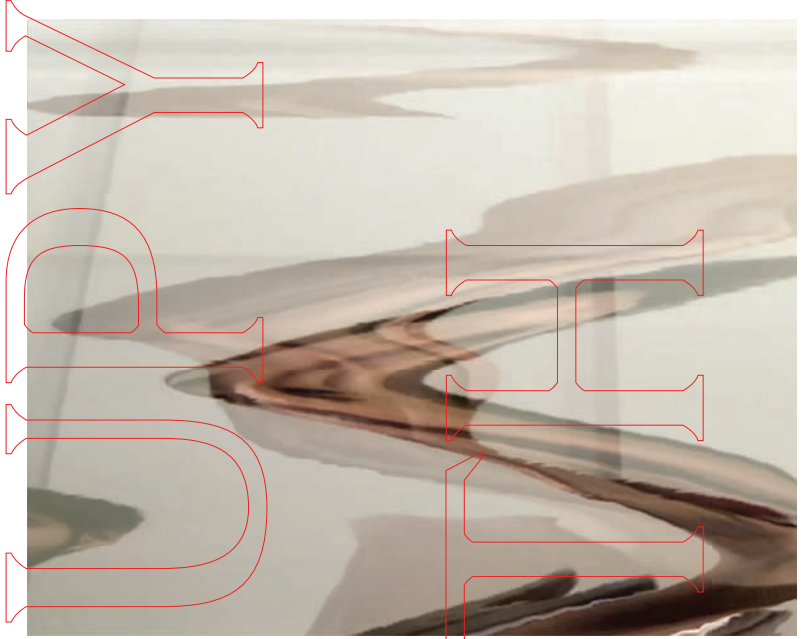


OCCUPY EARTH



COLLABORATIVE
COURSE
ON ILLUSION,
CLIMATE CONTROL
AND ECOLOGY



(2017-2018)

CREDITS

Occupy Earth is a collaborative course organised by the MediaLab in the School of Arts, Design and Architecture at Aalto University; and the MFA Design and Technology program at Parsons School of Design, during F2017–S2018.

The course explores human's illusion of control over environmental disruption, non-human agency, and differing philosophies of ecology, using various forms of immersive media.

Aalto University
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OCCUPY EARTH

Occupy Earth is a collaborative course organized in 2017-18 by Aalto University in Helsinki, and Parsons School of Design in New York. The course explores the polarized discussion of climates, both political and ecological, we now face as an earth-bound species in the 21st century. Through the process of creating virtual and physical “mixed reality” hybrids, the course addresses a range of themes including human’s illusion of control over climate disruption, our relation to non-human entities, and potential conceptions of an ecology without nature.



Occupy Earth is a pilot project in several aspects, particularly as a model for partnership between universities. Students and faculty have been actively engaged in developing best practices for collaboration and communication through the enactment of the course itself. Twenty six hardworking and insightful students from both schools have explored course thematics from multiple perspectives, and developed this research into a series of diverse projects that exist across physical and virtual domains. Faculty co-evolved the mutual study program in cooperation with students, as they in turn developed their projects through bi-weekly tele-present discussions and critiques.

The Aalto group visited Parsons in February to finalize projects, and the course now culminates with the Parsons group visiting Finland to mount an exhibition at the Aalto Campus in Otaniemi.

MIXED REALITY REFLECTIONS ON CLIMATE CONTROL, ILLUSION AND ECOLOGY

The collaborative course Occupy Earth has examined several interconnected thematic trajectories, which have been refined and developed through discussion, research and artwork development. These ideas include human’s assumed control over climate and primacy in the Body Politic, as well as current conceptions of nature/ecology and what constitutes illusion.

Throughout the course, we have explored mixed reality as an emerging form and potential technique for exploration of these topics. Our goal has been to expand the notion of “mixed reality” beyond its use as a device marketing term, in order to discuss the broader implications of an increasingly hybrid concept of reality, and connectivity between human and non-human zones of experience.

