

Welcome to BioNet Launch Event Transcript

Lili-Maxx Hager 0:05

Hello everyone, I'm really pleased to welcome you to the launch of UP Projects' latest digital commission *Welcome to BioNet* by artist and filmmaker Shu Lea Cheang. I'm Lili-Maxx Hager, UP Projects' Digital Commissions and Events Producer. I'm a white woman with shoulder length brown hair and I'm wearing a black turtleneck and some red lipstick. I go by the pronouns she/her. *Welcome to BioNet* has been commissioned for *This is Public Space*, UP Projects' digital commissioning program that invites artists to consider the online realm as a space for public art and creates space to investigate how we navigate between online and physical worlds, exploring the impact of digital media on our relationship between people and places. I was delighted and of course also intrigued when Shu Lea Cheang agreed to produce a digital commission for *This is Public Space*. Shu Lea Cheang is an artist and filmmaker whose work aims to re-envision, genders, genres and operating structures. Her genre-bending gender hacking art practices challenge the existing operating mechanisms and the imposed boundaries of society, geography, politics and economic structures. As an artist known for the ways in which she reconnects technologies with their political history and social agency, the prospect of her doing so whilst returning to the net art format that she has been known for since the 1990s really excited me. Today we are thrilled to launch *Welcome to BioNet*, a new digital science fiction experience that situates you in a world saturated by waste, corporate power and digital systems, where the biological, technical and sexual are deeply interwoven. The work is grounded in *UKI*, Shu Lea Cheang's ongoing alt reality cinema, which she will explain more about later. This new digital commission invites you, the audience, to join BioNet, interact with others consolidate networks and enhance personal e-data, challenging users to think critically about the data we give away each day online this work raises awareness about the lengths we're prepared to go in order to reach ultimate satisfaction. Are you ready to join us? How far are you willing to go? Will you make it to the climax? Along Shu Lea Cheang we are joined by Matthew Fuller, who is a Professor of Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is also a long-term collaborator of Shu Lea's. With Shu Lea Cheang, he has recently been working on the *Sleep Series*, a series of events of 'art by sleepers, art for sleepers and art as sleep' and has participated in a number of Shu Lea's projects over the past two decades. Tonight's event will be kicked off by a presentation by Shu Lea Cheang followed by an in-conversation by her and Matthew, and a live play of the work where you get to experience *Welcome to BioNet* yourselves. I'm now going to hand over to Shu Lea and Matthew, who will

introduce *Welcome to BioNet* and the wider alternative reality in which it is situated. Matthew, over to you.

Matthew Fuller 2:53

Thanks very much, Lili. Yeah, so I wanted to start off with a kind of a brief overview of Shu Lea's work. And really just to kind of give some context, Shu Lea started working on the internet in the late 1990s or mid-1990s, with a project called *Digital Nomad* where she was traveling around the world in various guises taking part in the Internet in a very, in a way that that took on the question of infrastructure and the personal in a way that, in a sense, sets up some of the projects, the concerns of this project. But she also had always at the core of her work, this question of sex, of power and a piracy of the elicited and the authoritative and the question of desire, the construction of desire and technology at the core of her work. So some of these other early projects included the very kind of well-known landmark project *Brandon* that showed at the Guggenheim in New York, Waag in Amsterdam, and LUX in London, as well as series such as *Locker Baby* series of projects, and many projects that also work in collaboration with other artists and curators, for instance, *Kingdom of Piracy* with Armin Medosch, and Yukiko Shikata, a number of projects throughout the century that have worked on the question of the relationship between the network and ecology, for instance, working with different formations of composting, and also questions of mushroom networks and mycelium networks. But also, one of the things that we'll address in this in this question in this in this session is really this this form of real time science fiction or science fiction, that is a lived experience rather than something you interact with as a consumer. Shu Lea notably and recently was the artist selected for the Taiwan Pavilion in the 2019 Venice Biennale in which she reused the prison, the main prison of Central Venice, the Renaissance Prison in which Casanova was held in order to restage some dramas around historical and contemporary prisoners of sexual politics. Along with this work Shu Lea has also directed several feature films: *Fresh Kills*, which is an eco-thriller; *I.K.U* a pornography, science fiction, cyber feminist film; *Fluid0*, very recently, an interesting film that shares a lot of thematic with the current project around illicit trades, in data, in sexual products in experience, and we're interested in this kind of way in which a lot of a lot of her work steps a few seconds into the future in order to draw out some important points about the present. And I hope you'll join us in discussion to find out more about this. But first of all, what I wanted to do was to invite Shu Lea to kind of talk us through some of her work as a background to this project, and then we'll go through *Welcome to BioNet*. Okay, so Shu Lea over to you.

