

# Orphan Drift

TELEMATIC

323 10th St.

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Orphan Drift's visceral and dreamy four-channel video installation *If AI Were Cephalopod*, 2019, is an ode to the octopus, whose intelligence still baffles scientists. In the video, serene underwater footage of octopi, CGI renderings of octopus skin, and scans of caves are layered with heavily processed video effects and painterly masks. The work unfolds through a series of simple propositions that begin with the titular phrase, "If AI were cephalopod." In these written statements, which merge scientific facts with lyrical extrapolations, the video speculates on what would happen if artificial intelligence could, like the octopus, camouflage itself, create diversionary clouds of ink, identify toxicity, and taste with its tentacles. While the work feels more expansive than moralistic, a viewer can still conclude that a man-made thinking organism with these attributes would be disconcerting. One of the largest concerns the hypotheticals raise is that if AI could camouflage itself, it could surveil us and serve the interests of scientists, governments, or corporations alike.

Nascent forms of invisible AI are already with us: Complex algorithms developed by Facebook, Google, and other tech giants insidiously aggregate data and implement targeted mechanisms. As the supposed distinctions between AI (designed to interact socially) and the more asocial ocean creatures (dedicated to their own survival) become murkier, we must remodel machines to prioritize the long-term social good over the undeniably human desires for profit, control, and security.

– Genevieve Quick

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