

The Ars Electronica Center's current focal-point theme

technē - The Interplay of Art and Technology

(Linz, January 16, 2015) Technology is omnipresent in everyday life now. There's hardly anything in our modern world that functions without computerization and the internet—the devices we employ in the workplace and our completely automated assembly lines; our private as well as public modes of transportation; the medical care we receive in hospitals; our financial and retail transactions (now often cashless); and even the way we administer energy in our homes. Technology has also become an indispensable part of interpersonal communications. Thanks to the mobile devices that are our constant companions throughout the day, there's scarcely a time we can't be contacted somehow—by phone, SMS, e-mail or social media. And this list could go on and on, ad infinitum.

Technology in the Focal Point of Art

Complex social, economic and ecological consequences are the upshot of technology's progressive permeation of our habitat. Thus, it's no coincidence that more and more (young) artists are manifesting interest in those technological developments that have sustainably changed our lives and will continue to do so. Technology thus becomes the crux and gist of (critical) artistic reflection, and does so in two respects: on one hand, technology itself is the theme or substantive object of artistic works; on the other, more and more artists are themselves acquiring a high level of technical skill, and this, above all, is what, in turn, influences the self-image or conception of self of many creative individuals, who see themselves as both artists and engineers, scientists, etc.

Art and Technology Are Growing Together

It is precisely this process of growing together—the meshing of technical and artistic competence—that occupies the focal point of a new presentation in the Ars Electronica Center. But note that “technē” hasn't been conceived as a one-shot deal; rather, it's a topic that the AEC will be accentuating over the coming months with themed tours and speeches in Deep Space in addition to these 17 works of art.

technē - The Interplay of Art and Technology: <http://www.aec.at/center/en/ausstellungen/techne/>
Ars Electronica Center: <http://www.aec.at/center/en/>

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Cloud Face / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

“Cloud Face” is a collection of pictures of clouds, each one of which somewhat resembles a human face. Thus, it’s thoroughly understandable that facial recognition programs come to the same conclusion and evaluate these cloud formations as “real” human beings.

Nonfacial Mirror / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

Whenever someone attempts to look into this mirror, it turns away. Incessantly. Simply put, “Nonfacial Mirror” shuns faces. But if you conceal your countenance behind your hands, the mirror hangs in there—only to turn away again as soon as you try to sneak a peek.

Captives / Quayola (IT/UK)

“Captives” is a digital reinterpretation of Michelangelo’s Prigioni series and his famous non finito technique. Here, Quayola is interested in, on one hand, the simultaneous tension and balance between form and content, as well as, on the other hand, between human striving for consummation and the complex, chaotic forms of nature. The 2014 Prix Ars Electronica honored “Captives” with an Honorary Mention in the Interactive Art category.

Landscape Abbreviated / Nova Jiang (NZ)

Nova Jiang’s kinetic labyrinth consists of modular elements supporting rotating planters that contain moss the artist collected from the sides of buildings, cracks in the pavement, subway grates and other urban nooks and crannies in New York City’s landscape. The computer-controlled planters continuously generate new maze patterns based on mathematical rules; they rotate to form shifting pathways that encourage visitors to change direction and viewpoints as they move through the space.

Looks Like Music / Yuri Suzuki (JP)

This installation showcases Yuri Suzuki’s charming way of visualizing music. A tiny robot proceeds along a black line that demarcates a closed course on a white paper surface. At irregular intervals, this track is intersected by colored stripes or painted over by multihued dots and splatters, all of which are translated into sounds and tones when the robot passes over them.

Real Imaginary Objects / Daniel Crooks (AU)

Daniel Crooks endeavors to represent time and its passage as three-dimensional objects. To accomplish this, he developed an innovative 3-D camera that makes it possible to capture sequences of cross-sections of a physical space—one in which a person is walking, for example—at a very high rate of image frequency. The two-dimensional images captured thereby are then sequentially clustered frame by frame so that they form a three-

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dimensional sculpture, a sort of time-block. During a research residency at the Ars Electronica Futurelab, Daniel Crooks took leave of the monitor screen as a medium of depiction and created a “genuine” physical sculpture.

Face to Facebook / Paolo Cirio, Alessandro Ludovico (IT)

To conclude their “Hacking Monopolism” trilogy, Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico took aim at big game online: Facebook. Using a home-brew computer program, they harvested a million Facebook profiles, filtered them with facial recognition software, and then grouped them according to similarities of the data as well as the faces. Finally, the profiles reordered in this way were displayed on a dating site the duo set up, and the profiled individuals were introduced to each other via e-mail. Within the very first week of its existence online, “Face to Facebook” was already making one hell of a splash, ranging from coverage in media worldwide to death threats and lawsuits. Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico were ultimately forced to take their project off the internet.

Loophole for All / Paolo Cirio (IT/US)

Art, activism and investigative journalism are what went into making Paolo Cirio’s “Loophole for All.” This project’s attention is focused on the Cayman Islands, the world’s fifth largest financial center and offshore tax haven. Paolo Cirio has stolen the identities of 200,000 companies registered here and is offering them for sale on his website www.loophole4all.com. What makes it possible is that registration in this Caribbean paradise can be done totally anonymously. So anyone can acquire a certificate that sets him or her up with the identity of a real company and thereby provides entrée to the financial world of the Caymans. The way Paolo Cirio sees it, everybody ought to have the opportunity to enjoy the same tax benefits that major corporations take advantage of. In this spirit, he describes his project as the attempt to democratize tax avoidance. Of course, the artist/activist’s ultimate aim is to call attention to the global dimensions of this type of cheating and to put an end to it for good, though he has no illusions about this happening anytime soon, since the lobby he’s taking on here is a pretty powerful one indeed.

