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Entrangled Technologies

Sofian Audry and Jonathan Villeneuve, In collaboration with Myriam Bessette and Samuel St-Aubin, Trace . Installation collective en trois temps. Galerie Art Mûr, Montreal. September 13 — 28, 2008

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Actualités/Expositions

Montreal

Entangled Technologies

Sofian Audry and Jonathan Villeneuve. In collaboration with Myriam Bessette and Samuel St-Aubin, *Trace : Installation collective en trois temps*, Galerie Art Mûr, Montreal. September 13 – 28, 2008

hat the pervasiveness of technology is here to stay is uncontested at this time and juncture in civilization. Our co-existence with, and the co-structuration of our many everyday realities with machines have fostered an ever more-entangled relationship with the nonhuman 'beings' with which we share this planet. The recursive qualities of participating in a technologically active exchange — the reciprocal gazes and shared evolutionary paths — formulate a moment of synthesis in the consideration of society's historical and present imbrications with machines and technological apparatuses.

*Trace*¹, a collective installation project by Sofian Audry and Jonathan Villeneuve with collaborations by Myriam Bessette and Samuel St-Aubin, is articulated over a series of three interactive *œuvres* anchored within the vernacular of domestic objects. The result of a complimentary exchange between its artists whom have gathered around a shared practice and conceptual framework of technology, art, and computational systems — the works in *Trace* were created via a collective creative process which speaks to current poly-disciplinary practices in the field of media arts.

Offering a re-framing of foundational technologies (light bulb, cathode ray, fan etc.) *Trace* is organized around 3 distinct works, (*L*), (*V*) and (*S*), wherein each component explores a different iteration of an interactive model predicated on the public's presence, though not inherently dependent on their active participation. The type of interaction proposed in *Trace* brackets the human presence as an opaque yet elemental ingredient to the process of revealing a series of material micro-transformations.

Trace (L), a vertical tubular amalgamate of twenty-one incandescent light bulbs and speakers, beckons us through its rhythmic light/audio undulations. *Trace (L)*'s interactions are constructed via accrued viewership encounters with the work, captured by a series of embedded proximity sensors. Inspired by Ising's mathematical model, the work is ever-transformed by "imprints" of past and present presences, therefore metamorphosing its algorithmic structure over time.² This sedimentation of "encounters" solicits the work to transmute discernibly subtle and new fluctuations in the relative intensity of the bulbs and audio composition through each subsequent viewing.

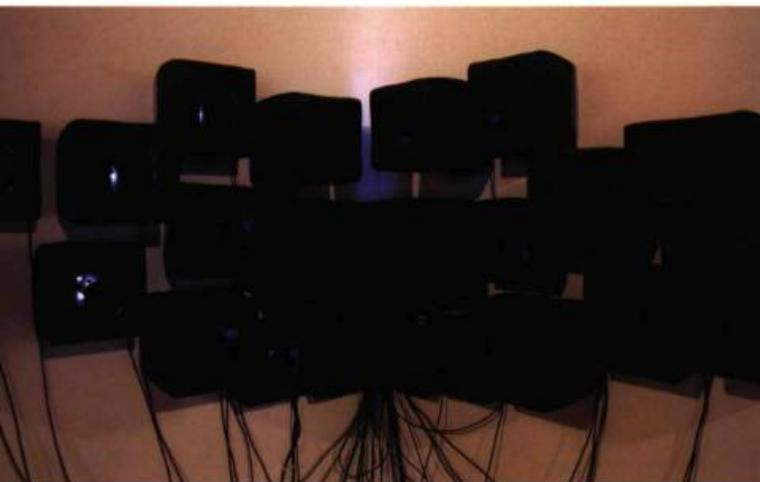
Trace (V) displays a kinetic cathode ray tube television broadcasting real-time and recorded video footage captured in the gallery setting. What is unique to the work is its computationally driven "editing" of the collected and actual video images. The framing device of the television, as a nostalgic object in light of the mul-

tifarious screen technologies available today appears in concord with the aesthetics of the two other works — all of the works have incorporated into their technological apparatuses or style an evanescent notion of 'technology'³ which could be anchored in the previous century. *Trace (V)* is intrinsically self-contained and self-referential. As the cathode ray tube ambulates up and down, our image, diffused in grainy, almost-surveillance quality resolution, remains a constant enigma as we attempt to formulate an understanding of where to situate this representation in time (is it now? was that before? "when" am I seeing?). This destabilizing factor enables a distancing from the experience, hence permitting a viewing at once 'engaged' (I am in the television) yet contemplative vis-à-vis the operational rules at play.

