TOTAL BODY CONDITIONING

MIKA TAJIMA

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ISLANDS IN THE DATA STREAM

Matthew Lyons

In recent years, Mika Tajima's work has centred on performance and productivity in relation to the modern built environment. Working in a variety of media and in several, contemporaneous bodies of works, she reimagines zones for performing bodies, and, by taking these their new principles to their endgames, her work suggests possible avenues for liberation, even if through means of excess and amplification. From Herman Miller's Action Office cubicle system for the mid-century office to ergonomics, how have industrial design and human bodies co-produced each other? Classical readings of sculpture purport that all sculpture is made in relation to the human form; we might expand that to look at the built environment in relation to ways of being human and performing. And Tajima's exhibition projects often choreograph one's actions moving through them and point to the ways in which the built environment and design (an office space, a factory, a domestic setting, or an art space) shape how we behave. Her 2014 Total Body Conditioning exhibition addressed multiple registers of life—work, leisure, and cultural activity—by looking at various technologies from the age of industry to the digital age which have altered human agency and utility, perhaps even its physiognomy little by little.

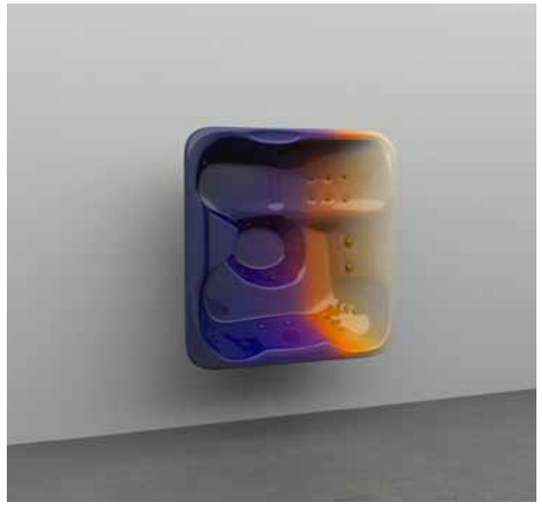
For Tajima, it has been useful to view these processes through the work Michel Foucault did on the production of the subject in the Enlightenment age of discipline and punishment. His groundbreaking theorisation on the history of the penal system concludes with a consideration of what he called "the carceral archipelago"—meaning all variety of nineteenth-century regulatory institutions and pressures (poor houses, orphanages, workhouses, mental institutions, etc), that grew out of the previous fervent period of expansion of penal methodologies and that gradually and insidiously normalise(d) modern subjects. Foucault places the emergence of "the carceral" at around 1840, right at the tail end of the fast-paced period of industrial revolution, that time of huge transformation in the relationship between human labour and capital. Jump forward a few generations, and it is these normalising principles that we see at work in the formation of Fordism, the standardisation of mechanical industry, and the micromanagement of how humans move in an industrial workplace.

The textile industry, of course, played a huge role in the Industrial Revolution. Through a residency at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, Tajima developed her *Negative Entropy* series in which she focused on mechanical textile production, in particular the development of the Jacquard loom, as a technology linked to these early modes of industry, but also one that developed into our current age of computing and information management. First demonstrated by Joseph Marie Jacquard in 1801, the Jacquard loom simplified the process of manufacturing textiles, in particular ones with complex patterns such as brocade and damask. This mechanical loom is controlled by a "chain of cards", punched cards laced together into a continuous sequence. Multiple rows of holes are punched on each card, with one complete card corresponding to one row of the design. The Jacquard head used replaceable punched cards to control a sequence of operations, an important step in the history of computing software. The ability to change the pattern of the loom's weave by simply changing cards was a key conceptual precursor to the development of computer programming and data entry.

To create her woven pieces, Tajima takes audio field recordings at either industrial factories or ever-expanding "server colocation centres" where data, equipment, space, and bandwidth are made available to (often web-based) businesses. These audio files are converted into image files, like the chain of cards, which serve as the patterning sequences of warp and weft for the loom. Stretched onto wooden panels, as are paintings, the textiles exist as images of the conditions of their own production—a transmutation of an industrial soundscape (be it mechanical or digital) into a woven network of colours and pattern. As static, mute images that result from zones of productivity, they haunt their respective industries and point to the increasing march towards obsolescence for many of them.

The next body of work in the *Negative Entropy* series came out of Tajima's research on the Toyota corporation. This global brand originally began in the nineteenth century in the textile rather than automotive industry. Company founder Sakichi Toyoda made important advances in loom technology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. (It was his son Kiichiro who then moved the family business into the booming automotive industry in 1933.) Yet the Toyota firm is still active in the textile industry today, and Tajima had the opportunity to visit a factory in Japan, at which the audio recordings for a new group of *Negative Entropy* works were captured. Beyond its innovation in textile and automotive industry, Toyota is also renown for its highly developed workplace and business philosophy. This elaborate, socio-technical system is often called the Toyota Production System (TPS) for which one of its key philosophical terms is *Jidoka*, or automation with human intelligence. An early example of this was demonstrated by one of Sakichi Toyoda's later automated looms that were able to stop themselves when a thread broke during the weaving process, rather than rely on a human to watch over and see the machine's error. Nearly 100 years later, current industrial factories are able to achieve almost complete lights-out manufacturing with very little need for actual human labour (or illumination for human eyes) at all.

