

# Behind the Screen: Installations from the Interactive Future

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**Abstract.** The future is interactive... at least that is the theory. And while the theory itself is not new, the screen through which it is rendered most certainly is. The new screen... one among possible many, and yet despite the many it is the impossible one upon which the interactive future will manifest. "Behind the Screen" is, in this sense, an exploration of the consequences of imaginative technological use, with an emphasis on the ways in which artistic mobilization of screen technology impacts on the interactivity of contemporary living. Focusing on several key installations from the 2007 Interactive Futures Symposium, this paper engages both the representative proofs and disproofs offered by artistic technological use – a theoretical exploration of the critical imaginary potential of new media artwork.

**Keywords:** technology, interaction, new media, installation, artwork, screen culture, imagination.

## 1 Overview

We lived once in a world where the realm of the imaginary was governed by the mirror, by dividing one into two, by otherness and alienation. Today that realm is the realm of the screen, of interfaces and duplication, of continuity and networks. All our machines are screens, and the interactivity of humans has been replaced by the interactivity of screens.

– Jean Baudrillard, "Xerox and Infinity." [1]

The future is interactive... at least that is the theory. And while the theory itself is not new, the screen through which it is rendered most certainly is. The new screen... one among possible many, and yet despite the many it is the impossible one upon which the interactive future will manifest.

But there are other new theories as well, other speculative fantasies of constituted reality, which is also to say of an imaginary so implausible that it remains, by necessity, forever un-provable... and forever un-disprovable too. This is the imaginary gone technological, the ghost in the machine is also behind the screen, waiting and watching for moments of reality interrupted. For it is within the interventions of technology that the interactive imaginary waits to be discovered.

“Behind the Screen” is, in this spirit, an exploration of the consequences of imaginative technological use, with an emphasis on the ways in which artistic mobilization of screen technology impacts on the interactivity of contemporary living. Drawing on the installation series of the 2007 Interactive Futures symposium, this paper is an attempt to engage the imaginary possibilities offered by artistic technological use – a theoretical exploration of the critical imaginary potential of new media artwork. Loosely brought together under the theme of “The New Screen,” the Interactive Futures symposium featured works by artists, performers, programmers and academics from around the world, brought together for the critical, aesthetic and intellectual exploration of the technological future.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Fauna of Screens

We live in a time of prophetic manifestation – a fateful time of mythology revived, of legend resurrected, of imaginary beings walking among the rest of us, unnoticed, unassumed, unacknowledged. The mirror has been broken, and the revenge of ancient times past is upon us again.

In those days the world of mirrors and the world of men were not, as they are now, cut off from each other. They were, besides, quite different; neither beings nor colours nor shapes were the same. Both kingdoms, the specular and the human, lived in harmony; you could come and go through mirrors. One night the mirror people invaded the earth. Their power was great, but at the end of bloody warfare the magic arts of the Yellow Emperor prevailed. He repulsed the invaders, imprisoned them in their mirrors, and forced on them the task of repeating, as though in a kind of dream, all the actions of men. He stripped them of their power and of their forms and reduced them to mere slavish reflections.[3]

It was Jorge Luis Borges who inscribed this history of the mirror people, of the battle between the mirror and the flesh, of the traumatic banishment that was the result of an overzealous silvery aggression. The story continues to say that there will come a time when, bit by bit, the mirror people will cease to follow the dictates of flesh, when their reactions to our human gestures will begin a life of their own, a day where a strange new light will begin to penetrate its way into the minds and bodies of humanity. Such a day has arrived. The mirror people emerge again, only this time the story is a little bit different.

For, while we may have won the historical war, one might also observe that we have become strangely reliant on our silver prisoners, strangely vain in our obsession with their opinions, strangely bound to them no less than they to us. The mirror people may be trapped behind the mirror, but it is we who have been screen-captured, archived, saved

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<sup>1</sup> Interactive Futures 2007: The New Screen was organized and curated by Steve Gibson, Julie Andreyev and Randy Adams, and was held in Victoria (Canada) from November 15 - 17, 2007.

and reanimated. Before the world has even come to terms with reflection as a technological phenomenon, reality has gone electronic; the mirror people have discovered a slipstream into the realized imaginary. Indeed, the mirror has gone digital – the new screen behind which our already precarious relationship to reflected knowledge suddenly becomes yet more malleable, yet more unreliable, yet more unfamiliar. Digital self-image: behind the mirror lives the imaginary – a race of screen people that return our gaze with the seductive look of completed fantasy. Without ever having left the reflected sanctity of their private abodes, they have already infiltrated the world of flesh. Manifest imaginary – a sign that behind the screen there is another world, and one that no longer feels a need to passively follow the dictates of a human real.