Shu Lea Cheang 6:51

Thank you, Matthew for the introduction. Um, yeah. Today maybe I want to just focus on *UKI*, the cinema that I've been working on. One of the things is the *UKI* cinema. Let me see if I can share some of the images that I will be showing.

[Background noises] Sorry. So, I'm going to see, I can't seem to get the full screen right. Can you see the screen sharing?

Matthew Fuller 7:48

Yeah, I can see screen sharing, but not full screen.

Shu Lea Cheang 7:51

Right, exactly. Okay, maybe this work will work. Okay, this should work.

Matthew Fuller 7:57

Yeah, that's good.

Shu Lea Cheang 7:58

Okay, so *UKI* is at the moment I called it a sci-fi viral alt-reality cinema. This is a project I have been developing since 2009. First started at Hangar MediaLab in Barcelona. And at that time, I had never thought that I could really develop the film into a feature length film. Due to, I think the concept, the amount of funding I would have to raise for such a crazy concept. So, I started developing more like as a live performance - a live cinema performance, I developed it into a game, what I will call eventually I will call those performance and game as a viral performance and viral game, which kind of developed and performing traveling as a performance and as a game. So, around 2009 to 2016. And actually, was showcased in quite a very different festivals, different venues, museums, different project space and all that. Basically, it's had quite a story to tell but *UKI* basically is a sequel to my 2000 film called *I.K.U*, which was shot in Japan, Tokyo, and premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2000. So basically, *UKI* proposed the *I.K.U* is like involved with the eco coders or just more of an orgasm coder sent out by the dispatch by the GENOM Corporation to collect human orgasm data. And it's also a kind of take-off on Blade Runner. And so, in *I.K.U* when the eco coders data hard drive for the human orgasm data is filled, the data got downloaded and eco coder are considered to be a piece of e-Trash sort of redundant and to be discarded into the Etrashville. So, for *UKI* the story kind of stopped there, how the eco coder were done on the Etrashville and found there the eco coder kind of attempt to reprogram herself in the process of meeting all these Etrashville residents and that they're here comes the whole story on Etrashville. At the same time the GENOM Corporation also retreated from the internet and started BioNet and the BioNet is actually built inside the human body that connects red blood cells. So, the story in this way, so in terms of the *UKI*'s multi-strip plot unfolding in Etrashville, the red blood cell and in fact the city and while it had to go into a sci-fi fable with default humanoids, trans mutants and technical data body. Also, since 2000 - since 2020, actually since 2017, I connected with producer Isabel Avers and we start - we got initially we got a grant fund Dicréam CNC, which is a French funding for more innovative media production.

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So, the project started with building this Etrashville, building these in the beginning I think I was more focused on building this Etrashville where Reiko was dumped and then from here, we meet the trans mutants. By 2020, I was more in a shape to conceive it as a full-length science fiction film. At the same time, 2020 started the lockdown so the whole film script as a Sci-fi feature film script actually returned during the lockdown in Paris. So, I went back many different plots, including an infected city which I will be shooting this part of the film in Berlin next March. The infected city I think I'm going to borrow the hoppers, particular scenery of like, for example, the diner to stage the infected city. Anyway, the plot sort of developing at the moment with Etrashville bill many characters with the BioNet, where again the GENOM Corporation takes human body hostage and using the red blood cells to regenerate orgasm data to regenerate the DNA, sort of alter DNA and there's a lot of kind of bioengineering scientists involved I would see how far we can get. Started from 2017 I started building this Etrashville with Matthew Magellan based in Paris. So, we built this a sort of scenery of using many electronic parts. I will show quickly...sorry...I think I will show quickly the Etrashville scenery, where we hope that eventually 60% of the film should be happening at this Etrashville as you can see. Of course, the film, what happened the continent, you know, many I think I'm referring to Africa, particularly in 2015 I actually did a trip to Nigeria and researched into the electronic e-trash dump at Nigeria for example, actually the trip also took me to China and England to study the management of the Etrashville, so you know how much we have generated that Etrashville. Yeah, so just a very brief introduction. Of course, for the each Etrashville we would start building different tribes. We will also be building different characters living here. These are what I call the Los Inhabitants. This includes various tribes that again, starting August this year, I started building a lot of these avatars with the designer Roland Roth who is based in Berlin and so there are actually going to be 22 avatars we had to bring together and they all belong to different tribes, they all sort of interact with Reiko in the process for Reiko trying to reboot program herself. So, these are the habitants on Etrashville; really gender fluid human, non-human, nerds, geeks, trans-mutants, symbionts, microbes and variants. So, I won't get into all these different characters because there is a narrative that is a plot along with all these characters. Basically, they live off the e-trash, as for this character, one of the characters in the film EQ is one of the customer nodes and you can see that she makes up her clothes with the broken hard drive. We have this character who actually make up her clothes, their clothes with keys/keyboard. We also what do we have these other liberals - the Labourers, the most of sort of lower class in the tribe and the Etrashville. So again, various tribes make up the Etrashville this way is really I'm showing the for the first time these work in progress. Actually, these avatars are still totally under development and have never been shown so this is the first time I dare to present it in its most raw form. It's going to be a long process to make this film that's going to be creating the characters; we're going to do have to do the motion capture everything is done with also with the Unity

