Multitu Singula

## Art in the Digital Age

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Le Bicolore

Multitude & Singularity

Dominique Moulon
Curator

Two notions that gained currency with the start of the new millennium are the multitude – the crowd made up of people connected with each other via networks – and technological singularity – the idea that machines will eventually become superior to human beings. In fact, the notions of multitude and singularity can be applied to both human beings and technologies. When we think of the multitude, we imagine our democratic commitments converging on social media, but we could just as well use this term to refer to the large data mass fed to AI programs that are currently the focus of everyone's attention. The singularity concerning us is the online identities and profiles we are constantly tweaking when we should be devoting as much attention to the concept of technological singularity, which raises questions about our relationship with the machines which we have become increasingly dependent on. The exhibition *Multitude & Singularity* assembles artworks which reflect the complexity of the world in its digital guise.
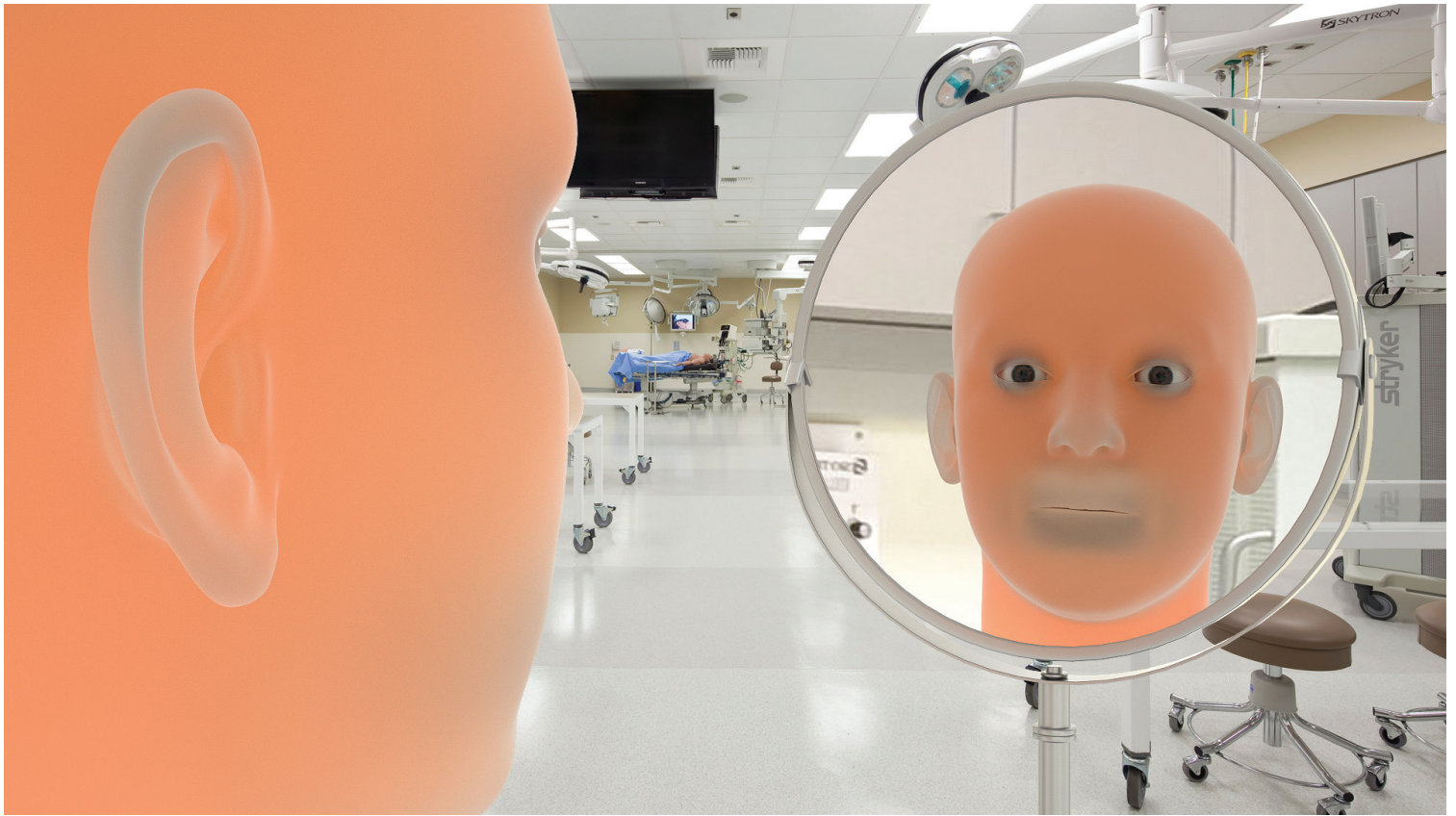
Stine Deja & Marie Munk
Synthetic Seduction : Foreigner
Three-dimensional sequence, 5 ´ 10

