

The Lonely Tail

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Abstract: *The Lonely Tail* is a four channel video installation that investigates human-computer interaction through experimental combinations of abject and glitch aesthetics. Each channel contains an animated digital collage and sound composition sourced from the user-generated content of specific web sites. Performative actions by the artist are then superimposed on the animation using chromakey. *The Lonely Tail* is an experiment in the performance of vicarious engagements that are experienced by Internet users who are frequently privy to other users documented experience of embodiment.



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1. Introduction

Campbelltown Arts Centre in Sydney commissioned *The Lonely Tail* for the exhibition *There's a Hole in The Sky* in 2012, which examined themes of anxiety in daily life. *The Lonely Tail* was the result of an investigation into unease about the experience and representation of embodiment in an age of ubiquitous computer connectivity.

2. The Lonely Tail Methodology

Displayed originally as a four channel video installation, each screen depicted an animated digital collage and sound composition containing media sourced from the user-generated content of specific online communities dedicated to a particular physical experience that has been displaced into a cyberspatial context. Channel 1 (figure 1) examines dermal grooming and extractions with content sourced primarily from popthatzit.com and reddit.com/r/popping/. Channel 2 (figure 2) examines the popular body-building and exercise culture typified by /fit/ (a board of 4chan.org), Channel 3 (figure 3) is concerned with the proliferation of 'amateur' pornography and Channel 4 (figure 4) contains images and sound sourced from various food blogging sites. This content was chosen because it relates to the abject described by Julia Kristeva, as "*food loathing... a wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat... these body fluids, this defilement, this shit...*" (Kristeva 1982, 2–3)

Each channel presents an image of superimposed performance actions by the artist that are related to the content of the animation. Using chromakey effects, the artist's body is replaced by a digital animation comprised of mediated and distorted images sourced from the online sites and communities mentioned above. The chromakey is done ineptly, so that evidence of a chromakey green costume and pixilation can be clearly seen. This misregistration is intended to make visible the media utilised and to prompt viewer distaste at a degraded style as much as revulsion towards the visibly abject content. This union between the abject and electronic glitch proposes the possibility of engaging with such Internet content as an immaterial "*ritual of defilement*" (Kristeva 63–64).

The notion of an immaterial ritual of defilement is significant because *The Lonely Tail* attempts to illustrate the kind of vicarious sensation that all notional bodies experience when transgressing physical, categorical distinctions between the viewer of the artwork, the online user, and the digital body depicted. Such ambiguous relations to the body in cyberspace challenge the assumption of the Internet as a disembodied environment. The union of the body as a pictorial depiction and process of embodiment as vicarious experience allies *The Lonely Tail* with Feminist criticism of conventional representation of the female body in cyberspace, most notably the work of N. Katheryn Hales (1999).



Fig. 1. Channel 1 Video Still (full video available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5nD51rkVrA>)



Fig. 2. Channel 2 Video Still (full video available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXvjCREHPQE>)



Fig. 3. Channel 3 Video Still (full video available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0ERkC5ezYs>)



Fig. 4. Channel 4 Video Still (full video available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pcMyftm3QY>)



Fig. 5. The Lonely Tail installation documentation.

References

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