engine - the software and so that this process is actually a long process. At the same time what's happening with the GENOM's BioNet, again, this is the premises of the GENOM's BioNet is how GENOM actually is able to create bacteria that could be inserted into the human body and the bacteria carry the orgasm data DNA. So, in this way that is able to infiltrate the body and alter the red blood cell function. So, the red blood cells embedded with these orgasm data is actually able to self-generate orgasm for the human. So, imagine a world that you basically can self-generate, we are not talking about masturbation at all, we are talking about sort of data regenerated orgasm. However, GENOM there is also a purpose for this once you can self-generate the data you kind of think you should be self-fulfilled all but there is a need for human, you know, as we have the need to go through the social network to actually need in the exchange of the data, we need to exchange the data. We want to get in touch with other people through in this case through the handshake that we can exchange the data, however, it is through this is change, the GENOM Corporation can actually collect/harvest your data. And for you the way of exchange data, of course, this kind of enhancement of your pleasure. In 2020, I got commissioned also from Rhizome to do a - rhizome is a - Rhizome.org is an online magazine based in New York. And they have a series called seven by seven, which is mostly focused on artists and scientists' collaboration. So, at that time, I was working with a scientist in Minneapolis University, and we actually had a series of dialogues. At the end, I created this video piece that sort of talk about the scientists, how the bio scientists in, creating these kinds of different scenario for the exchange the in the data. I will show these three minutes video.

[Video sounds] 20:26

Shu Lea Cheang 23:21

Yeah, so that's with Kate Amadala from Minneapolis University. I think, yeah, I just want to, it's really a film that I'm in the middle of actually in production at the moment of the Etrashville part. A lot of these sketches, the graphics I'm doing, will totally be working towards the film narrative at the end, I'm not expecting the film to get released until 2023. So pretty much during this whole period of time that I'm developing and creating at the same time, many of our work are being branching out or forking out on the concept of the film. In a way, it's a different way of expressing the concept I think, basically because the plot is quite complicated. So, for example, *Welcome to BioNet*, this web art commission allowed me to, to use this little web word to test the interface with audience participation. So, I'm really looking forward to playing with you after this talk is over. Thanks.

Matthew Fuller 24:48

Thanks, Shu Lea. I wonder if you could walk us through the *Welcome to BioNet* a little bit? Just give us a sense of what the project is, where it sits in this kind of universe that you've set up.

Shu Lea Cheang 25:03

Yeah, I think *Welcome to BioNet*, at the end, we'll think about the kind of social network we are in, if we join or not join, I think, you know, for example, even for the giant Facebook that we all succumb ourselves to, how many people want to get out of there want to migrate. Of course, the BioNet GENOM Corporation is producing is really is the result of for me, it's a result of my study on the biotechnology over the years to understand how the biotech is taking control of - or is not even taking control is totally altering our body without us knowing that we are part of a bio network that we sort of succumb our data to, right. So, in this way, in the *UKI* scenario, we are succumbing our orgasm data to the BioNet. At the end, what would the GENOM do is actually making this red pill, which will become the oral drug, for instant satisfaction. Of course, my biggest theory is always like the government, the biotech company, always working with pharmaceutical, pharmaceuticals have the control of the market; they can market the red pill. And this is where the money lies, right? Yeah.

Matthew Fuller 26:34

So, when people go to the website, they get this set of terms and conditions from GENOM Corporation. And then there's a set of steps that happens in the project. Could you walk us through those steps through starting with the terms and conditions? What happens in *Welcome to BioNet*?