And so, to engage the myth of the mirror turned screen, six stories, six iterations of the technological imagination, six installations from an participatory present that, taken together, also provide new strategies for creative engagement in our emerging, interactive future.

### **2.1 First Iteration: Circumstantial Evidence (Reflections on *Their Circumstances* by JiHyun Ahn)**

[*Their Circumstances*] is an experimental interactive animation, which introduces a new way to watch animation. It has non-linear structure in both medium and story. It combines videos and flash with actionscripts. All movies are put together in flash and through the actionscripts programming code, people can see more than two angle shots simultaneously, select the chapters and the video segments and create their own storylines. Also there are dynamic animations in flash itself so the animations in videos and those in flash interact [with] each other, crossing the frames. This frame means not only the literal frame object in my work but also the boundary between the linear video work and the nonlinear flash interactivity.

– JiHyun Ahn [4]

On a screen, the story waits. Or perhaps it is the characters in the story who wait. But this much is sure – until the human hand hits play, the story sits idly by, bored, waiting – sleeping as only a console can do. And yet, once the hand hits play, the scenario is reversed. Bound at the console, it is the human body that completes the narrative circuit, waiting to be shown what comes next – or what came before – until the next chapter ends and it's time to click through again.

Their Circumstances is a short story about the ghost of a girl who has lost her leg, and a family who finds itself unwittingly implicated in both the death of the girl and the consumption of her missing leg. It is also a Flash animation, presented in split-screen narrative that, every so often, requires one to click the flashing icon in order to proceed to the next segment of the story. Amidst this architecture, a compelling mixture of photography, cut-outs and animated drawing complete the low-tech aesthetic, at times grotesque, at others provocative and even humorous.

And yet, there is more at play here than the simple multi-task story line which presents each character in his or her own version of the narrative. There is even more here than the



**Fig. 1.** JiHyun Ahn. *Their Circumstances*. Interactive Flash animation, 2007. Courtesy the artist.

simple stop and go demands of minimal interactivity. Here, in fact, we find a technological allegory presented with the full force of an animated macabre. This is not Georges Bataille's "Story of the Eye," but in many ways what the two share is an obsessive fascination with the seduction of technological violence.<sup>2</sup> This – this story of the leg – is at once cannibal and cannibalized, as if Ahn sought to push to the limits the shared French etymology: *jambe* (leg) and *jambon* (ham). And this is not by accident.

It was Paul Virilio who made the assertion that technological engagement is disabling to the human body, a prescient precursor to Ahn's illustrated version.[7] Fittingly, the recurring mantra of this piece – "give me my leg" – finds an analogue in the structural demand of the piece itself. For while this is the story of a girl who loses her leg, one immediate effect of console-based interaction such as that mobilized in *Their Circumstances* is the immobilization of our legs too. Cannibalized by the very screens we watch, then fed this virtualized flesh back through our eyes themselves in what Jerry Mander would call the "ingestion of artificial light." [8] Electronic Breatharians,<sup>3</sup> we are hooked up to this violent consumption matrix, playing along as *Their Circumstances* become our own – a circumstantial dance, a ritual sacrifice that mirrors the digital sacrifice of electronic living.

<sup>2</sup> "The *Story of the Eye* is a novella written by Georges Bataille that details the sexual experimentation of two teenage lovers, and their increasing perversion. The imagery of the novel is built upon a series of metaphors which in turn refer to philosophical constructs developed in his work: the eye, the egg, the sun, the earth, the testicle." See: [5] and [6].

<sup>3</sup> Breatharianism is a philosophical/religious tradition in which believers claim they are able to live without food by optically ingesting sunlight for a period of time each day.[9]



**Fig. 2.** JiHyun Ahn. *Their Circumstances*. Interactive Flash animation, 2007. Courtesy the artist.

## 2.2 Second Iteration: Facebooks and Monkey-Cliques (Reflections on *Why Some Dolls Are Bad* by Kate Armstrong)

*Why Some Dolls Are Bad* is a dynamically generated graphic novel built on the Facebook platform. The work assembles a stream of images that match certain tags and dynamically mixes them with original text in order to produce a perpetually changing narrative. Users who subscribe to the application in Facebook can capture pages from the graphic novel and save, reorder, and distribute them. The novel engages themes of ethics, fashion, artifice and the self, and presents a re-examination of systems and materials including mohair, contagion, Freudian tension, perspex cabinetry, and false-seeming things in nature such as Venus Flytraps.

