* and *The Electric House* reveal a radical social concept. When things go wrong, technology is not only subversive but exhilarating. We delight in those moments when appliances thumb their noses at their owners because we can only dream of doing the same.

It's Gonna BLOW.

#Samsung washing machine

out of control (2016) (2:16 min.)

Once upon a time, servants lived in the basement; now it is home to our washers and dryers. Today, a whole new YouTube genre has been spawned: *It's Gonna BLOW. #Samsung washing machine out of control* is already a classic of the genre. It appears that what we crave is not safety or security but creative demolition.

My Desktop OS X 10.4.7 (2007)

JODI (8 min.)

Since its inception in the 1940's, the computer has always been conceptualized as an "electronic brain." In the 1970's, the Graphical User Interface (GUI) was invented to provide a friendly and helpful way for non-technologists to identify with this so-called brain via cute icons that were designed to make us feel comfortable in the virtual, computerized realm. In JODI's *My Desktop OS X 10.4.7* (2007), these little helpers have become infected, gripped by a useless and maddening display of hysterical disarray, making the screen a window into a deeply demented cerebral cortex.



How Do I Feel? Q&A w/ Zoe Beloff

Where does our physical and psychic integrity end, ceding to electronic signals? This screening imagines how gadgets and devices – the engineered components onto which we project our humanness – might start to enfold themselves into us, making them extensions of our selves.

***Emotient FACET SDK Demo Video* (2013)** (3:40 min.)

Emotient FACET SDK Demo Video is a technical demonstration of software that the company Emotient (now owned by Apple) believes can accurately distinguish even the most fleeting feelings. But notice how much the narrator sounds like an affect-less computer incapable of conveying or even comprehending the range of human emotions.

***Host* (1997)**

directed by Kristin Lucas (7:36 min.)

In Kristin Lucas's *Host* (1997), we see the world from the perspective of an emotion-decoding street kiosk, or ATM-like machine. Hungry for data, such as that encoded on credit cards, its purpose is mysterious. A young woman, played by Lucas, engages with the kiosk as if it were a confessional: "I haven't felt the same since the power outage. The computer shut down and so did I... since the upgrade, everything has been going too fast." Is the kiosk there to help, or to drain her of information? Is she an autonomous being or directly wired into the network? Is she a gamer or game object?

***Whispering Pines 1* (2002)**

directed by Shana Moulton (2 min.)

***Whispering Pines 5* (2005)**

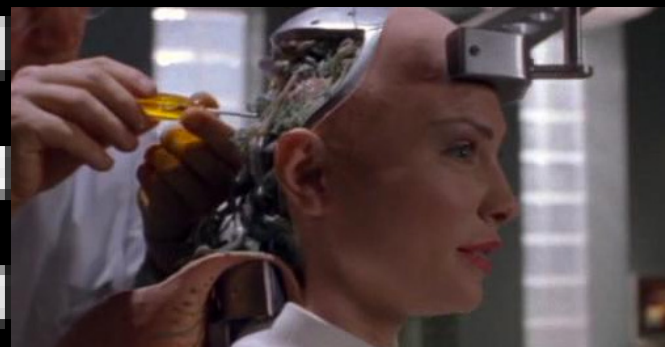
directed by Shana Moulton (6:32 min.)

Shana Moulton's ongoing *Whispering Pines* series conjures up alternate dimensions of stultifying banality with the aid of household gadgets. In *Whispering Pines 1* (2002), a hernia cushion, embedded in her alter-ego Cynthia's dress, somehow transmits the infantile cries of supermarket products as she shops. Like David Lynch, Moulton is fascinated by the idea of electricity relating to psychic energy. In Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), the "tulpa" (i.e., a conjured up being) Dougie Jones is extruded from an electric wall-socket. In *Whispering Pines 5* (2005), Cynthia has her doors of perception flung open via the pattern of her electric blanket.

***Videodrome* (1983)**

directed by David Cronenberg (87 min.)

In David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), the breakdown of the psyche is transmitted via an electro-magnetic spectrum; the catalyst is sexual energy. Max, a sleazy cable channel producer, becomes hooked on "Videodrome," a sadomasochistic television show broadcast from somewhere indeterminate. Though the film is a product of the home-video era, the set-up anticipates the dark web. As Max struggles to unearth the origins of the insidious program, he embarks on a hallucinatory journey into a shadow world of right-wing conspiracies, sadomasochistic sex games, and bodily transformation.