Shu Lea Cheang 26:54

Yes, I was hoping. Are we doing the spoiler, okay, um, I think the design for the website which I sort of say like, it was almost like for me, I think the project kind of really is a sort of revisit my net art practicing more in the 90s in a way, but it's also you know, bringing a lot of these social network contract into it, for example? The BioNet, you know, like, what we know today, you know, before you sign on to any network, any social network, if you're dare to read through all the terms and agreements, you know, I think we are on the net, we are so quick to click on submit, whatever, you know, you don't even know who you submit to. So, the BioNet - *Welcome to BioNet*, actually also have a very long-term loan agreement, and I challenge you to read through it before you agree. If you don't agree you are back to where you're going to be. So that's the topic I think the process of this project is also like really challenged the viewer to say: do you dare to agree? If you don't agree, you know, you're back to zero, you are kicked out, you are excluded. In order to join, you agree. So, by the time you agree, what are you giving up? Right on Facebook, we know that we give up every right to our image to our media, whatever words we articulate. So, this is actually an observance of the current network situation that we are in - the social network situation we are in. Second to that the on the *Welcome to BioNet*, I set up a very simple, so the peer-to-peer join play to swap the data, you know, and again, it really at the end for me it doesn't

matter which kind of data you are swapping so it's just like people are just exchanged any kind of data possible. Yeah.

Matthew Fuller 29:10

Yeah, no, I think it was also interesting is that the images, the sequences of images move from text and forms to very complex and highly textured computer graphics, at different scales, microscopic scales to macroscopic. And there's also these kind of references to different kinds of image formation on the computer so that it's also about the culture of computer graphics. And you mentioned game engine earlier, and how we're kind of these - these kind of network structures and the, you know, the kind of vocabulary of 3D graphics has also become something that you can play with in a very interesting way. A kind of mixing registers of computer graphics that don't normally sit together. Okay so let's think about outside of the kind of the specific BioNet project - *Welcome to BioNet* as I kind of sense that you don't want to reveal too much about what will happen to people if they sign up to this product because you know that they're going to be addicted to your fantastic your fantastic kind of orgasm delivery service. Span out a bit, what do you mean by this term viral alt reality cinema? And how does it fit into this kind of wider way of constructing a project that's a film that is art installations that are experiences what is what is happening here?

Shu Lea Cheang 30:57

Yes, so as I say, you know, I always thought that it could be a feature film. However, my focus on writing a feature film script really it went when lockdown began, I was in Paris, so it was a long period of time to go through it and we all kind of go through the solitude, we go through an empty city that really sprouts even more imagination in terms of how the script reconstructed. However, the core of the *UKI* cinema is always about how the character found *I.K.U* the eco coder, named Reiko; how she was dumped on Etrashville and then from being dumped on the Etrashville, she went through this whole process of kind of reawakening, right, awakening process that which, including try to DIY herself, or DIWO - with others to help her regain a body shape - regain a body function. However, maybe somehow through the process, some sort of miscalculation, she actually turns into a virus, you know, actually through other people also, I think, is also very genderfluid, in a way maybe in the process, she's probably swing between any kind of transmutation process. So, by the time she became the virus, of course, it's sort of almost like, agent or revenge or infiltration, you know, so, by the time when she became the virus, you can finally infiltrate into the BioNet, and mobilize, you know, maybe mobilize many of the infected people and infiltrate into the BioNet. The ultimate goal is probably to stop the red blood cells function - computing function, and to regain her own orgasm data. So, this is kind of like, heroic story of the ending, right? There was also, throughout the process of developing I have always had so much doubt about how are we able to fight back with the corporation takeover?