Jeppe Hein

360°Illusion IV, 2008

Kinetic installation
Collection of Frac des Pays de la Loire

Multiple viewpoints

Jeppe Hein is an artist whose medium is perception. He often uses reflecting surfaces, as in *360° Illusion IV*. Mirrors undeniably attract us, wherever they are – including in art centres and museums. Hein's rotating mirror is especially fascinating because it questions the notion of viewpoint, a recurrent concept in art history. Rather than reflecting back our image, the rotating object in front of our eyes reflects two viewpoints, like two co-existing states of the world, simultaneously alluding to quantum physics and turning this participatory artwork into a laboratory experiment. Hein's approach is often comparable to scientists' use of reflecting surfaces in their research laboratories, and the public's gaze is a vital component of his installations.

Jens Settergren

GhostBlind Loading, 2021

Audio installation

Listening to the invisible

As our household appliances increasingly become connected, we tend to think of them as intelligent, crediting them with an indefinable extra something. Jens Settergren recorded sounds made by technical objects in our everyday surroundings, processed them and then slipped them into the immersive soundscape *GhostBlind Loading*. Music made up of sounds we barely register is played via speakers resembling rocks, available from large retailers. This ghostly presence prompts us to reconsider invisible electromagnetic activities which, unbeknownst to us, we share our lives with. The presence of camouflage huts with reflecting surfaces gives viewers the feeling they are being watched – a feeling we are increasingly experiencing, even in our own homes, with the intensification of our connectedness. The notions of invisibility and surveillance are indissociable both in our collective imagination and in the everyday reality of our lives.

Jakob Kudsk Steensen

Aquaphobia, 2017

3D sequence

Terrors

Jakob Kudsk Steensen creates artificial worlds for poetic narratives in the form of virtual reality experiences, video games or film sequences. His inspiration for the 3D sequence *Aquaphobia* came from psychological studies of treatments for fear of water – not forgetting that people can also be afraid of not having enough water or of excess water, as flooding threatens more and more places. In the world of *Aquaphobia*, we are guided by a liquid entity, perhaps in reference to the fact that our bodies consist chiefly of water. This body with changing contours, which leads us from underground to the surface, is disturbing rather than menacing, especially as it is accompanied by a soothing voice off. Via several dim tunnels, we arrive to a place that resembles Brooklyn when flooded by *Hurricane Sandy* in 2012. In Jakob Kudsk Steensen's work, the imaginary creation never completely distances itself from its real-life inspiration.

Stine Deja and Marie Munk

Synthetic Seduction, 2018

Installation with sculptures
and screen

Between real and virtual

When Stine Deja and Marie Munk work together, their aesthetic senses converse and intertwine. In this installation from the series *Synthetic Seduction*, objects on the floor seem to be continued in the on-screen image – unless it is the opposite – prompting us to reflect on how these sculptures and images differ and how they are alike, thereby gaining insights into their nature. Their roundness tells us they are organic, and their flesh-pink colour suggests skin. On the floor, they are static, but in the space of the image, where the frame restricts their movements, their materiality is somewhat different. If the floor sculptures of varying sizes had come out of the screen and invaded the tangible space of the exhibition, they would have lost some of their virtual sheen in the process and become more strongly present. It is as if everything took place in the interstice between objects and their depictions, even when the latter are three-dimensional, with no way of knowing which direction they might move in.

