

# DIGITAL ALTERITIES

## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Emerging Artist Exhibition

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Anyse Ducharme  
Thea Jones  
Mani Mazinani  
Tamara Platiša & Saša Rajšić  
Santiago Tavera  
Calvin Winter

Curated by Scott Gamble

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The intermingling of humanity and technology has blurred the lines between real and fabricated, between natural and digital. We live in a constant state of cyber-flux, bombarded by the seemingly endless supply of digital noise. Digital culture has permeated every micrometer of our natural being, and the discrepancy between the real and virtual is increasingly difficult to discern. According to Donald Ihde, this condition, known as the "alterity relation", is the moment of symbiosis between the self and the digital other. Following Heidegger's media-based hermeneutics, Ihde's alterity relations represent the next step in the progression of human-technology relations. Whereas Heidegger's hermeneutics dictate that technology such as the computer is merely a device through which the self interacts with and manipulates the external world, Ihde's alterity relations are instead a conscious awareness and appreciation of the union between humans and technology and the results of their interaction. Ihde posits that technology can be seen as a tool for enhancing personal realities, with the possibilities limited only by the ambition of the user. Technology's pervasiveness is acknowledged and fully accepted, and allows those who embrace it to develop and achieve new goals within digital media. For Ihde's alterity relations, technology no longer represents a solely utilitarian use, but can open up new avenues of exploration, both philosophically and personally, often with unexpected results. It is a gateway to new realities and digital alterities.

New media artists are uniquely positioned to experiment with technology in unconventional ways in order to ascertain a new understanding of their relationship with it and create these new realities. Artists have the ability to create a dialogue with the machine and integrate it seamlessly into the external world. Instead of trying to understand technology itself, like some foreign species, its existence and purpose is simply an accepted norm within the realm of contemporary life and artists are free to experiment in an open-ended, inductive fashion. There is instead a romantic invigoration of new media works that was once overshadowed by the ever-present creep of technology in everyday life. With the physical boundaries of the machine erased, artists are free to find more inventive methods of using technology which in turn allows the viewer to embrace, appreciate, and ascertain a more profound understanding of the beauty these new digital paradigms possess.

In *DIGITAL ALTERITIES* each artist makes use of ubiquitous technology to explore this digital frontier, highlighting new perspectives for viewers to enter and explore for themselves. Each piece is an experiment that tests the boundaries of the knowable world, be it through the physical connections of the technology at work, the connection between technology and human experience, the non-deterministic juxtaposition of natural and simulated, or a combination of any number of these. Every piece extends self into other; a critical examination of human-technology integration.

Mani Mazinani's interactive sculpture *Rotary Leap/Once* (2011) makes the video feed itself, and its impact and

connection to the viewer, visible. Consisting of a live feed camera, video screen, rotating plexiglass screen, video feedback, and an RGB light fixture, *Rotary Leap/Once* encourages the viewer to create his or her own new perspective through experimentation and playful interaction with the piece. The connections between all the components are visible: The wiring is laid out in plain sight and the viewer is able to see how each component feeds into the next. As they interact with the piece, the viewer's own influence on the work is made visible through their appearance in the video as well as their reflection on the plexiglass. This creates a space that oscillates between real and synthesized and exists simultaneously in both. *Rotary Leap* is in a perpetual state of flux, infinitely collapsing back upon itself thanks to the live feed. This infinite hallway of ever-changing colours and space reflects the endless possibilities these new connections can make, both with each other and the viewer. By inverting the connections so that the viewer can see them, one must consider their presence or lack thereof within the piece, should they choose to abstain from getting too close. This reflects the spectrum of acceptance one may have with technology and the ways one might move from a hermeneutic approach to a more integrated, alteritous one.

Using similar methods to Mazinani, Santiago Tavera's projection *Multiple Scanned Presences (2011)* inserts the viewer into the piece via a live feed camera, yet in a more confrontational manner. Whereas Mazinani gives the viewer the opportunity to maintain a distance from the piece, Tavera does not allow such luxuries. As soon as the viewer is within view of the piece they are faced with a series of large, distorted moving projections. Like its scanner imagery, *Multiple Scanned Presences* ensnares the viewer and makes them an active component in its realization. It is an immersive experience regardless of where the viewer situates themselves, as the larger-than-life images and sounds encapsulate their surroundings. The overlaying of the images and the physical juxtaposition of multiple projectors relates to the human-machine convergence. While the projector units are discrete and easily distinguishable, the resulting installation is far more complicated, and highlights the difficulty one can have in escaping technology's grasp. The viewer is left to consider their own relation to the artwork, the technology that created it, and the reflection of a distorted reality that gazes back at them.