Exhibited for the first time as part of Total Body Conditioning, Tajima's newest series titled *Epimelesthai Sautou (Take Care)* also connects to the manufacturing history and narrative of another family-run, global brand: the Jacuzzi line of hydrotherapy baths. Similar to the Toyoda family, the large Jacuzzi clan did not begin their business in the industry with which they are now associated. They achieved success with new hydraulic techniques, first for aviation and then for agriculture. Decades later, one of the sons in the large Jacuzzi family developed debilitating rheumatoid arthritis. His brother realised that he could create a hydraulic pump for a home bathtub to mimic the hydrotherapy sessions from which his brother got so much relief at his monthly hospital visits. The firm eventually developed the large soaking tubs themselves, fitted with built-in jets for air and water, heating, and filtration systems that could accommodate one to several people. Thus the Jacuzzi was released onto the market in the 1970s, less as a therapeutic tool for specific conditions than as a luxury item for the general pursuit of leisure. With the shape of the Jacuzzi tub and its multiple seating capacities, social bodies and structures are formed in this configuration, by this object; these are then reproduced as necessary and desired in the marketplace. Leisure activity was after all a concept being developed by and for the market. At around the same time, the new personal computer industry pitched to the consumer that these newly-affordable machines could take on so many tasks that one would enjoy vastly increased amounts of leisure time. Of course, a generation later, personal computing devices and applications have gone on to overtake a huge portion of leisure and interpersonal communication, so much so that it has become seemingly impossible for one to socialise without them.



Leisure, entertainment, and the culture industry also come into play in Tajima's ongoing *Furniture Art* series. These wall-based, rectangular boxes of Plexiglas onto which paint has been sprayed to the interior approximate the scale of a medium-sized work on canvas. The wall surface on which these pieces hang are revealed through the areas of unmarked Plexiglas and the thinnest areas of sprayed paint. *Furniture Art* refers to a small number of pieces composed by Erik Satie in the early twentieth century that he grouped under the rubric "Furniture Music". By this he meant music composed not to be listened to intently but to serve as a background to other, often mundane events. Taken up later in the twentieth century by Cage and others, the precision of this term was modified and eventually took on another meaning for theories around minimal and ambient music. But Satie's use of it was meant more as a satirical critique on the state of listening, with listening as a form of analysis and thought in peril from new mass media forms of aural entertainment like radio broadcast. Tajima's hanging Plexiglas boxes reincorporate this critical edge; as if modernist abstractions had been transmuted into vapours, they are then pinned down and held captive as little more than a few passes of aerated pigment, a framed zone of air on a section of wall in a room, contingent in their environment and vulnerable to visual contagion from their supporting wall, from the glare of lighting and to reflections on their surface. They are the truants held in the exhibition space, having failed to be dematerialised. Tajima's Jacuzzi pieces, re-sited from the horizontal to vertical, also read as non-compliant pictorial planes, jutting out too far off the wall and with high-gloss, undulating forms that seem misshapen in their new orientation.

For Foucault, the carceral system and its emergent class of delinquents and non-normative classes of individuals produced and perpetuated each other. Looking at contemporary work life, some have likened the popularity of somatic practices such as yoga or meditation as a similarly codependent element of the 24/7 demands of constant reachability and immediate response in both the professional and personal realms of contemporary daily life. Seen in this Foucauldian lens of the disciplinary regulation of the self, these practices do not serve to mitigate contemporary pressures but in fact sustain them. So millennial working life and the activities meant to balance it instead co-produce and reinforce each other, often with militaristic overtones such as 'total body conditioning' or 'bootcamp' and the like. Here the Ancient Greek concept "epimelesthai sautou", ie "to take care of oneself", or "the concern with self" which Foucault placed in opposition to "know oneself", becomes a new, extreme industrialised technology of regulation and normalisation.

And the place where demands for greater productivity and design meet is ergonomics, which tries to anticipate the "human factor" in labour economics to reduce "work-related musculoskeletal disorders". Tajima has often looked to these design systems in the office room or factory floor to point to this performance-related regulatory system. Taking performance capacity to an extreme, Tajima has even staged events with contortionists, asking them to exhibit their almost post-skeletal capabilities amid her installations of ergonomically-designed office furniture. How far can this body conditioning push our capacity to produce/perform? How far can information gathering and online algorithms denaturalise our ability to socialise without their networks? Tajima's installations of transmuted objects and data sets re-imagine the histories of binary technology and their corresponding built environments, from their implementation for the production of material goods to their current use in the collection and maintenance of data (and of course the eventual monetisation of these data sets). As we approach 200 years since Foucault dated the emergence of what he called the "carceral archipelago", could these new, immaterial algorithms be mapped as the newest islets of the disciplinary control of the self, the furniture selfie, and our new roles as data producers and consumers?