Stine Deja and Marie Munk

Synthetic Seduction, 2018
Skin-to-Skin
Foreigner

Sculpture et 3D sequence, 5'10

Artificial emotions

In a hospital-like setting bounded by a blue curtain, Stine Deja and Marie Munk invite us to take a seat on a sculpture with a skin-like texture. Seemingly organic, it responds to touch as if to simulate life. Comfortably seated *Skin-to-Skin* – one artificial, the other real – we watch the 3D sequence *Foreigner* about artificial intelligence. The being that appears to be seeing its own face for the first time in a wake-up room seems to be endowed with consciousness but has no experience. In any case, this is what the song from the 80s suggests in such a context with the chorus "I would like to know what love is" which he intones. The question whether artificial beings can feel emotion has been recurrent in science fiction scenarios of this past century. It becomes crucial in research laboratories where conversational robots emerge in search for a body without experience. In the process of giving shape to their ideas, the two artists explore the issue of post-humanism. After all, fiction is often ahead of science.

Cecilie Waagner Falkenstrøm

An Algorithmic Gaze II, 2023

Generative installation

What the machine sees

For centuries, artists have learned how to depict the human body by drawing naked bodies. So it's hardly surprising we have ended up teaching machines the same way. However, there is a problem. It has not so much to do with the algorithms themselves as with the data fed to them. There has been an overriding tendency to supply them excusively with visuals portraying a national Western human being. Cecilie Waagner Falkenstrøm has tried to get over this bias by collecting thousands of nude photographs reflecting our gender, age and ethnicity diversity. With a learning process of this kind, it's easy to suppose that the machine will tend to depict a person who is an overall composite, a hybrid of all of us. In fact, it keeps endlessly attempting to do so, generating thousands of depictions in which we might all recognize bits of ourselves here or there. But it is the monstrosities it occasionally comes up with that makes us wonder how it sees us.

Mogens Jacobsen

No Us (but 1 Off), 2023

Generative installation

The technological other

Mogens Jacobsen's installation *No Us (but 1 Off)* is made up of dedicated entrance, processing and exit apparatus. First of all, there is a sort of mirror-screen through which visitors literally enter the artwork revolving around an AI program that "invents" faces based on those of the viewers so that the artwork is generated as they watch. The artist turns the exhibition space, as it were, into his studio, while the machine creates portraits in which we cannot tell how much is real. This reinforces the idea that we are constructed via interactions with the other, in this era where the other is increasingly a technological entity. A final point worth noting is that the artist has opted to broadcast all his countless portraits via an audio-visual technique that harks back to the beginnings of television. Is this a way of telling us that in terms of artificial intelligence, we have a very long way to go, while AI has lately become one of us?

Dominique Moulon

Biography

Dominique Moulon is a freelance curator and art critic. He studied visual arts at the École nationale supérieure d'art (ENSA) in Bourges and holds a doctorate in Arts et sciences de l'art. He is a member of the Digital Art Museum (DAM) in Berlin and the Association française des commissaires d'exposition (C-E-A) and has been curator for multiple galleries, fairs, art centers and cultural centers in Paris, Brussels and Seoul. He has been associate curator of Némo, the Île-de-France Region's International Digital Arts Biennial, since 2015. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and has written many articles for exhibition catalogues, collective publications and specialized magazines and coordinates MoocDigital. paris. He is the author of *Art Beyond Digital* (2018), *Art et numérique en résonance* (2015), *Contemporary New Media Art* (2013) and *Masterpieces of the 21st Century* (2021), the last three published by Nouvelles Éditions Scala. Dominique Moulon is a member of the Observatoire des mondes numériques en sciences humaines (OMNSH) and the Réseau national des arts hybrides et cultures numériques (HACNUM). He teaches at the École professionnelle supérieure d'arts graphiques (EPSAA) in Paris.

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