

Posthuman Body and Interactivity: an international project in the time of Brexit

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In the time of a definitive break down of boundaries between the arts and science, interdisciplinarity and experimentation are key to investigate the present, while looking at the future. Technology and visual art, virtual reality and biomedical studies, the body and the digital can merge in light of common aims – a social commitment, aesthetics, provocation.

This occurs in *The Games Europe Plays – Body <> Tech*, the second exhibition of an ambitious project in three parts, promoted by EUNIC London and curated by Ghislaine Boddington. As the title suggests, a fundamental component of the whole project is interactivity.

As a result of the international cooperation between cultural institutions, *The Games Europe Plays – Body <> Tech* brings to The Stephen Lawrence Gallery the work of six European artists and collectives who deal with ways the virtual world and technology can effect the human body and our perception of it. Interactive installations allow the public to experiment themselves, and sometimes to be intimately disturbed by the pieces. Interactivity has been a controversial subject within New Media Art [1], but the works on display demonstrate that a coherent engagement with the viewer-user is still possible. These works don't simply exist in the world of aesthetics – as experimentation on the consequences of interaction between the human and the digital. Anna Dumitriu and Alex May, Ivor Diosi, Marco Donnarumma and Blast Theory stimulate reflection on identities, provoking a response towards pieces that can be perceived as disturbing or intrusive. Meanwhile, Designswarm and Grendel Games works are designed for a future use in real life.

On the opening night, the exhibition was introduced by a performance of Marco Donnarumma [2]. The tattooed and painted body contracts, white and lightened in the darkness. The lights pulse, synchronised with the electronic sound produced by Donnarumma's own body and reactions. In 2011 Donnarumma created The XTH Sense, a tool that elaborates bioacoustic information taken from the human body (as muscle sounds and heartbeat) to produce music and sound, by means of software and a library of audio effects. Using The XTH Sense, Donnarumma evokes in his performances a sense of a psychedelic and alien reality, at the border between physical and virtual. Inevitably, digital art becomes a way to experience the human body. This is demonstrated by Anna Dumitriu, who worked together with Alex May using *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria collected on her nose, they faced it through data elaboration, videomapping and VR. Ivor Diosi *Molding the Signifier*, a work reflecting on identity in the digital age, also investigates the relationship and reciprocity between the physical and the digital. His avatars interact with the viewer in a disquieting manner, while being gradually affected by bacteria from a monitored bioculture connected with the software [3]. Karen, an intrusive life coach who interrogates the user more and more personally, is an app for smartphones created by digital art collective Blast Theory. In the time the user interacts with Karen, the app profiles the person in question, giving feedback based on their answers [4].

Of particular interest is the potential of videogames as tools for functional rehabilitation, which is suggested by *Gryphon Rider*. Produced by Grendel Games (Netherlands), *Gryphon Rider* would allow children with brain damage to play with family or friends, with the physiotherapist working remotely. Also significant is *The Good Night Lamp* by Designswarm, created using Internet of Things technology. This avant-garde field of experimentation concerns the expansion of the idea of interconnection to everyday objects. As a result, *Body <> Tech* presents a selection of artists and designers whose research investigates interaction and virtual bodies at the highest level. Not forgetting to question the contemporary world and to address engaged issues, the exhibition shows an interest in an experimental approach to the arts and science and in the exchange of ideas within international cooperation.

Opening shortly after the Brexit referendum, *The Games Europe Plays* tastes like a bitter disappointment and as a high-head challenge. It is a testament to the importance of open European borders, a stand for international dialogue in the arts and culture and for shared research towards common aims. EUNIC London (*European Union National Institutes for Culture*) is the network of EU cultural institutions and embassies in London. At the University of Greenwich, academics and students come from all over Europe. While this should impose a reflection on the current rise of nationalism (and not just in UK), *Body <> Tech* demonstrates that universities can be the place to promote international experimental research within the arts and to host and curate important exhibitions.

Following a first show in April at the Finnish Institute as part of The London Games Festival Fringe, the current exhibition precedes Future Love, a meditation on love, sexual identities and the virtual world, which will bring together physical and virtual for the two-day FutureFest 2016 in September.

