

Group exhibition

Future Delay

HC Guest Curator: Amanda Schmitt

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Curatorial statement

We live on the precipice of total simulation. As technologies further proliferate and dominate daily life and basic organic functions, the perception and fulfillment of biological needs and desires is in danger of being totally hijacked by technologies that generate the self and its surroundings. Digital reality, presented through various mediums with an increased level of bodily incorporation (sound, video, holography, VR, AR, and so on) and distribution channels (television, social media, internet advertisements, etc), have an uncanny ability to alienate oneself. Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacra — copies that depict things that either had no original, or that no longer have an original — has finally been realized.

As cautiously proffered nearly fifty years ago by the American media theorist and video pioneer **Paul Ryan**, in reaction to the increased use of hyper-connectivity and video technologies in a fragmented modern, post-war society, "One moves in a vicarious experience of intimacy with an electronic image that cannot respond in real time." Ryan however sought an optimistic solution, positing in his iconic text, "Cybernetics of the Sacred" (1973), that video technology could in fact save the human species. Imagining a utopic future, Ryan was part of a larger cohort of video pioneers who — in the words of Ina Blom — investigated the cybernetic continuity between biological and technical modes of being, as well as nascent ideas of artificial life. For these artists, a techno-utopic future was one where individuals developed into communities, connected through — and integrated within — technology.

Concurrently, and similarly, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Finnish multimedia artist **Erkki Kurenniemi** imagined the technological capabilities going one step further: that video could preserve, supplement, or even replace, the human experience. From Kurenniemi's point of view, a techno-utopic future is one where humankind's "slime-based, sluggishness, uncertainty, forgetfulness, and fatigue" is complemented by artificial intelligence, realized by technologies that will soon outpace the human brain. His position was optimistic in that — rather than accepting the inevitability of biological death — we could reframe our perspective towards imagining virtual and technological immortality.

Throughout this exhibition, artists **Hollander**, **Pigao**, and **Rosenström** present alternative modes of integration between humans and technology, which propose to resolve the sharp detour from the utopia of the 1960s to the dystopia of the 2010s. This exhibition is about feedback between humans and machines placed alongside the dimension of time; time being only perceivable against a

background of mortality. Precluding Kurenniemi and Ryan's ideas about video technologies and cybernetics, and also precluding the current corporate investment into virtual immortality (by magnates like **Elon Musk**, **Mark Zuckerberg** or **Dmitry Itskov**), the Argentine writer **Adolfo Bioy Casares** imagined — in his novella, "The Invention of Morel" (1940) — an immortality achieved through the technology of holography. As the protagonist of this story discovers, this programmed immortality, achieved via machine, is superior to his own sufferable mortality. Bioy Casares both shares and prefigures Kurenniemi's perspective that the physical body is an insufficient mechanism. A line from the novella reads: "I believe we lose immortality because [...] we keep insisting on the primary, rudimentary idea: that the whole body should be kept alive. We should seek to preserve only the part that has to do with consciousness."

Departing from a line of ideas developed by the aforementioned writers, theoreticians and artists, this exhibition asks us whether technological immortality can or should replace biological mortality. Technology promises today, as religion promised for millenia, a stare into the abyss of death, but with a happy ending. What would future delay appear as, and how would interference and synchrony between transmission and reception in both organic and technological beings manifest? Are humans choreographing a future integrated with machine, or are the machines choreographing us?

Walk-through

The exhibition begins with three textile works mounted from the ceiling, created by Oslo-based artist and musician, **Pearla Pigao**. The textiles are digitally hand-woven, meaning that Pigao has developed a technique whereupon the works are carefully crafted by a synchronized balance between her hand and the programmed digital juaquard loom. Upon close inspection, it becomes apparent that these are no traditional textiles: they are woven with a fine combination of both cotton and steel wire (both an insulator and a conductor). The materials' reactivity to electric currents becomes apparent when the viewer discovers the textiles' alternative function: by using metal wires as warp and weft in the loom, Pigao has transformed the woven surface into a musical instrument inspired by the theremin.

The viewer thus, becomes a participant in the works of Pearla Pigao, as her textiles act as analogue electronic instruments that respond in real-time to the visitors in the gallery. The sound becomes three-dimensional, something one can seemingly touch, as the participants' physical movements directly affect the volume and pitch of the instruments' output.