You know, I think this has been a kind of key elements in a lot of my work. I think in the beginning, I want to develop a kind of game situation at the end of the film, so involving the audience to play the game to say, can the virus actually infiltrate a corporation and regain the data, or the corporation finally wins the game, you know? So, this is basically, at the time when we are witnessing the pandemic, the COVID-19, it really proved to be, you know, you had too many elements involved. By that time, you have the vaccine, you have so many companies involved. You have the different vaccine company, some work, some doesn't work, or there's also, you know, for me, there's a lot of intricacy in that. I think, during the pandemic, I also read a lot of, sort of, you know, you still rely on refer to many philosophers who can kind of take you out of this or sort of help you analyse the situation. One of the readings about like, is there a is the virus being the portal, you know, can we actually get into the next world through the virus do this kind of question. And of course, what made me realise especially during the kind of supply, the demand and supply or the vaccine solution, you realize that you and I don't live in the same viral reality. You know, so if we talk about the global situation is like, "oh, we all have the plague - the pandemic", however, the class, the race, the economic situation, political situation, or affecting the supply chain or the busing, that means that who gets the vaccine who doesn't get the vaccine, at the end, we got the mutants also got the mutation, we got the variants, you know, so the story never ends, right. So, we are still living in, in the midst of this. And for me, I think these particular realities really affect the script I'm writing, and I have several times went into doubt, or certain kinds of depression because I couldn't walk myself through the plot. I am still working on the on the film script at the same time we are in production. Because it's like, there's so many different development, parallel, triple development, that somehow, I have to figure out how to merge them together, if I can find a way and I think, thank you, Matthew, throughout the process, you are always a big advisor for me, you know, helping me kind of script consulting me.

Matthew Fuller 36:27

Yeah, thanks and I should say to everyone here that we're also open to questions, if you want to put anything in the chat. We're very happy to have questions from the audience. And there's one question from an anonymous attendee, which says: "what role does science fiction play in your work? And have you always situated your work in alternative realities?"

Shu Lea Cheang 36:56

Actually, the particular work or reality, I have actually tried to try to distinguish myself from virtual reality, you know, I have been sort of rejecting working on a virtual reality project. But I want to particularly say when I say alt reality, rather than alternative reality, or again, I make a difference, you know, for me alt also, it's like one of the keys, right, one of the keys on your keyboard? So there is a very different sense of alt reality, as proposed - opposed to virtual reality or alternative

reality, in terms that what the viral alt reality also may be meaning something else of, actually the film in the beginning, at one point, I want to make it I was having a subtitle called interrupted cinema, you know, I am willing to stop the cinema, the narrative flow anytime just so that we can talk things through the kind of way of at the moment, I feel more like the film actually take you to this trajectory of Reiko's journey through the Etrashville takes you through BioNet's journey through the blood vessel, you know, so these are very science fiction approach of course for my film, I think since 2000, I pretty much got into science fiction film with *I.K.U.* And since then, I do feel it sort of is the only way I can tell many stories at the moment. But at the same time, I think science fiction is probably more reality than we can live in.

Matthew Fuller 38:56

Yeah. I mean, a related question from Ulrike Hager who asked: "how far would you go with this? What if a biotech company would like to take this into reality?"

Shu Lea Cheang 39:07

Yes, throughout the research period, I actually was at this bio lab in this was actually the bio lab in Barcelona. And there's like 1000 bio, biotechnologies, working in this bio lab. And I was particularly researching into cell and synthetic biotechnology. And I proposed this scenario, you know, to all the scientists, while they kind of been entertained, and they actually do think about this seriously and think it is possible, and I think, I think this idea of the biotech company wanting to make the drug and the web data it's changed the kind of, you know, blockchain way of harvesting, mining. It's all happening, you know, I do not think it's so far away from the reality.

Matthew Fuller 40:16

Great, no, I think I think that it could be the next, the next epidemic could actually be a feature film - who knows? The next question is: "the graphics in your films are incredible. How do you develop these characters?"

Shu Lea Cheang 40:32

Okay, um, I do have a script with all the character descriptions, what they dress like what they act like. But at the same time, I'm working with this very young queer guy, Roland, and of course we went through a different process of developing as many references, almost all my characters have different references. We are actually trying out also mixing the real performers with the avatars. So, some of the avatars are totally created in the vault. And some of the avatars going to be working with real performers. We did sort of motion capture performance three weeks ago at Shedhalle, and kind of presenting the sort of behind the scene, motion capture, and also do the casting to find a few really great performers, which we hope to who we hope to continue working with. As I say, it's just a very

long process of creating these characters, and, but they all fit a very certain function in the script. The script does involve each character to be engaging in one way or the other with Reiko, the character, and contributing to her becoming *UKI*, the virus.

Matthew Fuller 42:01

Another question is: "Is it significantly returned to net art with *Welcome to BioNet*?"