Trace (S) is developed out of a series of simple modular components, which come together to create a complex and rich work. Featuring small padded frames made of fabric reminiscent of 70s rec-room sofas, each module (frame) is regulated to emit light and mechanical (ventilator) impulses expressed via a fixed programmed cycle. However, these modules are also imbued with sensitivity to ambient (read: other frames') fluctuations of light. The advent of proximal light sources from next-frames results in a 'speeding up' of the light cycle, which aims, through a process of several hours, to create a unification of light/fan pulses rhythms consistent throughout all of the modules. This moment of reciprocal light/fan emissions is short-lived as it gives way to new instantiations of collective transmogrification by means of a 'deviant' (non-conformist) behavior scripted into the software. An unfolding of the autopoiesis process, most famously explicated by Maturana and Varela, is unveiled in the three works. In this sense, one can read an intention to create systems which, though linked to exterior stimulus, also develop their own internal systems of relations to which an enduring allegiance prevails.

Relation of Relations

The import of relational qualities within technological systems and artworks (not to mention biology and evolutionary theories) is a key foundational query of the 21st century. Relational art³ proposes new ways of engaging audiences in the art experience



Sofian Audry, Jonathan Villeneuve, electronic concept: Samuel St-Aubin, *Trace S*, 2008. Wood, wool, fans, luminescent photoresistant diode, microprocessor, power supply; 190,5 x 228 cm. Photo: Alexis Bellavance.



Sofian Audry, Jonathan Villeneuve, sound concept: Myriam Bessette, electronic concept: Samuel St-Aubin, *Trace V*, 2007. CRT screen, mechanical lever, wood, aluminium, electric wires, audio amplifier, microcontroller, RF converter, computer; 76, 2 x 50, 8 x 190, 5 cm. Photo: Alexis Bellavance.



Sofian Audry, Jonathan Villeneuve, sound concept: Myriam Bessette, *Trace I*, 2007.
Aluminium, 21 bulbs of 40 watts, speakers and bass amplifier, proximity sensors,
audio amplifier, MIDI device, computer. Diameter: 12, 7 x 30 cm 4. Photo: Alexis Bellavance.

by soliciting their active participation in the creation of the work. Often predicated on the re-framing of everyday objects (a pile of multicolored individually wrapped candies weighing in at 175 pounds which metaphorically stands in for a body, as in Felix Gonzales-Torres' *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991 or events (for example the communally prepared and shared meals of Rirkrit Tiravanija), relational work seeks to create art experiences in subtle, cumulative micro-events. Relational art is the logical conclusion of a coupling of conceptual art and Fluxus, owing much to early performance art practices.

Gilbert Simondon, the mid-20th century philosopher of technology who is experiencing a surge of import in the fields of art and technology, proposed an emendation of ontological and technological thought, engendering an ethical alignment between technical objects and man. Simondon's ethical consideration of technical objects, also translating into an ethics of interaction between humans and machines, is incumbent on a detailed concern for the materiality and practices of uses of the technological apparatuses. As notes Alberto Toscano, "Simondon's overall preoccupation with ontogenesis and 'allagmatics' and his work on technology and 'mechanology' are brought together in the ethical project of forging a 'technical culture' that would guide the interaction between men and technical ensembles, on the one hand, and the 'metabolism' (to use Marx's expression) between man and nature, on the other."⁴ The practice of framing machine-man-nature within a reciprocal/ontogenic system foregrounds the entangled and inter-indebted evolution of an "ethics of interaction beyond former tripartite separation of man, nature and techniques."⁵ To re-think technology on the grounds of an intimate evolution in consort with man is a radical proposition, yet one which artists might be best positioned to appreciate. For in Simondon's treatise

of a "technical culture" is an unmasked desire to see hierarchies between ecologies of manual and intellectual labor leveled. Thus *Trace* situates itself within this delicate balance of exchanges between the machinist and the natural/human in such a way as to imagine it would please Simondon, or at the very least the Simondonians amongst us.

VALÉRIE LAMONTAGNE

Valérie Lamontagne is a Montreal-based performance/digital media artist, freelance art critic and independent curator. She regularly writes about new media art and culture in: *CV Photo, ETC, Parachute, BlackFlash, HorizonZero, Rhizome*. Curatorial projects have been featured at: The New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York City), the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (Quebec City), OBORO (Montreal), Images Festival (Toronto), CYNETart (Dresden), Columbia College A+D Gallery (Chicago). Her technology-based works have been showcased across Canada, the United States, Central and South America and Europe. She is a Special Individualized Program PhD candidate at Concordia University investigating "Relational and Ubiquitous Performance Art" where she lectures in the Department of Design and Computation Arts. Her research explores the resonance of embodied somatic presence co-structured with technological apparatuses expressed via live performance or networked environments.

NOTES

¹ *Trace* was originally developed as a member's project thanks to an emergent artist program initiated by the Montréal artist-run centre Perte de Signal.² According to Audry, the reason for using Ising's model, as opposed to cellular automata (more utilized in media arts), was to arrive at a more "natural" system. [e-mail exchange with the artist on December 23, 2008].

² Nicolas Bourriaud discusses the important developments in the relationality of art—from installation, performance to technology and argues that this is the predominant premise of contemporary art, to create networks between nonhumans, humans and experiences.

⁴ Alberto Toscano, "Technical Culture and the Limits of Interaction: A Note on Simondon" in *Interact or Die* (Rotterdam: V2 Publishing/Nai Publishers, 2007, p. 202).

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 202.