

Technology cultivated by each individual should not be used in part or trivialized for compromise. Art is a series of “technology of return” that is, the means by which to return from points such as “Art is a capitalist game and is meaningless” or “I’m gonna die someday, and there’s nothing left.” The wilderness of emptiness and relativity is never an ultimate objective, even if it is your current destination. While it indeed could be meaningless, there is still something that you want to do. That’s why you turn on your heels to return, instead of compromising in the wilderness and pretending that it is your destination.

Kosuke Nagata

Born in Aichi, 1990. Locating fundamental components such as social structure, today’s media technology, and our sensory system to perceive various phenomena in his artistic interest, artwork by Kosuke Nagata continues to emerge ambiguity in the process of distinguishing one from another. He has recently participated in the following major exhibitions “Aichi Triennale 2019: Taming Y/Our Passion” (Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art), “Open Space 2018: in transition” (NTT InterCommunication Center), and “The Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions 2018: Mapping the Invisible” (TOKYO PHOTOGRAPHIC ART MUSEUM). The essay titled ‘Photography after Photoshop: Software of the “Photographic Apparatus”’ contributed to the Lev Manovich’s Japanese-translated publication “Instagram and Contemporary Image” (Tokyo: BNN, 2018)

Consider compromise as being “halfway happy.” What it potentially harbors is the time of future. This year, aM project presents exhibitions with five artists, who each through their individual approach, attempts to study and share technologies of return for believing in the future in this day and age in which they live and die.

aM Project 2020–2021

Halfway Happy

Vol. 2

Kosuke Nagata
Eat

2020.11.27 FRI — 2021.3.5 FRI

13:00–20:00

Closed on Sunday, Monday, Holidays.

Entrance Free

Guest Curator Arata Hasegawa

Support:

Tokyo Art Acceleration

ANOMALY

1 Purée

2020

35’14”