– Kate Armstrong [10]

You have a friend invitation from a bad doll, a mad dash for face-shifting with the singular condition that you subscribe before reading. Assuming you already have a face, of course, you can then begin your own accumulation of digital page-captures. Archive while you can however, for if instead you click next, that which came before will leave, never to come back again. Apply yourself to the application, for some assembly is required to choose your own adventure from the wealth of possible manifest randomness.

*Why Some Dolls Are Bad* is a graphic interface in which seemingly random images are mashed up with short, aphorism-like textual instances. The resultant flash-card displays can be saved or discarded, collected for their arbitrary manifestations of meaning or absurdity, or dismissed as digital detritus. Less, perhaps, a simple artwork

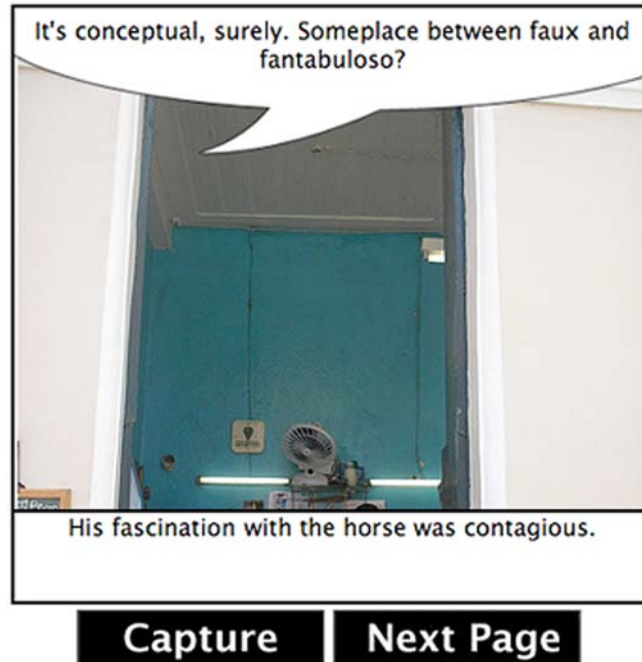


**Fig. 3.** Kate Armstrong. *Why Some Dolls Are Bad*. Facebook application, 2006. Courtesy the artist.

and more, one might suggest, a meta-artwork of sorts, it is also not unimportant that this piece lives among the social networks of Facebook, creating in its own right a sub-network of users with nothing else necessarily in common. Here, the distinctions between tools and products, applications and instances, meld and blur as contingent and contextual interaction form the signs of the digital day.

In this frame by frame encounter it is also noteworthy that the narrative too is contingent, contingent in this instance on our own ability to speculate on possible connections between images. While it is, of course, understood that the content is pulled from a spectral database of one sort or another, this piece reads as a thousand monkeys – not on a thousand typewriters, but instead armed with digital cameras and keyboards – embarking on the quest to write, not just any book but here the book of dolls and faces.<sup>4</sup> Or perhaps it is even more metaphysical still, and these monkeys are trained – coders and hackers – writing the very applicability of one click to the next: the shortest distance between two pages is not the mouse-click but the monkey-click itself. Or, yet still, perhaps it is we who are the monkeys after all, the bad dolls are separated from the good by the efforts they themselves put towards establishing narrative patterns within the randomness of graphic occurrence.