Street Ghosts / Paolo Cirio (IT/US)

Google’s Street View Project gave rise to a sort of “photograph spanning the globe” in which countless millions of individual snapshots of public squares, avenues, roads and trails are interconnected into one gigantic image and made available online. And—as part of the bargain, so to speak—users get to see pictures of all the people who just happened to be present when these places were being photographed. They remain anonymous, of course, but suddenly they’re all on display on the internet. In “Street Ghosts,” Paolo Cirio turns the tables on Google. He took these Google shots, prepared life-size posters from them, and then put them up on the building walls or fences at the exact spot where the person was standing at the time the shot was taken. Nevertheless, there’s an essential difference between the

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digital originals and Paolo Cirio's so-called ghosts—his posters quickly disappear whereas the Google data will definitely remain online for a long time to come.

FADTCHA / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

Inspired by the so-called Turing Test administered online to separate the humans (users) from the machines (data harvesters), the “FAce Detection Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart” does just the opposite. Human users are called upon to discover a face in a picture consisting of a bunch of colored dots, a task that doesn't pose much of a problem to facial recognition software but constitutes a virtually insurmountable hurdle for us mortals.

The God's Script / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

“The God's Script” is a very unusual take on the short story of the same name by Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges. Every single word of the English translation is depicted in the form of the image that is the first result of inputting it as a search term in Google Pictures.

Cat or Human / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

The facial recognition capabilities of today's video surveillance are based on highly sophisticated algorithms. They deliver almost seamless documentation of our behavior in public spaces and retail settings. At the same time, these programs turn out to be total flops when it comes to differentiating between a human being and a cat. This fact, which seems almost ludicrous, nevertheless makes us cognizant of how error-prone these—purportedly—supremely efficient surveillance instruments actually are. In fact, the consequences that such a “miscalculation” could potentially have in the life of some very real human being are without a doubt quite unpleasant.

CAPTCHA Tweet / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

CAPTCHAs usually call upon an internet user to read slightly distorted numbers and letters and then type them back in as a means of verifying that the user is an actual human being and not a computer program. “CAPTCHA Tweet” is an application that reverses this—it lets Twitter users post tweets as CAPTCHAs and thus communicate in a way that's illegible by a computer that might happen to be eavesdropping.

Lapillus Bug / Kono Michinari, Takayuki Hoshi, Yasuaki Kakehi (JP)

This work consists of a plate full of breakfast leftovers and a small black ball—the “Lapillus Bug”—hovering above the plate like a fly, seemingly undecided about which tasty morsel to alight on first. This so-called pebble (the meaning of the Latin word lapillus) consists of particles that are being bombarded by ultra-low frequency waves inaudible to human beings. That's what keeps the bug aloft—so, actually, the secret behind its motion is strictly physics. Kono Michinari, Takayuki Hoshi and Yasuaki Kakehi thus illustrate how life can seemingly be breathed into inert material and, indeed, in a way that inevitably evokes comparisons on our part between them and creatures they “resemble.” Deploying ever-more-sophisticated

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technology is what makes it possible to create objects or images that are hard for us to tell apart from the original—that is, from actual living things.

Portrait / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

“Portrait” is a composite of all the faces that appear on screen in a particular film. Special software recognizes them and uses the gleaned data to produce a sort of “average face” that provides information about the main characters and the film’s visual atmosphere.

Iris / Chloe Cheuk, Kenny Wong (HK)

“Iris” consists of a couple of very outgoing hands that can communicate with an interlocutor only by means of gestures. Installation visitors can use trial-and-error to figure out which hand motions Iris reacts to. Conversely, Iris too is capable of learning: the gestures made by her conversational partners are recorded and stored to a database, whereby the installation’s repertoire of gestures steadily increases.

A Million Seasons / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

Flickr is currently the largest online photo platform. Among the material stored to it are millions of pictures with tags containing the words spring, summer, fall and winter, and these, in turn, provide the raw material for “A Million Seasons.” Each of these pictures is then reduced to a single pixel displaying the average color value of the entire image. Finally, a million pixels provide a colorful abstract impression of each of the four seasons.

Guided Tours and Presentations in Deep Space

In addition to the exhibition featuring these works of art, themed guided tours will also be offered in conjunction with “technē – The Interplay of Art and Technology.” Tours commence every Thursday at 6:30 PM and on Saturdays and Sundays at 3 PM. The itinerary includes all the installations in the exhibition and a presentation in Deep Space.

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STATEMENT

Bernhard Baier, Deputy Mayor of the City of Linz and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ars Electronica Linz GmbH:

“technē, the Ars Electronica Center’s current focal-point theme, spotlights a development that is as exciting as it is relevant. The selected works and, especially, the artists who created them display how the boundaries that have traditionally separated artistic disciplines and genres are becoming increasingly permeable. Here, we behold new types of creative protagonists whose biographies clearly differ from those of so-called classical artists. These are young people who have been trained in the natural sciences or technical fields and who, parallel to or, often, interspersed with their many artistic pursuits, also work as engineers, programmers and technicians of other sorts. Since they conform to the typical image of neither an artist nor an engineer, they often bring completely new perspectives and uncommon approaches to bear, and these, in turn, foster innovation.”

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