Shu Lea Cheang 42:10

Yes, I think, in the 90s, with *Brandon*, so I, kind of sometimes being held as a net art pioneer, of course, *Brandon*, at the time, as a one-year project, when your narrative project on the web, and being a Guggenheim Museum commission, and collection. And so that really marked the very, sort of my kind of my net art adventure at the time with *Brandon*, I always think the net art should be developed into episodic, you know, so then, the idea for one year that you can input different episodes, you can input different story, you can input different interface - or the interface should become open interface, you can invite the public and other artists to collaborate. I still did quite a few smaller art projects, for example, composing - composing the net, this kind of work. But officially, in a certain way, this piece is really a lot about the interaction with the viewer. I'm imagining that there is a public out there, and it is probably particularly popular, because it's a commission from UP Projects. And it's particularly for the series called *This is Public Space*. So which I really want to challenge myself to do to return to the web art, but to a piece that really is working with the public, and particularly in this case, updating myself to deal with the issues or social network issues of data is changed; data ownership, the big data, the data mining, all this particular issue, I've been struggling myself with many of my work over the last few years. Yeah.

Matthew Fuller 44:18

And there's, you know, there's another question that follows up in a way here. What what's the one thing you'd like people to take away from this new work? Obviously, apart from a UKI virus?

Shu Lea Cheang 44:29

Ah, ha, that's a serious question. How can you take a how do you take away...hmm, you should be able to take away a red pill, I hope? Maybe in this case, before it can produce you can take away a virtual red pill and I hope that you get to simply swallow it and enjoy it.

Matthew Fuller 44:54

And yeah, a couple of questions that are kind of linked. One is: are you are you afraid of censorship? And another one: Thank you for a really interesting presentation, can I ask if you're positive about the future?

Shu Lea Cheang 45:10

I'm not afraid of censorship, but I'm constantly dealing with censorship. A lot of my work for example the *FluidO*, my 2017 feature film, before it got made into a feature film, I also made a lot of performance with that word that concept and I think I got censored in three different cities including Berlin, Montreal and Kristiansand in Norway. A lot of my work will carry a warning sign as to you know, I think three by three by six in Venice also carry a warning sign but with the curator Poppy Preciado we are very careful not to use the age as the warning sign, you know, we always say this work is for mature audience. So, we have a lot of precaution these days in order not to get shut down. So, I think my work probably is challenged that particular nerve, that particular border, but I'm not afraid of censorship - I have no problem being shut down. Yeah, it's okay. As to what's the next question about the fear?

Matthew Fuller 46:28

What about what are your feelings about the future?

Shu Lea Cheang 46:32

All the future has passed us already. We, we the future has passed with - passed earth and we are trying to catch up with so many things I think you know, maybe we live the future. At this particular point, I think it's more about with we really are talking about a lot of catch up to do you know, catch up with ourselves regenerating ourselves you know, how do we reach? Actually, I have this other project about the farm; it's all about regeneration and recovery. However, this again needs a community to come together to do it you know so again as I say, *Welcome to BioNet* is really a testing ground to see how I can involve the public to join. Again, the major part of the *Welcome to BioNet* involves a point of view and you really have to play with people if you're alone there is nothing for you to do so you actually have to be accidentally if someone also there and that is why we are organizing a play together so make sure we all join together so we can play together. So again, this is a test to see how we add together can have this community, but I think the *Welcome to BioNet* of course is very cynical as to say like submit yourself to BioNet, right?

Matthew Fuller 48:20

Yeah, but we also have this function of you know, the e-trash scape which has all these kind of resisting communities, different kind of collectively living in there and I think I think your claim that the future has already happened. And we're living we're living in the e-trash scape generated by different versions of the future or different images of the future. And we have to kind of pull together some other kind of future is absolutely core to the film and this and this wider project.

Shu Lea Cheang 48:50

Right, exactly.

Matthew Fuller 48:52

So, there's a little bit more time left. We've got until eight there's a couple more questions, one is: "if we ever have the red pill, will it turn us into the most unsocial people ever?"

Shu Lea Cheang 49:07

Maybe not, maybe you start doing a lot of raves and have a red pill party. I think rave is totally bad right? Everybody's doing a rave with yeah. You know, it's just like a replaced accuracy pill. So, you start taking red pill that's probably going to be developed into a different drug. You know, so, of course, you know, we have to be reminded of the reference of the red pill or blue pill which pill you want to take, right, from the matrix movie.

Matthew Fuller 49:47

Yeah, yeah, certainly London revival of rave with the super clubs being back there too expensive to go to. So, everyone's in the, in the deserted factories, the e-trash scape of the present in the periphery of the city.

Shu Lea Cheang 50:01

Yes, absolutely.