<sup>4</sup> The 1000 monkeys on 1000 typewriters is a popularized version of the infinite monkey theorem which states that "a monkey hitting keys at random on a typewriter keyboard for an infinite amount of time will almost surely type a particular chosen text, such as the complete works of William Shakespeare." [11]



**Fig. 4.** Kate Armstrong. *Why Some Dolls Are Bad*. Facebook application, 2006. Courtesy the artist.

It is as if this piece is a literal manifestation of N. Katherine Hayles' digital dialectic of pattern and randomness, sign of the electronic times but also signifier of the new face of interactivity.<sup>5</sup> Digital continuity and digital interruption; if you don't like a page swap it out for another. It was Kierkegaard who asked if it was ever possible to return to the same city twice, but it is Armstrong who asks if we can even ever go there once. In an age of perfect digital memory, of undo functions and coded, reliable and repeatable patterns, *Why Some Dolls Are Bad* challenges these tenets of digital living by splicing the urge to capture with the faceless disappearance of all random pages not deemed worth archiving. And in this a Facebook metaphor too, as social networks monkey-clique up to avoid the uninvited, the Facebook challenge: you can't be friends with people you don't know, and you can't be a good doll if you have bad intentions.

### 2.3 Third Iteration: Babelling Identities (Reflections on *Photocollagen* by Chris Joseph)

*Photocollagen* [is] an installation [that uses] the screen to channel a digital Prometheus, remixing the artists and presenters of Interactive Futures 2007 in a

<sup>5</sup> According to Hayles, "an infusion of noise [i.e. randomness] into a system can cause it to reorganize at a higher level of complexity." See [12].

continuously (d)evolving chimera: a virtual identity mashup in perpetual motion.

– Chris Joseph [13]

They say that blurred boundaries are a sign of technological living, but one might wonder how literally this is meant? From face to face – the face of another, or of parts of oneself. I'm told I have my father's smile, my mother's eyelashes, my grandfather's hairline. Little of my face, it would seem, is mine alone. But then again I rarely see my own face – if anything it is the more unfamiliar side of things. If I had children I'd not see myself in them; instead I'd be left wondering how their faces managed to appear as part of mine.



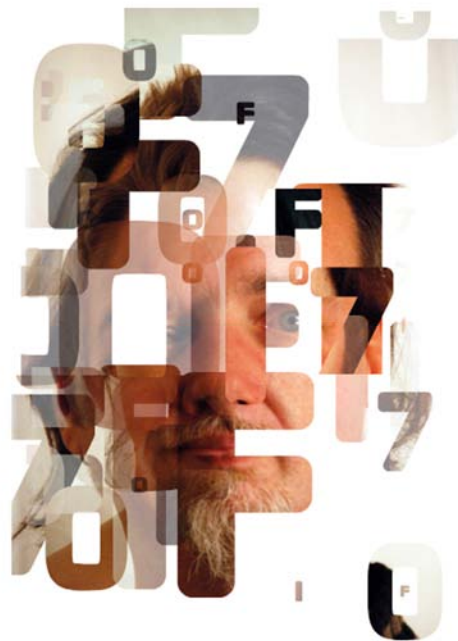
**Fig. 5.** Chris Joseph. *Photocollagen*. Digital remix video, 2007. Courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Garth Rankin.

*Photocollagen* is an identity-injection, or perhaps just the opposite – an identity-diffusion – projecting fragments of faces into a digital whole. And yet the whole is full of holes, as is demanded by a coded display that flirts with the novelty of pre-fab design. Who puts the "I" in identity, or is this the iDentity of Apple-inspired aesthetic seduction? A little bit of harvest goes a long way, paradoxically seeding the projected future at same time. If you try hard you might catch a glimpse of your own face – here or there – somewhere within the changing image of Babel turned digital flesh.

But this is important, for such a manifestation is either reducible to a coded novelty-value display or it actually matters that these image segments still, in some way, reference the flesh from which they came. It is as if Zeuxis went to remix film school and his legendary portrait – in which the eyes and nose and ears of all the most desirable women were combined to make the most beautiful painted image [14] – has in



fact turned manifest, projected in real-time for the world to see. But imagine, then, if your face was not included, if you did not make the literal live action cut, surgically denied your place among the beautifully interactive others. For this is not mere photographic or video-based collage – this is collagen, the wrinkle-defying, age-reversing digital solution to the problem of time itself. But consider the remix here as more, perhaps, than just a random ordering of partialities. The order matters, and whether this "I" is for isolated or ironic or indifferent makes all the difference. Or is the "I" actually an eye – or a one: "1 of 7" might read the Star Trek sign, a trite but appropriate metaphor for identity gone democratic.