2 Découpage

2020

509×394 mm

3 Digest (Translation Zone)

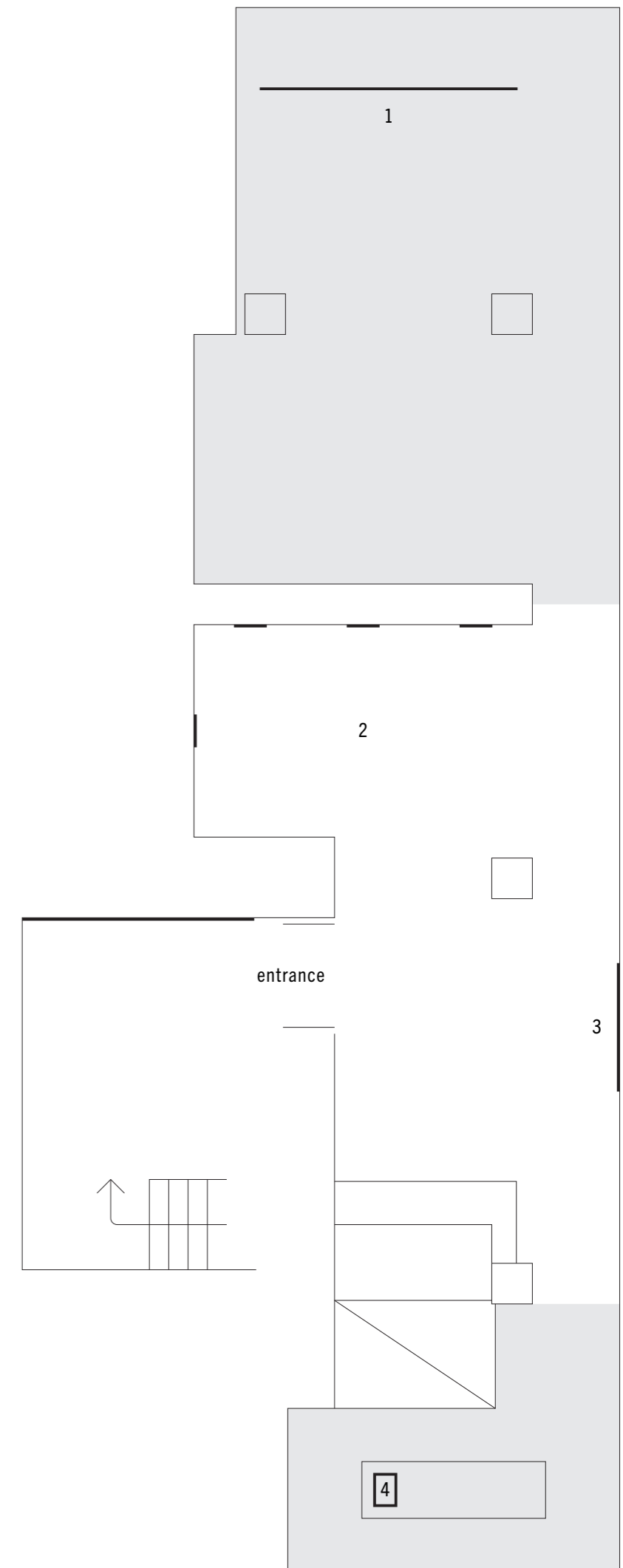
2020

13’10”

4 PC: The Last Night of the Stone Age (Prototype v1)

2020

h470×w485×d330 mm



As the second installment in its exhibition series, aM Project 2020–2021: *Halfway Happy* presents *Eat*, a solo show with artist Kosuke Nagata that centers on his new video work, *Purée*.

As can be discerned from the titles of both the exhibition and the works presented, the show focuses on questions about eating and as well as “the mouth” itself. Here it is possible to observe Nagata’s consistent interest that continues from his previous work *Translation Zone* (2019) which was based on the theme of home cooking. In fact, a digest version of *Translation Zone* titled *Digest (Translation Zone)* is presented on this occasion (Digest also bearing associations to the consumption of food), indicating that this exhibition is indeed an extension of this previous work¹.

From/To Translation Zone

Let us briefly look back on Nagata’s previous work². Nagata has been producing works by paying attention to the fact that phenomena, which seem to clearly “copy & paste” reality, are indeed a cause for various “conflicts” and “confusion.” Particularly, in the early years of his practice, he sublimated the very technology that serves expose the opacity and instability of media devices into works of art. For example, in *Postproduction* (2018) he invalidates the ground and figure within the image plane by taking advantage of how the automated “spot healing brush” editing tool is unable to distinguish between “the subject” and “the subject in the photograph.”

In *Sierra* (2017), Nagata traces the history of the mountain photograph that is pre-displayed on the Mac desktop in order to bring a “desktop background” to the “foreground,” while in *Audio Guide* (2018), an audio guide is used as a means to fluctuate the “figure and ground” of the episodes as well as the attributes of the objects viewed in the exhibition. In such works it is possible to recognize the embodiment of the “technologies” that the artist had researched and studied thus far. At the same time they were also part of a process by which the artist himself increased his awareness towards the fact that the various boundaries drawn throughout the world are not fixed, but are rather highly arbitrarily, politically, and provisionally determined. It is not only the “spot healing brush” editing tool that confuses “figure and ground” to result in the creation of unclear images. We ourselves are also constantly confused, making arbitrary decisions and drawing peculiar lines to section the world. There is a certain reflection here.

Nagata does not infinitely expand this “reflection,” but refers to it as a turning point that directs him towards producing his work. His works by no means simply resolve to point out that the lines drawn throughout this world are arbitrary and unclear. This is nothing but a premise. The question here is what kind of lines one wishes to draw despite the given circumstances. *Translation Zone* conveys that both “translation” and “home cooking” are monuments to the positive attitude of those who try to live their lives even under inadequate conditions. What sets Nagata’s work apart from a mere enumeration of interesting facts, is indeed his unfaltering will and forwardness towards “making.”

In his new work *Purée* Nagata attempts to think about the scope of the “subject” while cooking the very dish from which it derives its title. He contemplates the possibility that the mouth may exist beyond the realm of the body, or more specifically, a mouth that is not 1 but requires a decimal point such as 0.9 or 1.24. The work traces the history regarding the act of eating, and considers reasons that are not transfixed by ethics and responsibilities that extend endlessly from excretion to digestion, cooking, distribution, and production.

From here I would like to cultivate auxiliary issues concerning *Purée* in a more in-depth manner as opposed to a “digest.”

