Digitalia

Though technology has vastly inundated our daily routines and perceptual experiences, it has also become an infringement upon human identity in a very physical and physiological way. Considering that gender composes the core of our psychological makeup, it consequently comes to play in any conversation about technology. Every artistic practice is grounded in social, historical and personal experiences of each practitioner; tendencies that would obviously expose the distinguishing characteristics between a man and woman's position. Imagine *Allure Electronica* on a smaller scale; a virtual exhibition curated on the internet, intended to compliment the actual version at Wood Street Galleries. Perhaps all of these practices express a view of digital media as a personal/private reflection of what is otherwise a public medium.

We must first identify technology as a tool, a means to facilitate efficiency. The basic structure of this tool can be viewed as a mechanical language; a generative relationship between machine and human that allows for a broad communication platform.

Artists that address aesthetics specific to the digital realm, including Mouchette, Yael Kanerak, Tamara Lai, Tina Laporta, and Mary Flanagan, often indicate the significance of gender through structures of data banks, net communities, software and the computer itself; and more specifically in relation to character, narratives, biological and psychological positioning of the medium. *Mouchette.org* and *WorldofAwe.com* are both net projects that build narratives on the premise of a personal journal. These projects introduce the shifting perspectives of different characters and narratives, integrating the specific aesthetics of the net. *The World of Awe* is a journal of an anonymous traveler of unknown gender. We identify with the narrative and are therefore drawn further and further in to a fantastical world, a portal between the physical and virtual landscapes of the computer, the net, the mind and one's own personal memory.

Mouchette.org adopts the aesthetics of an on-line journal, so popular in contemporary youth culture. As of late, Mouchette, the "physical" girl/character, is pondering suicide. She asks the readers of her journal what might be the easiest means. She has created a bulletin board for readers to post suggestions, which range from precise functional methods to the truly perverse. This project addresses issues of public responsibility, gender, identity, location and truth.

Tamara Lai's *Web of Lies* refers to the issue of truths, as indicated in it's title. Lai's site breathes life into the digital process by examining rituals and the dual possibilities of gender - qualities not obviously associated with machine aesthetics. Tina Laporta's *techno.FETISH.* proposes the net as a platform for presentation, creating a site-specific installation with imagery found on various S&M sites. Laporta addresses fetishism and identity; she proposes the significant

function of the net in terms of fetishism and its social role as a purveyor of this, pointing out the merging of fetishism with new technology.

Mary Flanagan's *[phage]* takes the digital portrait and narrative to another level. Surpassing the relation between bio- and digital technologies, Flanagan uses hardware to present her software installations. *[phage]* is actually a software that works much like a virus within one's hard drive. The computer holds data as artifacts – a personal memory that, when unwoven, expresses the unique perspective of each individual user. *[phage]* randomly accesses one's travels on the net; tracking every document, download and image one has tapped, to create a TRUE self-portrait of each individual user, their C drive.

The concept of truth plays an important role in net and computer-based art practices, as it has adjusted to the idea of self as extended through a broad nationless landscape, proposed via technology. Upon examination of these and the works of *Allure Electronica*, it becomes evident that the utopian idea of a genderless society does not function, as one still needs to root concepts of truth as a relative, gendered self. We as humans can not abandon the "self," for it is the self that guides us through life, makes art interesting, permits personal variations as well as social perspectives. These internet projects are specific to the nature of the machine and software, and to the internet specifically, and are intended to contribute to the broader dialogue proposed in *Allure Electronica*. Along with the work of Andrea Ackerman, Lillian Ball, Nancy Dwyer, Julia Heyward, Claudia Hart and Kiki Seror, these internet works should raise important questions about technology and the aesthetics of digital art practice.

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http://www.mouchette.org
http://www.imal.org/tamara_lai/web_of_lies/
http://www.worldofawe.com
http://users.rcn.com/laporta.interport/techno/technofetishism.html
http://www.maryflanagan.com/virus.htm