THE GAMES EUROPE PLAYS – BODY <> TECH

curated by Ghislaine Boddington

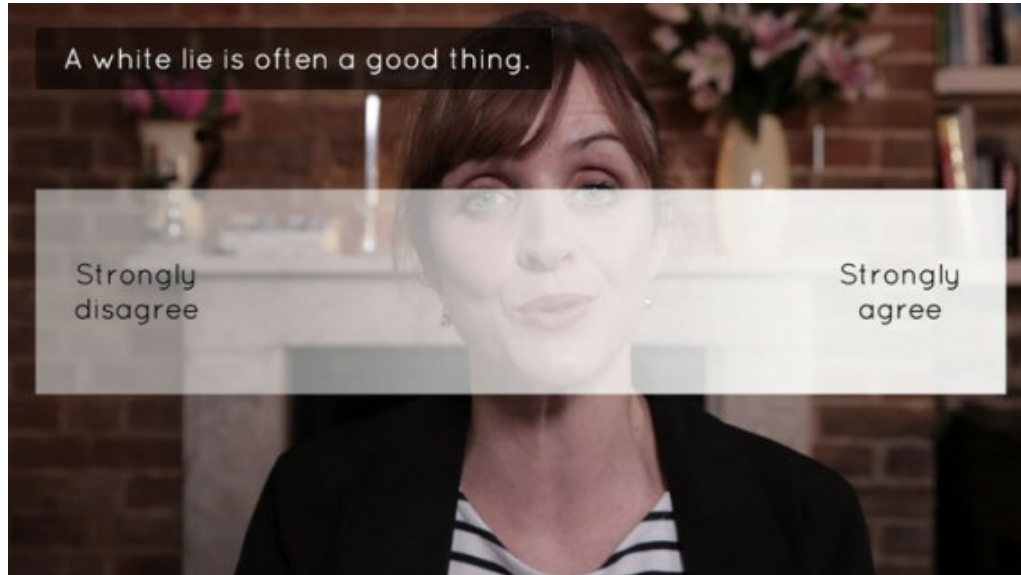
The Stephen Lawrence Gallery presso la University of Greenwich – 10 Stockwell Street, Londra SE10 9BD

[1] “Interactivity is a very simple and obvious way to manipulate people [...] there is always the author with his name and his career behind it, and he just seduces people to click buttons in his own name”. Alexei Shulgin in: Stallabrass, J. (edited by), *Internet art: the online clash of culture and commerce*, Tate Publications, London 2003, p. 60. A similar position is taken by the collective Necro Edema Amalgamated: “Giving a user more buttons to click is like giving extra links to a dog chain”. Shanken, E. A., *Art and electronic media*, Phaidon Press, London 2009, p. 223.

[2] <https://vimeo.com/152710490>

[3] vimeo.com/ivr/moldingthesignifier

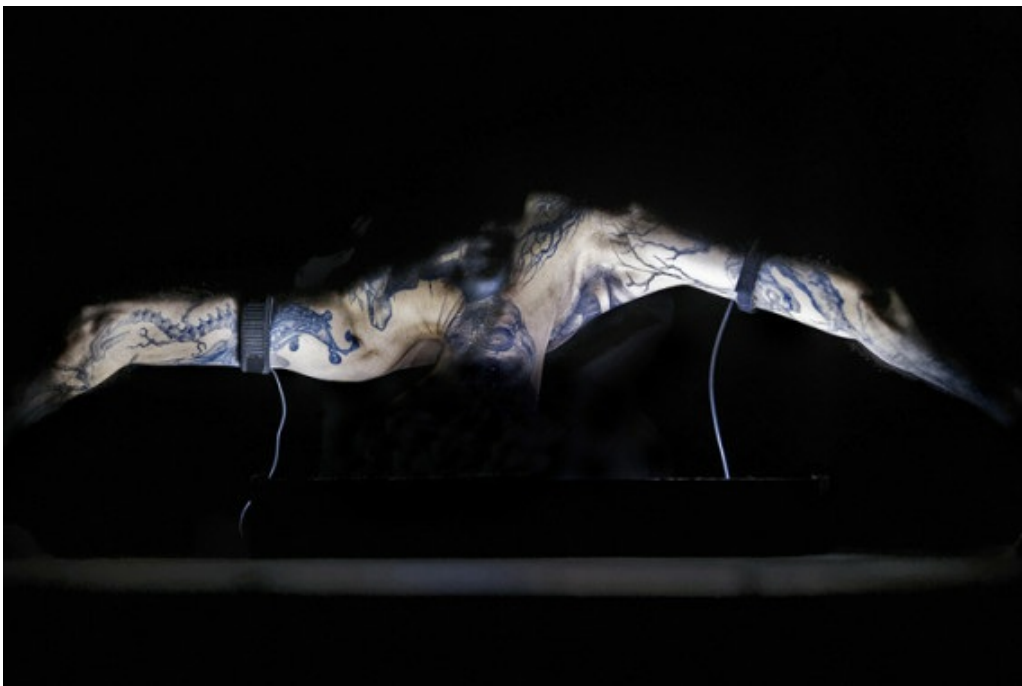
[4] <https://vimeo.com/123450333>



Blast Teory, Karen, installazione interattiva, 2015. Courtesy dell'artista e di EUNIC.



Designswarm, The Goodnight Lamp, installazione, 2005-2012. Courtesy dell'artista e di EUNIC.



Marco Donnarumma, Corpus Nil, performance, 2016. Courtesy dell'artista e di EUNIC.



Ivor Diosi, Molding the Signifier, installazione, 2008-2015. Courtesy dell'artista e di EUNIC.



Anna Dumitriu and Alex May, Sequence VR, installazione, 2015. Courtesy dell'artista e di EUNIC.