Technologies of Here, There, and Thereafter

Herdimas Anggara/Neta Bomani/Songan Kyung/Kit Son Lee

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01.31.2022 – 03.04.2022

RITUAL/VIRTUAL

Visit the online exhibition at ritualvirtual.digital.conncoll.edu.
RITUAL/VIRTUAL presents engagements with technology that straddle the sacred and the mundane, the spiritual and the secular, the historic and the contemporary. Through explorations of (sub)cultural cycles and machinic loops, these works unearth the repetitions encoded in our devices to examine, complicate, and undermine their influence on social conditions.

Herdimas Anggara’s JARANAN (Horse Trance Dancing), a “platform sabotaging” performance originally presented over Zoom, appropriates the iconography and affordances of the MacOS operating system to conduct a contemporary take on a traditional Indonesian ritual. Defamiliarizing the digital space, various interface elements emulate the religious ecstasy and altered states of consciousness seen in the ceremony’s human counterpart; their unexpected movements call attention to the preconceived ideologies with which one approaches both the desktop and an othered cultural practice. JARANAN is screened periodically, in intervals determined through the ritual’s internal logic, and commandeers as its stage the screens of other works in the exhibition.

Virologist Songan Kyung’s Enter the Bardo by explores the concept of the “bardo,” a liminal state between death and rebirth found in some schools of Buddhism. Kyung identifies Samsâra—the eternal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth—as sharing the loop structure of video games, in which players can repeatedly die, only to return to rechallenge the mission. Filmed in a single shot within a game engine-generated white cube, Enter the Bardo appropriates the Z-axis centered perspective of first person shooters to allow audiences to experience the Bardo from the viewpoint of the dead.

Neta Bomani’s genre-expansive audiozine, Dark Matter Objects: Technologies of Capture and things that can’t be held, draws the viewer into a story past, contemporaneous, and ongoing: that of the master-slave relationship. The work gathers the voices of numerous artists and cultural practitioners, who together deny this relationship as a relic of history and demonstrate its persistence as an “[organizer of] social, political, economic, racialized, gendered, and other cybernetic relations contained within the feedback loop that produces technological infrastructure.” Screened as a video, Dark Matter Objects features music performances by Christelle Bofale and Contour alongside narration by Alexander Fefegha, American Artist, Ashley Jane Lewis, Bomani Oseni McClendon, Gabrielle Octavia Rucker, Galen Macdonald, Fred Moten, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Laolu Numa, Lina Chang, Marilyn Nance, Melanie Hoffman, Sadé Powell, Simone Browne, Sol Cabrini de la Ciudad, Stephanie Dinkins, Sydney Spann, and Zisiga Mukulu.

Interspersed throughout the exhibition are works by Kit Son Lee: interactive, websites, image files, posters, typefaces, books, and an installation. Excepting the latter, these objects are fairly quotidian, adhering to formats encountered daily outside of an art context. Their innocuousness, however, is a Trojan Horse. One-Time (Key)Pad seems to be a simple decorative font, but its design and software are countersurveillance against both computer vision and key tracking. Post-Post-Hole appears to be a standard JPEG file, but hidden in its bits is code heralding the image’s decay over the course of a millennium. Viral/Vulnerable presents itself as a therapy chatbot, but the website scans the user’s contributions for emotional vulnerability and takes those opportunities to push Lee’s own advertisement keywords into the user’s search history. Across multiple pieces, Lee’s practice implicates the participant in a series of encoded processes and invites a reexamination of the hidden subroutines in our technological habits.

Ritual can be sacred (e.g. a ritual ceremony) or mundane (e.g. a daily ritual), but both valences are defined by repetition. The recurring loop characterizes much of modern technology, and advances are often measured by the automation of previously manual tasks. With sociopolitical infrastructure becoming increasingly dependent on these conveniences, we find ourselves participating—knowingly or not—in rituals of another’s design. In light of this trajectory, RITUAL/VIRTUAL collapses sacrosanct themes into everyday interfaces. The presented works contend with consumer technologies at the level of religion, culture, economics, and time, challenging their supposed banality with rites of their own making.


2 A Let’s Play is a video documenting the playthrough of a video game, usually including commentary or a camera view of the gamer’s face.