**Fig. 6.** Chris Joseph. *Photocollagen*. Digital remix video, 2007. Courtesy the artist.

Between the poles, then, of democracy and vanity, *Photocollagen* mobilizes both the generosity and the alienating idiosyncrasy of collective identity formulae. It is we who look at the projection, but what looks back is a crowd – replete with an appropriate multiplicity of proliferating metaphors: from the collective recognition of a cultural mirror turned digital to the magic mirror of temporally arrested multiplicity. Explicating Marshall McLuhan's famous insistence that the content of a medium is always another medium, *Photocollagen* reverses the aging process on collective facial existence, paradoxical self-placement for a digitally remixed documentary world.[15]

#### 2.4 Fourth Iteration: Self-imagining Otherwise (Reflections on *Frontera* by Lilia Pérez Romero)

One of four randomly chosen characters observes the spectator from a crystal screen. From its pose and the framing of the shot, it seems to be waiting to be portrayed. The character will carry on like this until the spectator touches the screen. Then, it will come out of his immobility responding with the same gesture, placing its hand and gaze on the user's hand, following any route it follows. Trapped in this small sequence of gestures that reminds us of *The Invention of Morel*, by Adolfo Bioy Casares, the portrayed character meets the real one at an instant of simulated communion, which expresses both the will for communication and the impossibility of it actually happening.

– Lilia Pérez Romero [16]



**Fig. 7.** Lilia Pérez Romero. *Frontera*. Interactive multimedia installation, 2007. Courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Gerhard Haupt & Pat Binder.

A gesture of generosity: reach out and touch someone... but what if they then seek to touch you back? The digital feedback loop is complete. We have realized our otherness, or rather we have had it realized for us. Ironic isn't it? How we can go through life thinking we know ourselves best when, in the final analysis, we must ultimately realize that our own image is among those least-encountered moments of optical recognition. Case in point: to see someone else mimicking us, well that makes perfect sense. If it were we ourselves, well that would be nonsense; a private bathroom fantasy of early morning living, preparation for entry into the world, but not actually part of the world proper... mirrors never are.

*Frontera* is a simple screen with a complex – though familiar – message: we are not ourselves. And, if we had never encountered a mirror we perhaps would never be

the wiser. Is it the figure who is trapped within the screen or we who are trapped on the outside? Either way works, of course, for in both instances it is not ourselves we see. Like the encounter with one's voice on the answering machine – an unfamiliarity that is disjunctive because we expect ourselves to sound a certain way. And when the voice is distinctly not ours? Well, it should come as no surprise that we still find it foreign.

Jacques Lacan always insisted that the mirror-stage was that which formed the basis of self-consciousness, yet he could never have known the trap he was setting.[17] His was an analogue world, and while he insisted that the mirror gave us the fantasy of ourselves as another, even he – perhaps – would be shocked to see his own private fantasy digitally realized. But isn't this also the story of the story – the meta-story – upon which *Frontera* is based? For what is *The Invention of Morel* if it is not, in fact, the story of a reality machine – first perfected by Lacan, then reinvented both by Casares and Pérez Romero as a time-machine of dislocated otherness.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, *Frontera* is a first-generation version of Hans Moravec's final fantasy<sup>7</sup> – not yet the downloadable brain, but at least the interactive – forever interactive – ghost of one's very own image, left to respond ad infinitum to those visitors the future might bring one's way.



**Fig. 8.** Lilia Pérez Romero. *Frontera*. Interactive multimedia installation, 2007. Courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Garth Rankin.

<sup>6</sup> *The Invention of Morel* (also called *Morel's Invention*) is a novel by Adolfo Bioy Casares in which a fugitive on a deserted island encounters a reality-machine that depicts simulated people who seem real.[18].

<sup>7</sup> On the question of Hans Moravec and the drive towards an accessible, downloadable consciousness, see [19].

But that, ultimately, is because we have already gone far past Lacan. We are not bound by the mirror-stage – not anymore. The screen-stage of contemporary living is what allows for these virtual touchings, these selves with irreconcilable images, these walking and talking identities with faces that are not theirs. We needn't imagine the impact of seeing our actions repeated exactly by another – this is not fantasy, it is more common than even our mirror gazing histories. Is it we who watch the people in the screen, or the other way around? Surveillance cultures abound, and it is perhaps worth reinforcing that without such live-action screen captions we might never be able to cross the frontier; the virtual barrier collapses and finally the screen touches back.