The concept of mixed reality links the spheres of technology, the natural world, and human society into a complex mesh of agents, inter-operating at varied scales of time, materiality and cultural significance. The reliable solidity of the physical world, and the timelessness of the natural, is no longer a given; just as we see a blurring of the borders between virtual and actual realities, we imagine a blurring of geopolitical boundaries, and an explosion of the distinction between natural ecologies and constructed environments.

The current tensions around the ideas of the “Body Politic,” the relation of individuals to a larger social body - and who and what actors are granted agency as members of that larger body - was a pivotal discussion point within the course work.

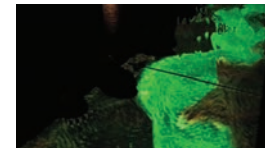
As a group hailing from several countries (Finland, Spain, Austria, Italy, Neth-



erlands, Bulgaria, Colombia, India, USA, Taiwan, China), currently living and studying in the United States and EU, we give serious consideration to the current global state of war and climate disruption, their resulting interrelated effect on migration, political speech, assembly and negotiation. Much of this problematic can be seen in the lack of political will to address climate change, particularly instantiated in the Trump administration's response to United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015, better known as COP21. European writers such as Bruno Latour have suggested that Americans, as well as other large industrialized nations, have two choices. They can either acknowledge that the current system of globalism will very soon run out of resources to consume, and make a large scale change in investing in the redirection of capitalism; or, sink into denial.

Which entities, however, are empowered to take part in these decisions? Recently, humans have begun to consider how non-human entities affected by climate change might gain legal status. In 2017, New Zealand granted "legal rights of personhood" to the Whanganui River. Though humans clearly remain primary in this equation, with two people acting as legal guardians to the 90 mile stretch of River, the discussion of where the river begins and ends proved telling. The river basin was not defined solely by its physical catchment, but also included other non-human living entities, as well as systems of worship, culturally defined by the original inhabitants of the area.

Already having technology necessary to model the effects of climate disruption, one could argue that what people still lack are the skills to negotiate and function as a larger Body Politic that exceeds misguided as-



By Melanie Crean,
Tyler Henry
and Petri Ruikka

sumptions of human control over territory. Several student projects responded to the prompt of "climate control," by framing it as an illusion, challenging the primacy of humans as an exceptional species who serve as masters of the Earth's ecology.

One central theme of the course concerned the objectification of nature and the illusion of containment of various environmental structures. These discussions challenged further the idea that the environment could be seen as separate from the human. While the proposition that places nature on a pedestal can be argued to support a sort of conservationist perspective of nature, it is in reality a deeply problematic one since it reinforces the false idea of separation, as Timothy Morton also poignantly underlines.

The utilitarian processes of containment, control and extraction of various environmental realms or biological structures have proven to be extremely useful and efficient in the history of humankind. Nevertheless, we should question the extent to which this containment can reasonably be extended. The idea of containment and control, also ultimately connote separation between these two interconnected agents.

Appreciating the multitude of agents and interactions within these incredibly complex systems might bring better insight into our relation with the "ecological mesh," to again borrow a phrase from Timothy Morton. How might we better acknowledge our position and interconnectedness within this mesh, especially when reflecting on the larger Body Politic that might result from conventional human-centrism?

ABOUT THE COLLABORATING UNIVERSITIES

MediaLab

The mission of the Media Lab is to explore, discover and comprehend new digital technologies and their impact in society; to leverage the potential they create for communication, interaction and expression; and to understand the challenges they pose to design and creative production.

Aalto University

Aalto University is a multi-disciplinary community where science and art meet technology and business. We are committed to identifying and solving grand societal challenges and building an innovative future.

