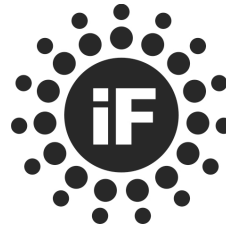




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**IMAGES
FESTIVAL**

Spectres of The Future

Presented in conjunction with the Images Festival

Victoria Delle Donne, James Rollo, Franco Arcieri and Sook Jung

Curated by Shauna Jean Doherty

April 10 – May 2, 2015

Selected Works:

Victoria Delle Donne, *Compression* (2014), single channel video

James Rollo, *I Can't Actually See What You're Doing* (2014), interactive projection

Franco Arcieri, *Radio Spirit/Death Channel* (2014), sound installation with AM/FM radios

Sook Jung, *Hologramom* (2014), installation

“A ghost never dies, it always remains to come and to come back...At bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come” - Jacques Derrida¹

Artwork relays information about the temporal moment in which it is produced, revealing to viewers the nature of their own era. This was the leading edict of Walter Benjamin's “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility”² and guides my curatorial efforts in this exhibition, *Spectres of the Future*.

Accordingly, the artworks that constitute this exhibition deploy the most common technologies of our time, offering a distinct vision of the present in anticipation of the future.

Together, Victoria Delle Donne, James Rollo, Franco Arcieri and Sook Jung each interrogate this physical world with technologies that gesture towards virtual realms. Through this assemblage of

¹ Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

² Benjamin, Walter, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.

projections, radios turned theremins, and a hologram, these artists foreground the complexity of the physical body placed within a technological domain, where the nuances of human experience and intimate exchange are complicated by the immaterial distance afforded by networked communication and digital devices. Their works are united by a haunting quality that articulates an anxiety spurred by technological ubiquity. In this exhibition the human form appears unstable, an apparition that threatens to disappear completely in the wake of digital discovery.

Through their works these artists ask, what does it mean to be human in an age of technologies? What form does the body take when placed within the porous borders between reality and virtuality? And how do synthetic experiences affect real lives?

The division between the physical and the virtual has become increasingly ambiguous in the contemporary Western world, affecting our ways of knowing – ourselves – and each other. Online identity abstracts the body; avatars and disembodied communications impact contemporary notions of subjectivity and individuality. These works consider the deep ontological changes that have been wrought by this techno-reality, where self-knowledge is dependent on experiences that are often siphoned through technological media. Each work is a manifestation of the ongoing redefinition of personhood in the 21st century.

In her 1999 publication, *How We Became Posthuman*, literary critic Katherine Hayles rigorously proposes that we have deviated from the “liberal humanist subject” of the Enlightenment age, and evolved into a modern figure that she describes as the “post-human subject”.³ For Hayles, the body is diminished in the information age. Through the four works presented here, the artists attempt to relocate the body within a paradigm that again and again displaces it. It is made clear in Hayles's text that this post-human subject proposes new manifestations of self-hood, autonomy, and humanity as the biological being becomes increasingly combined with the digital devices on which it so depends.

This imagined future where the organic human body is fused with synthetic machine components is a proposal that is often met with unease, understood as a threat to typical conceptions of human subjectivity. As Hayles accounts, “As long as the human subject is envisioned as an autonomous subject with unambiguous boundaries, the human-computer interface can only be parsed as a division between the solidity of real life on the one side and the illusion of virtual reality on the other...This view

² Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1999.

of the self authorizes the fear that if the boundaries are breached at all, there will be nothing to stop the self's complete dissolution" (290).⁴ Hayles exhibits a more optimistic attitude about the mixing of the human and the technological, describing this combining as a "dynamic partnership" (288). She uses the example of prosthetics to demonstrate the great potential inherent in the augmentation of the human body with artificial elements.

The blurring of boundaries between the real and the hyper-real contributes to an evolving meaning of "presence" in this intensely technologized social and physical landscape. Each artist in this exhibition responds to this deprioritization of physical presence by reconstituting the body in various iterations. Traces remain, whether as beams of light or invisible signals. At times the human body must animate the exhibition itself, illuminating the spectrum of human experience. Life and death. Analogue and digital. These works traverse the poles of materiality and immateriality, presence and absence, magnetic fields, and digital worlds.

Radio Spirit/Death Channel (2014) by Franco Arcieri features modified AM/FM radios that transmit a high-pitched sound when approached. The artist applies a macabre persona to his collection of possessed radio apparatuses with the inclusion of death in his title. To walk within the perimeter of his catacombs of obsolete technology is to resurrect them. Arcieri's modified radios align the invisibility of radio waves with the elusive immateriality of the human magnetic fields that activate his machines. The piercing hum is an analogue death rattle that marks the obsolescence of radio technology with their human-makers perhaps not far behind.

I Can't Actually See What You're Doing (2014) by James Rollo is much more alive: a responsive projection, human in its awareness and digital in its structure, titled with an apathy that denies its mystery. A digital projection that senses the viewer's corporeal presence seems to reach beyond the frame, imposing on the safe reality in which the viewer sits. The projection is a portrait of the artist himself, an immortalization of this moment in time. Rollo's work summons a future where projections are sentient and respond to your presence. The video's protagonist is a soulless spectre wading in a digital sea, Frankenstein's monster, capable of destroying his maker.

In Sook Jung's *Hologramom* (2014) the artist presents a holographic portrait of her late mother. The work, contemplative in its soft glow, proposes new corporeal possibilities in an advanced society. This image, in its unearthly luminosity, parallels technological obsolescence with human mortality. How can

³ ibid

technologies be used to extend life, even in abstracted forms? Does this work provide comfort or longing?

As Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston assert in their text *Posthuman Bodies*, “posthuman bodies are the causes and effects of postmodern relations of power and pleasure, virtuality and reality...The posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image..a techno-body” (3).⁵ In their text the authors maintain that technological progress does not necessarily mean the inevitable obsolescence of humanity, instead they imagine an evolution towards a new human form that combines with technologies.

In *Compression* (2014) Victoria Delle Donne literalizes the assertion that the posthuman body has transformed into the projected image itself. The work features a digital rendering of the artist consumed by the screen, unable to escape. In its haunting and spectral appearance, this work articulates an apprehension that has emerged with the proliferation of technology. So enmeshed in a simulacrum of projections and digital mediation, the artist becomes entirely consumed by the interface, her body mutating into a digital signal. Here the artist proposes the potentially destructive effects of digital representation on notions of subjectivity and identity, becoming fully engulfed in the digital apparatus. The artist is seen, detached from reality, stuck in the virtual with no way of breaking free.

Together these works test the limits of the human body by inserting the human form within the technological realm. In a reimagining of the relations between the physical and the artificial, *Spectres of the Future* preserves the traces of the physical body within a virtual paradigm that threatens to displace it.

-Shauna Jean Doherty

⁴ Halberstam, Judith, and Ira Livingston. *Posthuman Bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.