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## Precognition: Bodies in Network

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# Precognition

Kate Hoyt

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*“Precognition” is an installation that seeks to explore the liminal space between actor and environment, human and technology, and self and Other through the performativity of flow. Deleuze and Guattari use the term “flow” to describe a deliberately imprecise way of knowing or understanding meaning beyond, across, and within the existing category of the form (trans. 1987). Within the materialist ontology of poststructuralism, it is not the form that matters so much as the substance - energies and affects entangle us with our surroundings, affording a radical questioning of the rational, contained self that remains so central to the Western, capitalist ethos. This performance sought to create a network of entangled (human and non-human) nodes of subjectivities - what Deleuze and Guattari call assemblages - and explore the fluid boundaries of the self and a dispersed understanding of agency. Essentially, such an ontology, coupled with the virtual capacities of new and emerging technologies, gives us an opportunity to revisit fundamental questions such as: what is a body, and what can it do? These questions served as the fundamental creative impetus for “Precognition.”*

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## Artist Statement

“Precognition” is an installation that seeks to explore the liminal space between actor and environment, human and technology, and Self and Other through the performativity of flow. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the term “flow” to describe a deliberately imprecise way of knowing or understanding meaning beyond, across, and within the existing category of the form. Within the materialist ontology of poststructuralism, we can understand the signification of the form to be secondary to that of substance: Energies and affects entangle us with our surroundings, affording a radical questioning of the rational contained self that remains so central to the Western capitalist ethos. This performance sought to create a network of entangled (human and non-human) nodes of subjectivities—what Deleuze and Guattari call *assemblages*—as well as to explore the fluid boundaries of the self and a dispersed understanding of agency. Such an ontology, coupled with the virtual capacities of new and emerging technologies, gives us an opportunity to revisit fundamental questions such as: What is a body, and what can it do? These questions serve as the fundamental creative impetus for “Precognition.”

## Affect Theory and the Leaky “Self”

Simondon’s (1992) concept of the preindividual explores the possibility that the individuated self is not a pre-given but rather an effect of hegemonic cultural paradigms—specifically within Western positivism—that privilege cognitive processes over affective, embodied experiences. Brennan (2004) calls this illusion of self-containment a “foundational fantasy,” a myth that precludes the possibility of distributed material agency, due to its dissonance with the individual rational subject promoted by modern capitalist ontologies. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to the reframing of the body not by its physical containment but in the way in which it operates in synchronicity with other affective forces within various assemblages as the “body without organs.” The body without organs is a way of conceptualizing bodies as constantly expanding fields of desires and intensities. By looking at the affect that flows through structures or organizations rather than considering bodies as simply “containers” for the self, we can understand that affect allows bodies to expand, converge, entangles and leave residue beyond the spatiotemporal boundedness of physical presence. The dissolution of these barriers is precisely the aim of Haraway’s treatise *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (2004), which calls for the disarrangement and rearrangement of collectives that reach across boundaries of human/non-human, male/female, nature/artifice, and material/ideal. In the cyborg paradigm, “[n]ature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other” (p. 9).

Both Haraway’s cyborg literature and Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) assert the capacity for technological artifice to contain embodied agency—an agency that is shared with humans, non-human animals, and environments. Hansen (2004) expands this notion to speak to the new wave of emerging technologies that act as *technological prostheses* to the human body, wherein we integrate virtual milieu into our embodied sensorial processes—such as the way in which the panning of a movie camera is interpreted as a turning of the head, or when we expand our sense of proprioception while driving a car to incorporate the vehicle. The rhetoric surrounding emerging networked technologies within the digital era has started to incorporate a resurfacing of the notion of the virtual. For Deleuze & Guattari (1987), the *actual* represents stasis, repetition, and being firmly rooted in the present, while *virtuality* is infused with possibility and difference, represented by the pull of memory back into the past, or the longing of desire into the future. Hansen (2004) recognized new media’s capacity to remap temporality as a parallel to its potential to remediate the body, in particular the body in relation to the network: “[With the digitization of time] nothing less is at stake than the dissolution of the between-two of images and its replacement by . . . *affectivity as the very medium of the between*” (p. 591, emphasis added).