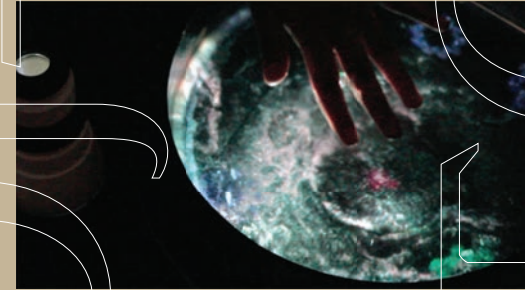
Parsons Design and Technology (MFA)

Designers today face two fundamental challenges: the expanding influence of design within society and the increasing role of technology within design. The Master of Fine Arts in the Design and Technology program provides a dynamic, challenging, and idea-driven environment in which to address these challenges.

The New School - Parsons School of Design

Parsons School of Design enables students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a rapidly changing society. Students collaborate with peers throughout The New School, industry partners, and communities around the world and in New York City, a global center of art, design, and business.

PROJECTS



PROJECTS

LEAH WILLEMIN, SRISHTI JOHARI, JULIE BYERS

(01)



(Parsons)

Though small in size, insects are crucial to the functioning of larger ecosystems. But a series of recent studies suggest that in the last quarter-century, insect populations have suffered. Honeybee populations are included in this decline.

Our project references a phenomenon in which bees forage from industrial food byproduct, instead of natural nectar. They return to their hives with processed sugars such as maraschino cherry and M&M sugars, creating brilliantly colorful honey. However, eating this industrial waste makes the bees less able to fight off toxic ingredients found in pesticides, leading to deaths. Though the honey produced from industrial waste is formally beautiful and represents the resilience of bee populations, it carries the tension of alarming truth: the scarcity of bee food sources and a broader threat to insect populations.

This project uses the rich colors and scent of melted hard candy juxtaposed against industrial materials to convey and celebrate the mixing of industrial and organic materials. Like colorful honey, the candy presents familiar colors and scents within a strange context. As time passes, the candy will slowly melt, evoking the hidden loss of insect biomass.

BIOMASS



(01)

CARLA MOLINS PITARCH

(02)

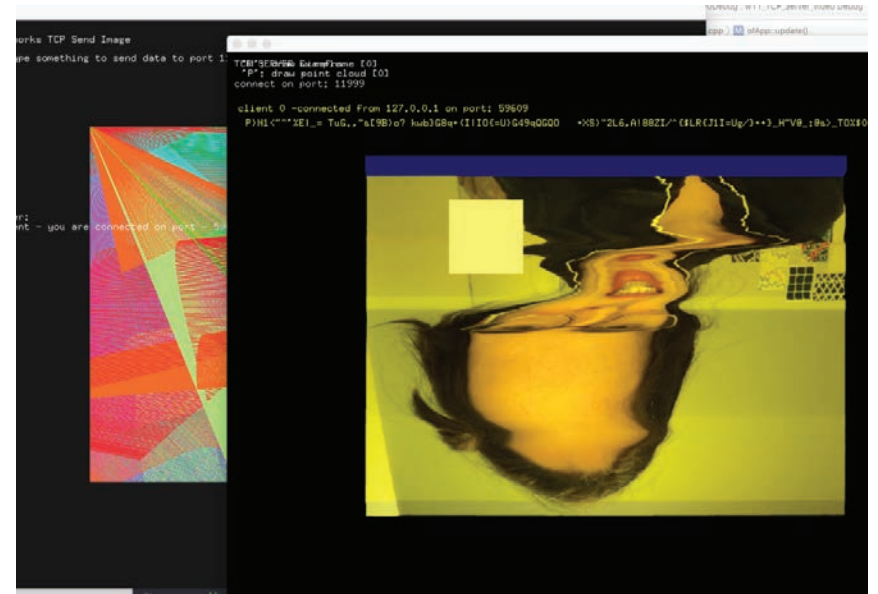


(Parsons)