Machines That Seduce

***Frigidaire Finale* (1957)** (3 min.)

In 1957, a ballet *Frigidaire Finale* is performed amidst a group of stubbornly inert refrigerators. Call it a futile mating ritual. The advertising agency clearly suggested that the frisson would rub off on the Frigidaires. But there they sit, true to their name, frigid, frozen in place – their orifices, doors, and drawers, awkwardly flung open by the increasingly desperate dancers.

However, in the last sixty years, a remarkable transformation has taken place – the appliances themselves (and their corporate parents) have become the seducers, both commodity and salesperson in one, promising

Product Review for Mattel's Hello Barbie (9:15 min.)

One such device is a sweet android for pre-teens, a Hello Barbie doll that retails for \$74.99. Mattel Inc. has worked its magic on the star of an unboxing video who succumbs to the charms of her new toy, hyperventilating as she frees her Barbie from its pink plastic sarcophagus and reads the user manual with the gravity of a nuclear code.

Hello Barbie speaks to her owner, Kelsie, in a conversational mode. She socializes Kelsie but does so into her mechanized doll's world, which is not human. I wondered as I listened to Kelsie's flat singsong voice and watched her furiously working fingers with purple-painted nails: is this a real girl? Has she taken on so many of Barbie's traits that she has become indistinguishable from her? A Barbie operating a Barbie in a recursive loop? What do you think?

***"Valerie 23" from The Outer Limits* (1995)** directed by Timothy Bond (44:20 min.)

Even before she was implanted with a networked neural circuitry, Barbie already embodied the inorganic ideal of the woman whose impossible feminine figure is echoed in Valerie, a life-size Barbie, in *The Outer Limits* episode "Valerie 23" (1995). Valerie is described as a prototype inorganic human, the perfect housewife who is, in her own words, "fully functional" in the bedroom and programmed to feel a rich palette of emotions. But what happens when, confronted with a rival, she feels too much?



Our Aliens—Emotions from the Other Side

“Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” J. Robert Oppenheimer uttered these ominous words after the detonation of the first atomic bomb. They return to me in *Tomb Raider*, the video game and film franchise whose name itself suggests a kingdom of shadows, a netherworld of shivering electronic impulses that endlessly morph into crude simulacra of our own hallucinated fears: piranha fish, raptors, and men with AK47’s. Through this valley of death traverses our avatar Lara Croft. In *Tomb Raider*, Lara dies and dies again but cannot, ultimately, ever die, trapped in digital purgatory; the worst of all possible worlds. She is a killing machine and a dying machine, the new flesh and a pixel body of digital tits and ass, an object of male fantasy and object of male fear. She must be desired and punished for all eternity.

She Puppet (2001)

directed by Peggy Ahwesh (15 min.)

In Peggy Ahwesh’s *She Puppet* (2001), Lara is no longer an object to be controlled with the click of a mouse. Instead, we enter into her consciousness – an existential consciousness that is fully aware of its own contingency, an alien consciousness in a body without organs. “Why did they give me a kingdom to rule over if there is no better kingdom than this hour in which I exist between what I was not and what I will not be.... I am just a copy... I am dealing with the spirit and no two spirits are alike. You have to realize that this planet is not only inhabited by humans but by aliens too.... We are what we are not and life is swift and sad...” This voice-over, layered over images appropriated from the video game, is revealed to be drawn from selected texts, lending Lara a strangely cerebral quality.

Humans – Season 3, episodes 1 and 2 (2018) (94 min.)

The blond and beautiful Niska – the charismatic ‘synth’ in the AMC streaming series *Humans* – is also disarmingly cerebral. Imagine Hello Barbie as an adult, only fully conscious and studying Hegel’s treatise on the master-slave relationship.

Humans takes us to an alternative present in which androids called “synths” are servants, doing everything from child rearing to factory labor to sex work. Only five of the original synths were programmed to be fully conscious. Niska decides that her synth-race (or class?) must be liberated and made fully conscious. Consciousness becomes synonymous with “class consciousness” as the enslaved workers of the world rise up. When the conscious synths are no longer docile machines, they are alienated from their labor and become aliens among us.

In season three, these conscious aliens have been quarantined and incarcerated in detention centers along the English coast while the government debates what is to be done with them. These aliens could, resonantly, be considered “illegal aliens” – do they deserve the same protections as native-born humans? Does the synth consciousness count? Do their lives matter? These are very real questions that are being debated both here and in Europe about migrants and asylum seekers who are currently locked in detention.



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