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INTRODUCTION

The Matter with Media

An *Artnodes* node developing new materialisms through media, art and technology

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Our digital, networked age hides from us (in plain sight) the concrete, historical and affective correspondences between matter and information, object and thought, that which is present and that which re-presents. The practices and culture of art-and-technology make it all too easy to ignore or devalue the material underpinnings and implications of artistic activity and production. Art is perhaps always an act of reconstituting the directly-communicative power of materials; for the rendering-present of the tension between the semantic or symbolic power of matter and its constitutive "real," at once simple and complex, always possibly sensual and potently tangible. Information networks, interactive interfaces, digital media displays and points of reception are complexes of material systems in collision. Any technical realisation requires the support of a bewildering, nearly untraceable nexus of physical interconnections and infrastructures. The technological artwork requires these, in addition to the support systems (aesthetics, exhibitions, forms of cultural capital) and historical scaffolding of an art world. Pointing at once toward the intersubjective meanings and framings we create and toward a strange, ambient and withdrawn inter-objective reality, art and technology "alert us to the attenuated indexical trace of an objective real that haunts the apparently self-referential world of pure simulacra." (Goldberg 2001)

Things, or systems of things (if there is a difference) have forever been creatively communicative with one another. This is the lesson of technical media, continually reiterated all around us in contemporary culture: The desire and agency of things is now manifest to us (as temporally and spectrally limited human subjects), through those material machines that contrive to speak to us, sing for us, dance with us. The expressive possibilities of a tree or a rock are no different in kind to those of a computer graphics card or a robotic arm. And an appreciation of the potential of the latter seems to deliver to us new modes of thinking, which help to access the eternal richness and conundrum of the former.

Matter persists in excess of what is perceived and understood - only certain properties are, indeed can be, revealed. A further power of technical media is an increased capacity to uncover that which is otherwise or previously imperceptible. These are neither claims to the truth nor to a real, but toward a mode of artistic working and thinking that seeks to denude before it ornaments, that develops critique and analysis in the same moment as exposition and synthesis. This is what characterises authenticity in art and technology. The potentialities of art are reinvigorated and reopened, and the motivations of traditional material aesthetic are widened and wrought ever more important and fundamental. The use of contemporary technologies does this in a panoply of ways: in challenging human perceptual limits, in opening up possibilities for the interrelation of complex systems (art without humans?), in becoming more marked material backdrop for everything we do.

In diverse practices, including the assorted set of writings in this volume, we identify concerns with the "veracity," "reality" and "rawness" of artistic technological forms and information: signals and carriers, data and indexicality, and media as re-presentation.

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Here we investigate the extent to which art-and-technology discourse and practice might be thought of as a primary contemporary site for the investigation of the non-exhaustive connections between matter, perception, and thought; a singular examination of how things, subject and object both, exist in relation, as material.

Reference

GOLDBERG, K. (ed.) (2001). *A Robot in the Garden, Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet.* Boston: The MIT Press.

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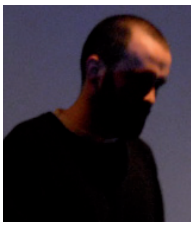

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Jamie Allen makes things with his head and hands. These things most often involve peoples' relationships to creativity, technology and resources. They often attempt to give people new, subversive and fun ways to interact with all of these. Working between art, design and technology, Jamie is a teacher, researcher and experimenter. His interests are in the ways people relate to electronic media and digital information in their diverse forms, beginning with their transduction, as matter and material. (www.heavyside.net)

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