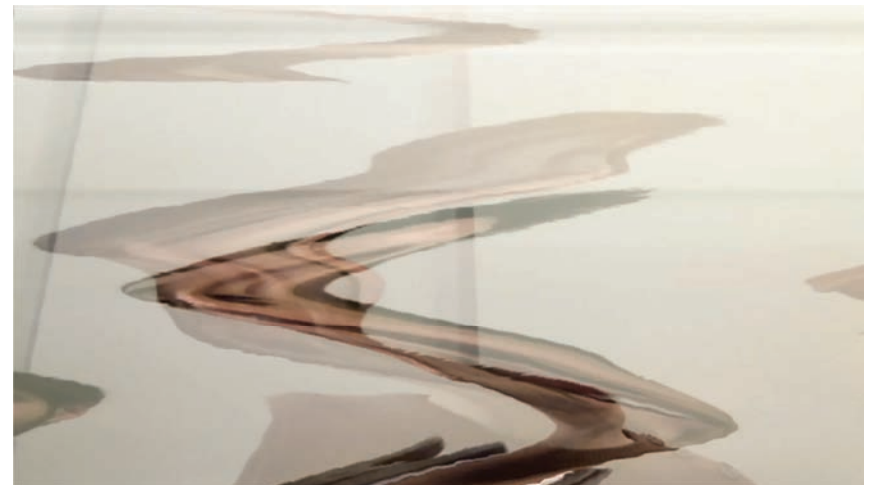
Co-Individuality focuses on the concept of the individual. This piece becomes an exploration of a person's identity and their relationship with other identities when they feel isolated. Meanwhile, the fracture between Spain & Catalonia affects daily life, it generates anxiety and uncertainty among the population and, ultimately, isolation. Although this instance of isolation emerges from a political situation, the focus of the piece is not on the conflict itself. Instead, it approaches the point of view of a culturally uprooted person.

The goal is to answer one question: is technology able to represent what happens in the liminal space of communication across a border? This liminal space is where everything is possible: what cannot be real in the real world can be real in this space. The answer is a telematics experience shaped as a combination of two camera images / people from two different ends creating an illusion of control of their own communication.

CO-INDIVIDUALITY

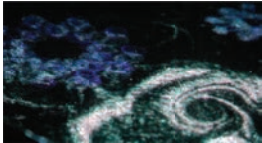


(02)



YIN CHIUNG SHEN

(03)



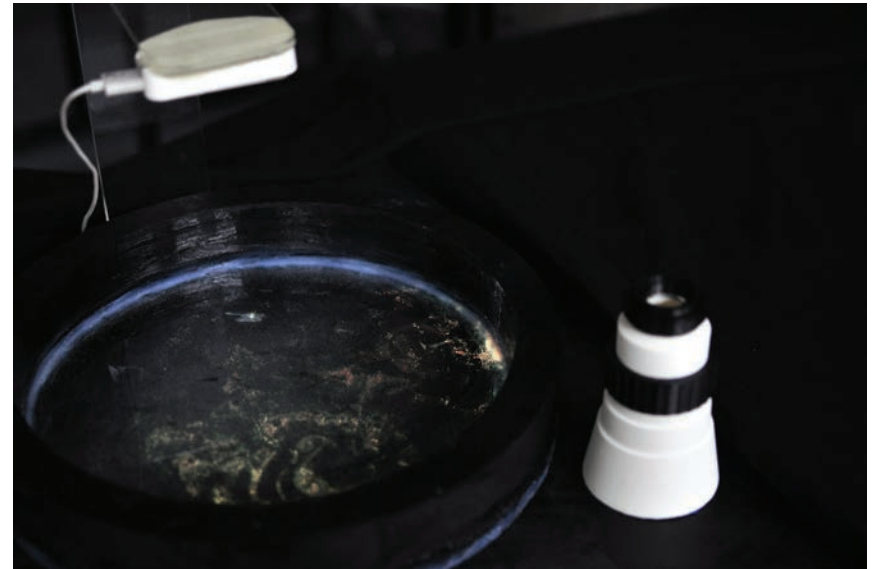
(Aalto)

Control is an interactive installation discussing the illusion of human control over nature and technology. New technologies as instruments of control, humans have come closer than ever to anticipating the unpredictable nature, which makes us too confident to believe that humans could control everything in the world. Can humans control the nature? Or are we just deceived by our technology superiority?