Matthew Fuller 50:04

So, another question, "can you talk a bit more about the role of collaboration in your work? Do you consult with scientists?" And you mentioned this a little bit, but maybe talk about the way in which you've talked with different groups of scientists in New York with Rhizome, and Hangar in Barcelona, for instance.

Shu Lea Cheang 50:23

Yes. This is actually very intense. And I welcome this kind of opportunity. Of course, at the moment, there is a kind of trend in the scene called the artisan science collaboration, right? So, for me, I am at the same time, I guess, when I talk about science fiction, it's almost like it's two terms, right? You have science, and you have fiction. Yeah. So, which is more scientific, in a way? So, when I go to visit a lab, the BioLab in Barcelona, or I have a very remote section working with Kate in Minneapolis, it is a very intense working relationship. We were you know, this was happening, what like, for example, working with K in Minneapolis happened during last year during lockdown, you know, on both sides. And so, it's just more like a very virtual is changed, but at the same time, I guess, all the time and proposing different scenario. The scenario I propose will be so far out and I almost need this scientist to tell me: "Say, do you think that is possible such a scenario?" And so,

this this kind of discussion and by chance, like for example, Kate also is a - she loves science fiction, so she actually really got into it, so she helped me write a lot of these dialogue you her on that video. Because, you know, so we kind of imagine that for scientists is changing the idea of how to how to build a BioNet, how to make people involved, but at the same time, how the glitch that can happen, you know, and I think glitch is also the glitch is like the virus, you know, they obey beautiful thing. So, with a glitch happened, then, you know, we could be creating a kind of gender-neutral species, you know, and this is what's happening a lot of time and, of course, I also refer to many biotechnology bio artists, you know, there's also been a really sprouting feel or development with many bio artists doing DIY work, you know, experimenting our own body with trans genes, transplanting. And so, all these are very interesting for me to see, you know, it's more like how artists are also pushing this boundary, as to even using their body as the testing ground. So, combining with artists doing the doing, working with these DIY bio feel, and the scientists kind of in the closet, you know, a lot of these research is actually not open to the public, you know, it's more like, you know, you never know how far is has been developed, you know, in terms of cell technology; in terms of we are not talking about chips anymore, we are talking about totally alter the body composition, right? So, these are very, very real, you know, is totally very real. Yeah.

Matthew Fuller 53:53

So, I mean, there's a few more questions and one of them is around NFT's. You know, is there a possibility to produce or would you like to produce NFT red pills?

Shu Lea Cheang 54:07

Yeah, I...

Matthew Fuller 54:08

I mean if you want to produce an ecological disaster What better way to bring your kind of film scenario into reality?

Shu Lea Cheang 54:17

Right? Yeah, yeah, exactly. I think it's uh yeah, I think the theme you know, I have a lot of plot actually totally taken from many experiment - for example, I decided to write a scene about the way the GENOM corporation infiltrates human body, you know, how the bacteria infiltrate human body is through the red brain is through the running down the red in colour red. However, this is also referred to many of the military experiment of bacteria experiment during the 1950s or 30s through 50s. You know, using the Navy air point, will be flying to the air and raining down different bacteria, right? So as a kind of chemical weapon. So, these are all happening totally, yeah. So, yes, there are many different possibilities in the scenario to refer to many of these scientific biological development lead, I would

pose question two, right? So forth, the process is really about what if something went wrong? Having something already gone wrong? You know that kind of question. So that's what I mean, the glitch is becoming more in the centre of the scene.

Matthew Fuller 55:52

And I guess it's this glitch is something that's quite distinct to identity. And there's another question about identity, and the use of identity or let's say that the way different kinds of identity formation structures and systems work in your work as a whole. What's your relationship and you have, you know, a strong kind of engagement with queer filmmaking, queer aesthetics, but also multiple others? Perhaps you could say a little about that and how it plays out in these this current project. And then we have one more question after that.

Shu Lea Cheang 56:31

I pretty much feel gender fluidity is a key to kind of, you know, I don't particularly feel any person should fix into fixed gender identity. Of course, I can see this again, there is another trend that people are eager to identify themselves as kind of gender formation, he/she/they, you know, so there's these kind of, maybe some of them are causes are political or sexual or physical or political, but the eagerness to fix yourself with a gender formation, you know, it's kind of surprising for me. So that the film that all the avatars I'm creating, they are all against the stereotypical 3D constructions. So, I have a character whose body shape keeps changing, I have a character who redraw themselves into various forms. So, there is no fixed identity in these people. I would probably need to call every character I'm creating "they" rather than "he" or "she", even for Reiko throughout the film, I think Reiko also changes quite a bit, you know, sort of went through quite a lot of gender change, identity change, there's going to be a lot of so different formation of on their body. So, this is all, for me to open this up is very important. And of course, then it becomes a point of discussion or departure to bring up discussion. Yeah.