All eating is force-feeding

In Maud Ellmann’s book *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* there is a peculiar passage in the debate regarding hunger strikes by women as a plea for women’s suffrage.

Our first experience of eating is force-feeding: as infants, we were fed by others and ravished by the food they thrust into our jaws. We eat, therefore, in order to avenge ourselves against this rape inflicted at the very dawn of life. The compulsive eater, who feels attacked by food, understands the truth of eating better than the gourmand, who thinks that he is eating by his own volition, or the ascetic, who thinks he can resist the imperative of food. All eating is force-feeding³.

Here, connections are drawn between “force-feeding” that entails thrusting food into those on hunger strike against their will in order to “keep them alive,” and the dietary assistance that is provided to infants who are unable to eat and drink on their own. This claim by Ellmann that easily equates the two seems highly extreme, and also neglects to think about the suffering of people who are subjected to the violence of force-feeding. Confined to their cells and simply being alive, those who have been imprisoned are literally treated as mere “mouths.” However, in this exhibition Ellmann’s claim cannot be easily dismissed despite the ethical issues that it harbors.

The human microphone that serves to restructure one’s mouth and the mouths of others while accompanied by certain discrepancies and incongruities, illuminates another practice of resistance, that is, the hunger strike which paradoxically attempts to voice one’s opinion by abandoning eating, and enables the act of force-feeding to emerge as its shadow. Nagata’s claim that the act of “eating” cannot be realized by a single independent subject, and that the “mouth” is always open to the possibility of being restructured, at the same time summons Ellmann’s horrific thesis that “all eating is force-feeding.” The overall potential of the subject that Nagata seeks to explore in *Purée* is constantly being dragged down into the territory of passive and powerless matter.

Pan-Constructivism

Meanwhile, the more it is emphasized that our mouths can be reconstructed, the more this claim comes within close proximity of issues such as “innovation” and self-transformation that are proclaimed under our contemporary capitalist regime. Akinori Kubo warns against this sweeping “pan-constructivist” attitude as he tries to simplify and explain Bruno Latour’s discourse.

Pan-constructivism, no matter how reasonable and marvelous the direction of construction may seem, as long as it is employed by positioning us as constructors as external subjects in the world, inevitably harbors the possibility of lapsing into Machiavellianism or arbitrary decision-making, which states that “those able to control the situation are correct regardless of the means that were used⁴.”

Of course, pan-constructivism was first introduced as an initiator to break the resignation and stereotype that society, institutions, and customs will continue forever, as well as debates that presuppose the independence and self-reliance of the subject. It is necessary to emphasize its significance, and there is indeed no doubt that *Purée* has also provided a sufficiently appealing opportunity to reconsider the scope of the subject.

But as I have said, the open mouth has its enemies. If the balance is lost even a little, human beings will be rendered as mere objects, or expelled to a wasteland where only the results matter. It is a deception to acknowledge *Purée* while ignoring this risk, and one could even say that doing so would be to underestimate this work.

Eat

Let us go back to the experience of “eating.” There are certain instances in which life as a whole, or a part of it is packed into meals that are each time none other than special and fragmentary. Instead of eating to live, living and the act of eating now equate to one another. That single mouthful can even surpass living itself.

At the very same time as being in the midst of perceiving this freedom with absolute speed, the mouth is inevitably remade into a mouth that is different from what it was before. In the experience of eating, the mouth is both far too free and far too passive. The act of eating is filled with an overwhelming experience that so to speak, appears to rewrite the entire “enemy” by means of thoroughly enforcing the freedom that has half-heartedly been diluted, and actively thrusts it into passive territory.

The appeal of *Purée*, above and beyond serving as a clue to reconsider the scope of the subject, is found in Nagata’s trust in the act of eating itself.

1 The work *Translation Zone* can be viewed throughout the duration of the exhibition by accessing the following QR code: <https://vimeo.com/knagata/translationzone>



2 The artist’s past works may be referenced by visiting his website: <http://knagata.org/>



3 Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*, Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 35–36.

4 Akinori Kubo, *A Manual on Bruno Latour: From Actor Network Theory to Exploring Forms of Existence*, Getsuyosha Limited, 2019, p. 249