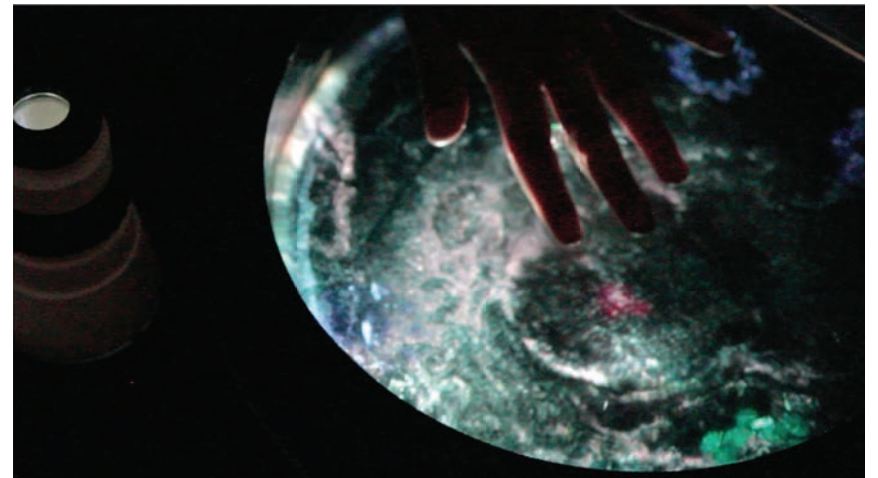
Technology was used as an ironic metaphor in this piece for controlling nature. Visitors put their hands into the water to control the realistic digital cell pattern in real-time. This installation thus offers the meeting of several realities in a shared interworld, where humans control the real nature- the movement of water and a fake nature created by technology- the movement of the digital cell.

Control also aims to challenge the visitors to get their hands dirty to interact with nature. This approach calls for a physical and emotional commitment in the experience, in the hope to bring more reflections on the relationship between humans, technology and nature.

CONTROL



(03)



MIRKA SULANDER

Dialogue is a performative installation by Mirka Sulander. It examines language as a unifying and separating force between humans and their surroundings. In the installation, one, two people sit back to back on the same chair. They watch the same film in the same room, but in different times and from different positions. Nothing can be the same.

(04)



(Aalto)

Nothing can be the same
But still connected
They are meeting
– Not in the words that are not their own –
but in the spirits
And They are not only the people

Alienation is an illusion.
We are all part of a monologue.
Being different sounds. Changing.

Alienation is an illusion
Because the words so separate on the paper
Are together

1: Dialogues can become monologues when we concentrate only on what we say and feel and not on what is happening around us. People can become monologues.
2: We are affected by our surroundings, always responding to the world and sending impulses. Even our words are not existing in a vacuum but they are linked to traditions, experiences, histories...



(04)



DIALOGUE

QIAOCHU KRIS LI, JIALU JULIA ZHANG

(05)



(Parsons)

Dystopian Reality discusses the issues that we face today as we become increasingly aware of our relationship with the resources we consume. This project examines mass-produced daily objects and the hidden aftermath of their consumption, and employs their imagery as portals that unknowingly connects us with the other version of the reality. Combined with a narrative that is closely related to our daily rituals, we hope to shine light on the issues of the over-consumption and disposal of resources from a unique perspective.

We are creating a speculative narrative in which humans began to simulate a utopia by “patching over” pieces of reality that are dissatisfying. Using backlit projection and see-through two way mirrors, we are creating an installation that simulates the ability to look beyond the appearance of a utopian world.

DYSTOPIAN REALITY



(05)



ANDREA EGIDI, LEDA VANEVA, SOURYA SEN

(06)



(Aalto)

All beings are dots in the line of the environment. Keep them in peaceful balance or stir them in chaos. You choose, because you have the power... right?

The work explores the topic of control in the context of climate change, and more precisely - the illusion that people have the ability to exercise control over such global processes. Questions about cause and effect arise and there is a general feeling of confusion in a situation which, at a first glance, seems completely clear.