### **2.5 Fifth Iteration: Digital Dreams and Delusions (Reflections on *Slip/host* by Fiona Bowie)**

This installation features an immersive video, sound and sculptural installation that shifts between two parallel worlds. The installation takes its inspiration, in part, from the social realism of Ed Keinholtz' State Hospital, an immersive tableau that the artist completed in 1966, and also the sparse caricature landscapes of the popular British television series *Teletubbies*. An eccentric host of characters in *Slip/host* includes the The Big Lump, the Gargantuan Head and Two-Headed Moon.

– Fiona Bowie [20]

It's one thing to see someone else's face and name and body and clothes, but to actually see inside someone else's head? Slip of the tongue or of the mind, slippery dreams of televised being. And the scale matters too, for every dream is a cosmology and every delusion a reality, simulated or otherwise. The world outside is also inside the screen, projected fantasies replace communal hallucinations, consensual or not, the low-tech high-tech mish-mash reveals not a big brother but merely some brother's big head. Fantasy dreams of having things as they seem quickly grow old when the screen gets its way.

*Slip/host* is a multi-layered installation, combining objects, images, ideas and environments into a delirious aesthetic mashup. In one room a series of roughly constructed models point to the difficulties of digital dirt; a series of objects charting the visually familiar cosmological loop wherein a solar system turns into a molecule and grows again to repeat. In the background a man eats chicken, while dreaming of eating chicken too – a looped delusion of insatiable satisfaction. In another room, a blue room lit with projected light, a giant head waits, sometimes watching but more often speaking slow words loosely collected around, it seems, a theme of disappearances. And this is more than metaphoric.. it is, in fact, theatrical.

But such is – it might be insisted – the case for all narrative in a digital era. Spectacular or delirious, it seems, are the only two options; everything else is predictably analogue. But that makes sense – if sense is what is required. Or perhaps it is just the inverse, and it is the disappearance of sense that is the first sign of digital cosmology,



**Fig. 9.** Fiona Bowie. *Slip/host*. Multimedia installation, 2004. Courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Garth Rankin.

the first sign of an incommunicable imaginary that always flirts and fluctuates between fantasies of otherness and the realization that such fantasies have disappeared into their own living realities – challenged most precisely by becoming real. It is an updated version of a more ancient story, a story of fragile delusion – the story of a digital Don Quixote who, instead of charging at windmills-turned-giants, prefers to satisfy itself with dreams of roast chicken.<sup>8</sup> And there is much at stake in the status of living dreams such as these, for it is not merely a scale shift that occurs when the imaginary finds its appetite.

Between, then, the constitution of delirium and the awareness of disappearance, *Slip/host* is a paradoxically candy-coated dystopia, soft-spoken aggression turned back on itself, internally multiplying, virally growing into a permission of a different sort. For under the signs of these digital dreams, it is the constitution of private fantasy turned public-display that is the default action script for worldly participation. One must add reality to the list of creatures rendered extinct by technology,<sup>9</sup> slipped out of the projected future, for only delusion can be properly hosted. But this is what happens anyways when the screens emerge – for only screens are capable of representing that which otherwise exists only in the privacy of our own heads. We have come full circle from screened stages to screened worlds, a digital universe that has made its way into our molecular flesh.

<sup>8</sup> The story of Don Quixote concerns a Spanish land owner who (mistakenly) believes himself to be a knight and tours the countryside seeking adventure. Among his delusional encounters is a battle with windmills that Quixote believes to be malicious giants.[21].

<sup>9</sup> One segment of Bowie's script has the narrator listing names of animals claimed by extinction.[22].



**Fig. 10.** Fiona Bowie. *Slip/host*. Multimedia installation, 2004. Courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Garth Rankin.

## 2.6 Sixth Iteration: A Digital Analogue (Reflections on *Scenes from the House Dream* by David Hoffos)

Through my installation work I have sought to reveal and examine the sources of illusion found within genre movies, theme park attractions, museum displays, 19th century parlours and 20th century living rooms. The evolution of my work has been a steady process of accumulating and inventing techniques and devices and then applying and refining them. Over the course of more than 40 installations my work has developed step-by-step from simple, stand-alone film/sculpture pieces into complex, immersive, multi-channel environments. A few of the techniques and devices that characterize my work include: film and video projection onto cut-outs, large miniature scenes, mirrored boxes, phantom figure illusions, ghost video glass effects, cineramas, homemade video projectors, and curtained entrances.