In a similarly confrontational fashion, Tamara Platiša and Saša Rajšić's single channel video *TTAMARAA. SSAŠAA. TTAMARAA! SSAŠAA! (2010)* directly confronts the viewer with a sense of immediacy and urgency. Positioned side by side, the two artists repeatedly call out each other's names in an endless loop. Each successive iteration is overdubbed on top of all previous iterations until the performance becomes an unsettling cacophony of noise that only serves to further obscure the artists' efforts. The layering effect achieved in both the audio and visual components of the piece concisely illustrates how the inundation of technology can quickly turn a simple task into a complicated one. As the disturbances caused by the accrual of multiple takes increases, so does the level of tension heard in the artists' delivery. Simple proclamations of each other's names becomes a desperate shriek that attempts to overthrow the booming resonance of all prior attempts. This hysteric exchange is evocative of a feeling of futility in attempting to overcome human error in relation to the precision of the machine. Both the viewer and the artists themselves are lost in the ever-deepening cave of the digital realm. Like the physical distortions in the piece, the viewer is left to contemplate the digital imprint left upon their psyche and the resultant change in their own realities.

Thea Jones shows the effects technology can have on human experience, but in a more subtle way. *Knox Pilgrimage (2010)* is a single channel video that demonstrates how digital artifacts can distort human experience and consequently, personal memory. Jones employs a video editing technique similar to scrubbing in order to alter and elongate video footage. What was once a mundane activity of climbing a hill becomes a strange and absurd exercise that brings attention to the vulnerability of memory. The manner whereby the original footage is corrupted parallels the ease in which personal recollection of the past can be compromised. By inverting the typical function of video -- that of an exact simulacrum of reality -- *Knox Pilgrimage* presents the viewer with one of many alterities that can exist within a single moment. Much like our own memory, we replay events and fond memories and recall the possible emotions attached to those times. However, the more that memory is revisited, the more unnatural and

imprecise it can become. It is instead an entirely new and fabricated memory. With multiple viewings, the glitched figures begin to lose their humanness and take on a more synthetic characteristic. The figures exist only in that perpetual performance, some Sisyphean climb up a digital mountain. The pilgrimage alluded to in the title of Jones' piece is a metaphorical one, set in the landscape of the digital world.

Anyse Ducharme's photo series *The Quality or State of Being Real* (2010) takes the digital artifact to its extreme by combining digital and natural landscapes to create a new and bewilderingly beautiful reality. Like Jones' video piece, Ducharme's photos are a pilgrimage into the digital unknown and attempt to combine two disparate worlds. Ducharme adds brief strings of text appropriated from comments on popular YouTube videos to the encoding of RAW image files, creating unpredictable results. The original image is all but lost in an abstract array of pixelated swatches of colour due to a simple insertion of a human presence into the digital encoding. The photos represent new realities that exist in conjunction with their analogous source. As the title of the series implies, each image challenges the notion of reality as a singular, infallible truth. As Ducharme illustrates, the conflation of both natural and digital, even in the most minute fashion, can completely reconfigure one's understanding of reality, to the point where it is unrecognizable. These new digital landscapes celebrate the beauty of the human-machine relationship and exemplify the ways in which new and multiplicative perspectives can be garnered through playful experimentation of readily available technology. Ducharme's photo series truly epitomizes Ihde's alterity relations.

Finally, Calvin Winter's kinetic sculpture *Prevailing Winds* (2011) brings the external world inside the gallery through the integration of weather patterns captured from around the globe and robotically controlled wind chimes. The result is a series of emergent, non-deterministic musical progressions that collapse geographic boundaries and transports the viewer into a surreal space that would otherwise be impossible to inhabit. While the space is metaphysical, it is rooted in the physical world; it is an entirely new and fabricated reality. Regardless of the source of the wind patterns, the space of the work exists only within the confines of the viewer's subjective interpretation of the chimes. Like the abstract nature of the chimes, the boundaries of that space are indefinable, which relates to the collapse of the physical into the digital. *Prevailing Winds* represents the transformative power of technology and the impact it can have on the entire world. It shows how technology can situate people and places in an entirely alternate reality and can open up each person who experiences the non-deterministic sounds to new possibilities.

*DIGITAL ALTERITIES* represents new ways that the human-technology relationship can be viewed. The artists grouped in this exhibition have all found new ways to harmonize and celebrate this relation by creating works that transport us into this realm of discovery. Whether we are to consider the physical connections of ourselves to technology, the outcomes of these interactions, or the digital phantoms that pervade our natural world, the certainty that technology has forever changed the state of our reality is absolute. *DIGITAL ALTERITIES* showcases the magnificent beauty and capabilities of the convergence between machine and user. In our hyper-aware, technologically-reliant culture – one that is saturated by the internet, social media, and gadget fetishism – it is no surprise that issues such as those presented here are at the forefront of digital discourse.

- Scott Gamble

InterAccess is a registered, charitable artist-run centre that enables artists and the general public to explore the intersections of art and technology. Our mission is to expand the cultural space of technology. InterAccess gratefully acknowledges the support of the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts and landlord/architect Breck McFarlane for their continued support.