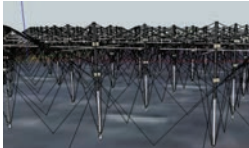
(06)



EQUILIBRIUM

ALEX VAN GIERSBERGEN, J. CAMILO SÁNCHEZ CARRANCO

(07)



(Aalto)

“Some researchers have raised questions about the possible involvement of HAARP in major disasters like the earthquake in Haiti, Indonesian tsunami, and hurricane Katrina. Could these have been HAARP experiments gone awry?”

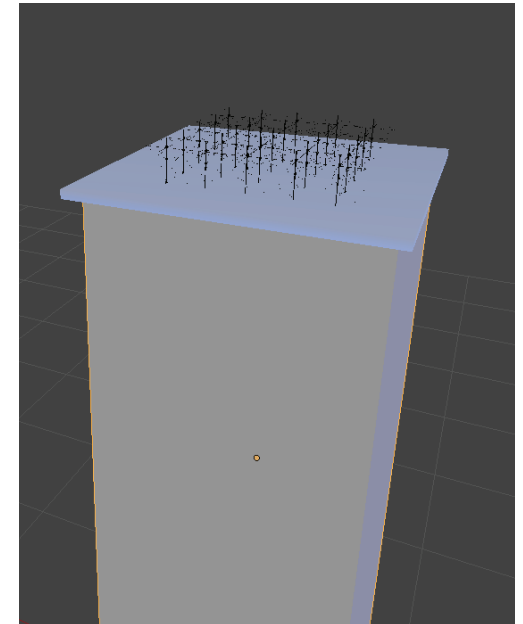
After studying the results of the original HAARP system we have created a device that allows us to utilise the HAARP climate and atmospheric control capabilities on a much more manageable scale. After the encouraging results in climate and atmospheric control achieved at the HAARP facility in Alaska, we have started our research to use the same technology to bring micro-climate and atmospheric control to the general public.

mHAARP uses the same system of phased array antennae to manipulate the local ionosphere, giving the consumer unprecedented control over local atmospheric circumstances. We have designed a unique method that uses a thermal nano-amplifier to allow a person to control the installation using nothing but their own body heat.

mHAARP



(07)



LUIS CELOMUNDO, ANDREAS WIBERG SODE, OTSO SORVETTULA

(08)



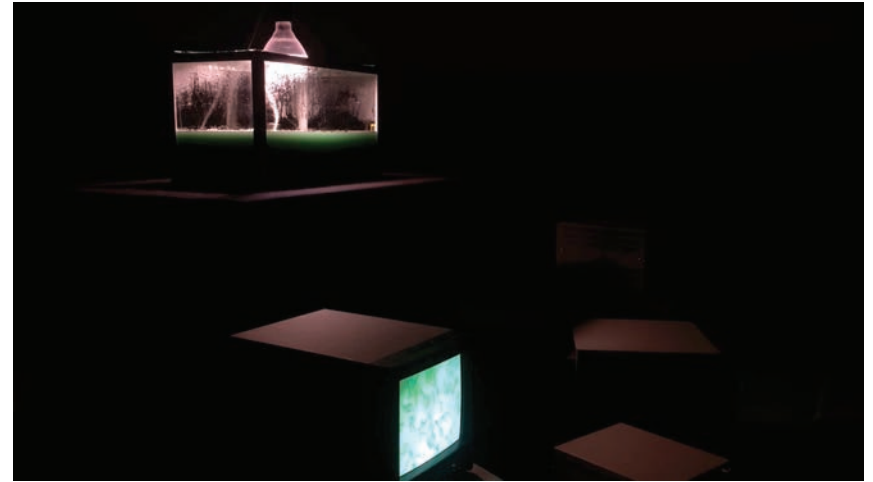
(Aalto)

Nature of Man is a video installation poem that represents a human being life from the distance, his/her relation with nature through a minimalistic and symbolic laboratory/chapel for humans to meditate and observe. Who controls whom? Is life lived by humans or are humans lived by life?