Matthew Fuller 58:19

Yeah, I think is very much a question of zone of experiment, as well as its own political struggle that's played out in your work. And I guess this leads possibly on to the last, the last question, which is "who inspires you? Who is there that is kind of making you think?" Yes, that's, that's somewhat thrilling.

Shu Lea Cheang 58:44

Interesting...whenever I got asked this question, it always. I always get baffled, because I don't know exactly how to answer this question. I don't have a particularly one figure. Like, I feel like I am part of a larger community: media community, queer community, artists, community, film community that all work in different ways. Making works that express ideas; political, social, in different ways.

So, I feel I am publicly promoted by many of my colleagues, and they inspire me, they push me forward. I want to have my work be seen by general public by the peers and the reaction. Because, you know, you have to understand as media artists, we don't get many reviews. We don't sell our work. So, the only way we finally can affirm our own existence, maybe by the peer recognition, right? Yeah.

Matthew Fuller 1:00:01

Okay, so there's one question that Lili is going to put through to the microphone from Joanna.

Shu Lea Cheang 1:00:12

Yeah.

Lili-Maxx Hager 1:00:14

You should be able to speak now Joanna.

Matthew Fuller 1:00:21

You've got your mic - you're muted on the mic side. You've switched the mute back on. Okay. That looks good do you want to go ahead? Okay, that's not coming through. Maybe you could use the Q&A function in the chat. Maybe you've got an issue with the with the mic. Yeah, so I mean, just to just before while Joanna is typing that question in, Shu Lea...if talk about this kind of peer recognition? If people were interested in your work, where else should they look? And with who the peers you're in dialogue with? An awful question to ask, in some ways. So, you're muted as well.

Shu Lea Cheang 1:01:32

What do you mean by where should they look?

Matthew Fuller 1:01:36

Where should they look? Right? Yeah. Where did...where did the, the kind of the inspirations. So, if people wanted to know the kind of be inspiring peers, who are you are in dialogue with?

Shu Lea Cheang 1:01:52

Yes. See, this is the thing, you know, I have a very stupid website called mauvaiscontact.info which basically this all my connection, or my kind of agenda every month, which actually linked too many interesting projects I am involved with, I can type it here is more or less content. Yeah. And so, in that case, that's probably the best reference I can give. And because it's sort of I tried to keep it updated with...

[Background Noise] 1:02:24

Shu Lea Cheang 1:02:26

...with various things that I'm involved with.

Matthew Fuller 1:02:31

Okay, no, I think that's, that's good to begin. I think we now move to the live play of the of the website.

Shu Lea Cheang 1:02:40

Do you think maybe you want to wrap it up? Yeah.

Lili-Maxx Hager 1:02:45

Yeah. And thank you so much, Shu Lea and Matthew for such an insightful conversation. So, as they both already said, we're now really excited to head over to the live play, which you can access via the link in the chat and Jack, our tech support is just going to pop that in the chat for you. But before that, I would really like to thank our audience. So, you guys, for participating and for all your comments and questions you've shared, which have informed that discussion tonight. Please also do share any feedback you have with us. You will see that our tech support will also share a link to a questionnaire which will be really grateful for you to complete before you leave. We will also be uploading a recording of today's event on UP Projects' YouTube channel and website which will include captions if you do want to re watch the event. But before we head over to the live play, I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Arts Council England for generously supporting this event and our ongoing *This is Public Space* program. And last but by no means least, I would also like to thank Jack Newbury, UP Projects' Project Assistant for providing technical support this evening. So do remember to join us for the live play and head to the link in the chat. And thank you all for attending this evening. See you in the BioNet!

Shu Lea Cheang 1:03:55

Hello. I just want to say if you can kind of go through the BioNet, we actually opened up a telegram to check so you have that link also on telegram we have a group called *Welcome to BioNet* and also just make it's not a very simple website in a way to navigate through at some point you may get stuck and I like to see if you actually reach the credit page which Arts Council London support - Arts Council England supports is a knowledge so I hope that you do reach the credit page and that will be successful. Thank you.

Lili-Maxx Hager 1:04:49

Thank you everyone. See you there the telegram link is now also in the chat.