The transcendent, connective ambition of this piece aligns with what Youngblood and Fuller (1970) call *intermedia*, “The simultaneous use of various media to create a total environmental experience for the audience” (p. 346). Performance scholar Salter (2010) points out that it is impossible to tease out

separate essences of human and technical beings, for technological objects should be seen as bundles of sensory properties and interconnected experiences (p. xxii). In fact, Salter argues that technology's transcendent embodiment can be viewed as divine interplay, for "technological machines of information and communication . . . operate at the heart of subjectivity" through memory, intelligence, sensibility, and affect (p. xxxiii). However, modernity has artificially imposed a divide between nature and culture, a construct which veils the fact that, as affect theory scholars have proposed, technology has as much agency in performance as humans. Salter describes technology as, in fact, constituted by performance, "Immanent, collective entanglement of material enunciations that operate on, shape, and transform the world in real time" (p. xxxiii).

### **Performing with Technology**

Through "Precognition," I sought to create a space of performance as a means of existing within the precognitive, affective state of perception. The emergence of a highly nuanced network of human-technological interaction allowed participants to remain within an embodied state of anticipation, bypassing the realm of the cognitive. The exhibited installation utilized two interactive movement suits—built from scratch with conductive fabric, conductive thread, LEDs and wireless transmitters (created with Arduino microprocessors and XBee wireless radio frequency identification models)—that were designed to be emergently interactive with not only each other but the entire mediated environment. Mediated architecture consisted of two infrared motion tracking sensors (Kinects), an interactive LED wall, two interactive wall projections and an interactive soundscape. Every movement enacted by not only the dancers but also by audience members altered mediation outputs of the entire environment. Each dancer's performance mediated biological-somatic input (muscle engagement, kinetic movement, and breath) that were translated through activation of the lights of the other's suit, creating a feedback loop between all of the actors—both human and technological.

The performance took place on May 20, 2013 at The Rembrandt Yard gallery in Boulder, Colorado, lasting approximately one hour. As the documentation shows, the dancers never ceased their movements and never removed their gazes from the LED wall barrier, despite the fact that they could not see each other's faces or even bodies, save for the LEDs that lit up on the other's suit. Following the performance, I conducted an extensive interview with the dancers to record their perceptions of the phenomena that occurred when they performed within the space. They recounted that the mediated environment caused them to remap what they considered as part of their own and their partner's bodies; in particular, they were struck by the experience of having to re-attune their responses to the lights changing shape from the other dancer's body, since this was the only visual cue they could perceive through the LED wall. The dancers indicated their confoundment at understanding what constitutes a body beyond the traditional positivist indicators. They also described sensing the dissolution of the boundaries between their body, that of the other dancer, and the mediated environment, describing an experience

of living in someone else's body. These descriptions highlighted ways that agency within a networked system is a truly dispersed phenomenon, not belonging to any one entity or body. The fact that the dancers' expectations of being able to control their own suits were continually broken indicates that a prolonged, precognitive state was achieved.

## Implications for Affect Theory and Performance

What is often the most frustrating barrier to communicating about precognitive, affective phenomena is the imprecision of representation imposed by language. Affect theory constitutes an attempt to move past the limitations of what is "representable," and yet many scholars are confined to the affordances of mere language. Although by definition, the term "performance" is conceptually murky, its essence is *temporal*. Salter (2010) defines performance as time-based, dynamic (non-repeatable), engaged in the present moment and immersive (p. xxiii). The tension between the scripted and the generative creates an interplay that is unique to each moment. Furthermore, performance differs from representational models of being and knowledge-making. This performance became a way to *enact*, rather than write about, the phenomenon of the subjective interchange with others and environment, and in this sense, it constitutes a unique contribution to affect theory studies.

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