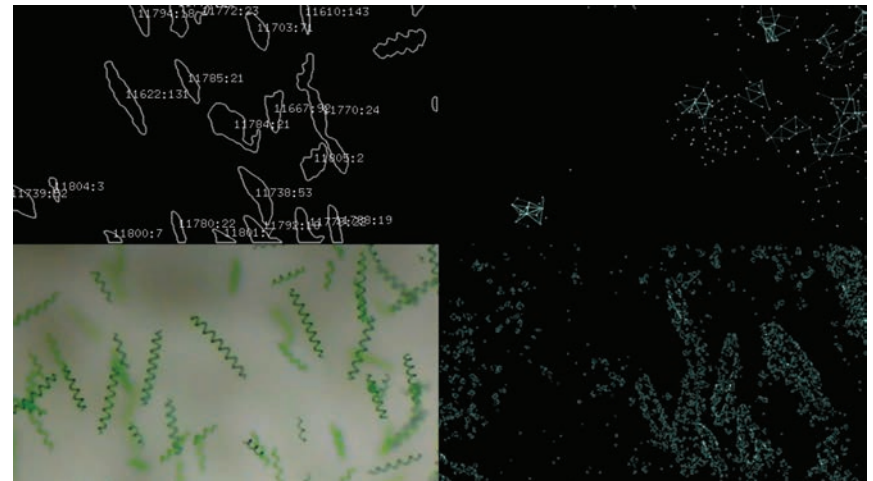
Spirulina algae grows and lives in the “aquarium altar” in a controlled and clinical environment, the monitors represent this life in different forms, showing the microscopic images of this algae and then mapping them into different representations of digital life forms that evolve and “grow” in real time using a computer program composed of different types of algorithms.

The observer of this piece immerses herself/himself into the reality of someone that controls a supposedly controlled environment: is he or she finding meaning and beauty just in the search and analysis of his or her own nature in relation to the environment? Or is he or she lost in translation with the environment hence failing to understand the meaning and dynamics of nature?

NATURE OF MAN



(08)



JACQUELINE WU, YI HSIN CHANG

(09)

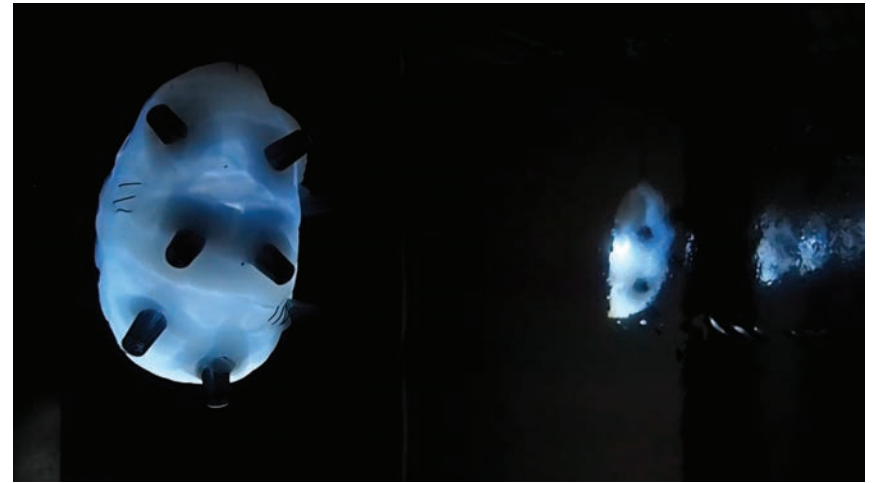


(Parsons)