Pigao's life-size theremins encourage the visitors not only to view, but to actively engage, and in turn, become co-creators of the sound composition itself. These works relate directly not only to Kurenniemi's utopic approach to creating electronic and interactive DIMIs (digital musical instruments) but also to Ryan's application of cybernetics as a tool for dynamic and direct feedback: the gallery visitor becomes both initiator, respondent, and mediator.

Moving to the rear space of the gallery, the visitor is invited to sit upon one of the three chairs that together comprise *Suusta Suubun* (Mouth to Mouth), a binaural sonic installation conceived by Finnish artist **Hans Rosenström**. When the visitor consents to participate (by taking a seat and putting on a pair of headphones), a signal box is triggered and an audio track begins. Through a short narrative using a specific binaural recording technique, one that mimics human hearing, the soundscape shapes an encounter that positions the viewer within the artwork, making the viewers' presence –and their body– an integral part of the work. Balancing between a private, intimate experience and a shared, inter-subjective situation, the work reflects on questions regarding the self and its relation to others.

Two bodiless voices emerge, yet they feel viscerally, hauntingly physical. The properties of voice transcend the physical limitations of the human body: both when we speak, and when we hear another's voice, we are able to surpass corporeal boundaries; a voice is born within the body of a speaker and exists equally inside the listener. A voice contains memory, and when heard, part of that memory is shared, simultaneously exported and downloaded.

The sonic illusions composed by Rosenström test the restrained limits of our perception, prompting us to confront our concept of reality and creating space to posit new interpretations of time, space, and communication. The strength in Rosenström's work relies on the artist's intimate knowledge of the digital and sonic mechanisms he has mastered, and like Kurenniemi and Ryan, his highly technical and clever sonic installations involve what scholar **Susanna Paasonen** describes as simultaneous externalization and internalization of perception and memory.

Madeline Hollander is a New York-based artist and choreographer who has conceptualized an eponymously titled site-specific installation and performance that will be presented in the gallery throughout the course of *Future Delay* at scheduled intervals (see schedule above). Hollander's research-driven practice is deeply engaged with technology, systems, and existing infrastructures, often posing her performances as scientific experiments that both track and respond to qualitative and quantitative conditions and reactions directly related to the performers or audience themselves, as well as to exterior phenomena such as temperature, climate change, space exploration, and accelerated evolution.

Hollander has culled data from the air traffic control system of the Helsinki Airport to identify over 25 different landing and takeoff patterns specific to the airport's three runways and their unique positioning and coordinates. Local dancers have been enlisted to transmute and enact these triadic movement sequences, responding in real time to the airspace monitored by the Helsinki Airport. Three fans are placed to situate the performers and mimic the headwind and tailwind patterns specific to the three runways at the Helsinki airport.

In her mechanistic and generative oeuvre, Hollander exposes the elaborate choreographies of the everyday, treating the air traffic control towers as choreographers that compose and coordinate the dancers' motions in real time. Past works have positioned her dancers to interact with technological devices including touchscreens, industrial machines and air conditioning units, and also has challenged them to reflect upon their own physical limitations as they conduct their corporeal experiments determined by formulas, blueprints, and notations.

Her algorithmic approach to something as organic as dancing reveals a millennial tendency to approach the human body not as something sluggish and slime-based (in the words of Kurenniemi), but highly programmable, mutable, capable of cybernetic circuitry, and optimistically transhumanist.

With Paul Ryan in mind, it is no mistake that this exhibition features three artists, and that Hollander's choreography involves three performers each representing one of Helsinki Airport's three runways. Throughout Ryan's many years developing and applying his own cybernetic theories and pronounced in his three-ing technique, his aim was that art would be autopoietic and also generate similarly autopoietic behavior from both its participants and audience.

In conclusion, this exhibition reflects upon words published by Kurenniemi in an article titled "Tietokone syö taiteen" (Computer Eats Art) in 1972:

“Our art culture is stigmatized by two polarizations. There is a polarity between man and art, a subject-object relationship, which is why we talk of a “work” of art. There is another polarity between the artist and the audience: like two magnetic poles that exist in constant tension and only really also exist in relation to each other. Without man there would be no art and vice versa; without the musician there would be no audience and vice versa.”

So with this in mind, we invite the visitor (viewer, listener, and participant) to fully interact and engage with each artwork in this exhibition. The accompanying text is meant to guide the viewer not only through each commissioned piece by Hollander, Rosenström, and Pigao, but also as an introduction to the work, writing and archives of artists Paul Ryan and Erkki Kurenniemi, whose work was less about recording has happened in the past, but how we might react to it in the present, and in the future. This idea lies at the core of *Future Delay*.