– David Hoffos [23]

The magic of ghosts and apparitions has been incanted, brought back to haunt and enchant a digital world. In a darkened room, sensory deprivation aside, the imagination wanders on its own, only here there are already illusions in play before the imaginary even gets there. Soft sounds of ocean tides beckon, and out the window one looks out onto a lookout – a meta-lookout whose seductive vista compels the instant creation of one story or another. For there are many stories that might emerge from such a dream, not the least of which waits in the corner – someone is on the inside watching, and the optical deferral process continues its holographic intrigue. This new screen is analogue, though no less digital for its magical dream.



**Fig. 11.** David Hoffos, *Scenes from the House Dream, Bachelor's Bluff* (detail) 3-channel video, audio and mixed media installation, 2005. Courtesy the artist and Trépanier Baer. Photo credit: Garth Rankin.

*Scenes from the House Dream* is a low-tech audiovisual installation with high-tech dreams, lucid dreams of holographic proportion, manifest as a window onto another, equally delirious panorama. A hole cut in the wall of a darkened room frames an elaborate series of models, projections and illusions, whose combined effects yield a 3D scene of a man standing on a cliff, overlooking a lighthouse. In the back corner is a life-sized projection of a woman, waiting inconspicuously for the viewer to turn, mistaken first for real, then revealed as part of the dream itself. Not merely *trompe l'oeil*, this is a full body delusion of delirious manifestation.

It also matters that we are implicated in the story, not merely as points of perspective but also as reflective surfaces for the interplays of projection, refraction, deception and attraction. We are part of the dream, haunting the house itself but also completing the perceptual loop. This *House Dream* is a hyper-screen – more real than real – a screen seen from the other side, and from inside the screen the dreamhouse dreams. But something happens when we encounter a technological immersion of this magnitude, something corporeal that extends from optical illusion, as if to prove to our forgetful minds that bodies and eyes are still – even in a digital world – related in some way. Or perhaps it is just the opposite and it is precisely a technological incorporeality that we here encounter. It is not merely the digital that deceives, says the dreamhouse, nor merely bodies that dream. Instead, these dreams are both embodied and disembodied as only a technological paradox would allow. Nothing intensifies corporeal awareness like sensory deception.



**Fig. 12.** David Hoffos, *Scenes from the House Dream, Bachelor's Bluff* (detail) 3-channel video, audio and mixed media installation, 2005. Courtesy the artist and Trépanier Baer. Photo credit: Garth Rankin.

Consequently, if there was any doubt that the mirror people and those of the screen are of the same ilk, it is in the *House Dream* that this question can be resolved for once and for all. For the new screen is a two-way mirror, always allowing for the manifest imaginary while declaring in no uncertain terms that these projections are more than merely holographic. A digital dream-time, without apology: here it is the house that dreams us, peppered ghosts<sup>10</sup> that emerge from the darkened room to rejoin the realm of the digitally living.

### 3 Behind the Screen

And so, behind the screen? Well, behind the screen there is nothing.. not anymore. And anything too – it can be no other way. There is no wall behind the screen, for walls are merely signs of an unsuspected real – a non-interactive future. Nor can there be darkness, for darkness is simply the sign of the screen turned-off – a non-interactive present. Instead, behind the screen there is always whatever we choose to see, or not to see – and that is, ultimately, the question. Deception aside, or perhaps

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<sup>10</sup> Pepper's ghost is an illusionary technique used in theater and in some magic tricks. Using a plate glass and special lighting techniques, it can make objects seem to appear or disappear.[24]



front and centre, the technological delusion is real. The screen people have stepped through, and our reality like theirs has doubled in the process. For when dreams become real, when the screen becomes real, we find ourselves in another of Borges' imaginary tales. This time it is the story of the dreamer and the imaginary that was always his home, even though he didn't always see it that way:

With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he realized that he, too, was but appearance, that another man was dreaming him.[25]

While these samplings of new screens – these dreams among many – are not exhausted suspensions of imaginative interaction, they are nevertheless more than mere instances of what the interactive future might hold. There are, of course, multiple other examples to consider, each worth its own weight in imagination, each of which initiates an interactive future of its own, each of which asks after the engaged potential of interactive living, and each of which insists in its own way that the imagination – like the very future itself – is only ever as active as personal engagement allows. The new screen is worn on the inside -- imaginative interaction to the power of dream.

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