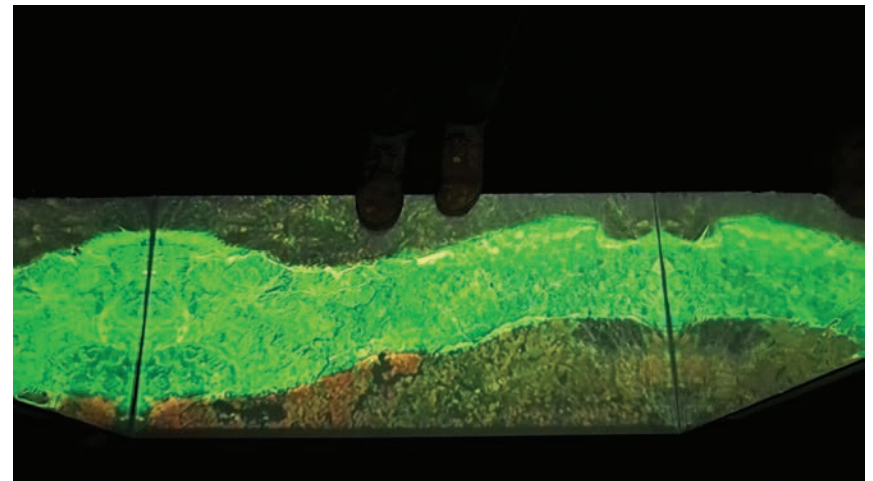
No Man's Land explores the paradoxical state of political boundaries and demilitarized zones. There is a compelling narrative of irony in these divisive spaces, where humans have forcefully inserted themselves in nature, but can no longer return due to fear of remnant military weaponry. And so a border so fiercely guarded is also fiercely protected: due to decades of human absence, the ecosystems have regained control and become flourishing sanctuaries for once-endangered species.

Intended as a spatial narrative, the piece emphasizes boundaries that are erected not by the height of fences but the length and depth of devastation and patrol. The borders are a testament to the legacy of war that we inherited from generations past, and a mirror to current nationalistic trends towards shutting doors and building walls. But, No Man's Land also aims to tell the story of the poetic resilience of nature and the delicacy of the human body.

NO MAN'S LAND



(09)



ERICA KERMANI, DIANA SALCEDO, JEANA CHESNIK

(10)



(Parsons)

How does a body of water embody the body politics? We explore how non-humans can participate in agreement processes to decide their fate. Telematic Rivers is an installation and performance that provides a technological interface through which rivers voice their concerns. In a conference setting, an assembly of multiple parties are represented by the real-time streaming videos of varying international rivers and by seats for humans.

Similar to the legal status granted to New Zealand's Whanganui River, we remove the notion that Nature is a human resource, rather a living entity with rights and protections. At Occupy Earth, Vantaanjoki in Helsinki and New York City's East and Hudson Rivers will be transmitted into the meeting. This experience intends to ask the viewer, if non-humans had a voice equal to humans, would discussions around climate change be approached differently than they are today?

TELEMATIC RIVERS



(10)



EXHIBITION

The course exhibition takes place from 16th of March to 20th of March at the Aalto University / Harald Herlin Learning Centre and at the 2nd floor lobby of Otakaari I.

Exhibition Opening on the 16th of March
4-5pm at the Foyer at Aalto Learning Centre
5-6pm at the Otakaari I, 2nd floor lobby

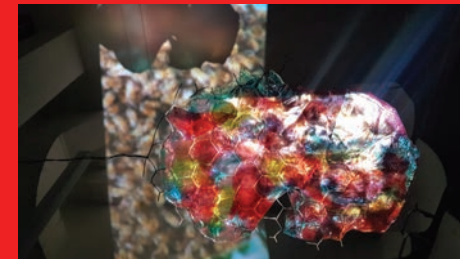
Exhibition Opening Times

Aalto Learning Centre

16th of March / 4–6pm
17th of March / 10am–3pm
19th of March / 8am–8pm
20th of March / 8am–4pm

Otakaari I, 2nd Floor Lobby

16th of March / 4–6pm
17th of March / 11am–3pm
(Access only through the main entrance F)
19th of March / 8am–6pm
20th of March / 8am–6pm



OPENING TIMES

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