

# AXIOM

AXIOM Gallery is the premiere gallery in the Metro-Boston area dedicated exclusively to showcasing emerging and established artists working in new media.

Founded as a collective in 2004, AXIOM has grown into an exhibition and performance space. AXIOM has had two locations, has seen hundreds of visitors and presented the work of local, national and international artists.

Exhibiting new and experimental media is a challenge for every contemporary art space- a challenge that AXIOM meets by providing space to foster the growth of new and experimental media through innovative exhibition and presentation of new media art and artists.

AXIOM strives to reach a wider audience of viewers through its support of new and experimental media and the artists who make it, in order to captivate and involve people of all ages in hopes for the growth of a bright future for art in years to come.

## About COLLISIONcollective

The COLLISIONcollective (aka CC) was founded in 2002 as an offshoot of the MIT student art group, ATat (Arts and Technology at tech), whose charter was to host events showcasing art incorporating technology.

Formed by artists and technologists, the COLLISIONcollective is premised on the sometimes abrupt intersection between art and technology. Its practitioners are drawn to this synthesis as the epicenter of forward-looking cultural adaptation. COLLISIONcollective was formed to address several vital needs: the promotion of artists, the creation of events and venues for exhibition, and fostering the exchange of ideas, techniques, and enthusiasm for making art. CC brings together people of all ages and disciplines in a collective format, creating a supportive community.



COLLISIONcollective produces experimental shows, called COLLISIONs, engaging viewers with interactive and robotic art, inviting them to explore laser-lighted spaces, listen and dance to live electronic music and generally have a good time — while being introduced to the future of art.

CC members meet bi-weekly in gatherings, dubbed COLLISIONcollusions, where a varying roster of local and visiting artists, scientists and engineers share their work and techniques.

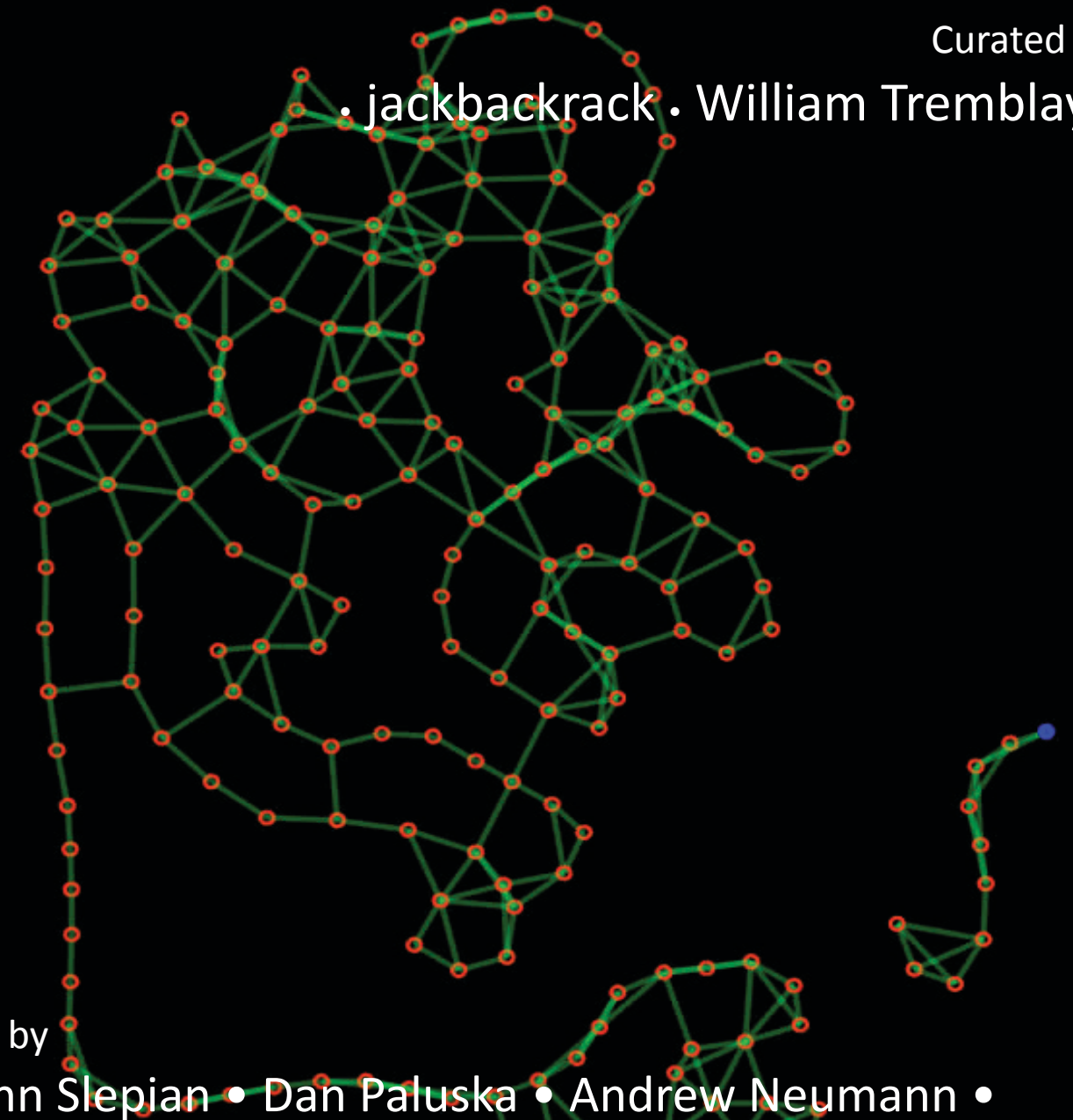
COLLISIONcollective members' work can be found from the basements of MIT to exhibitions, galleries and museums throughout the world.

# COLLISION:technomorph

August 10 - September 8 2007

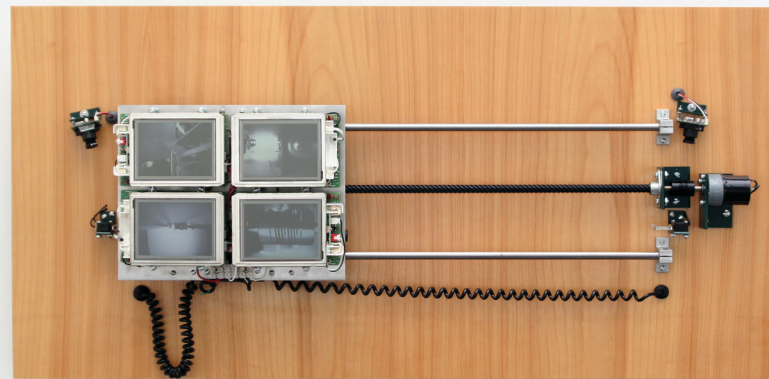
Curated by

• jackbackrack • William Tremblay •



Work by

• John Slepian • Dan Paluska • Andrew Neumann •  
jackbackrack • Roy Pardi • Erica von Schilgen • William  
Tremblay • Rob Gonsalves • Eric Gunther • Chris Fitch •



**The tendency for human beings to ascribe human characteristics to non-human entities or objects,**

known as anthropomorphism, is universal. It seems to be a natural by-product of the way our minds work, and a pre-requisite for empathy. It requires no training: children, from the earliest ages, identify objects as having personalities. In philosophy, this phenomenon is considered an error, and is known as the “pathetic fallacy”, the mistake of attributing human aspirations, emotions or thoughts to inanimate objects.

In the context of artistic practice, anthropomorphism is the rule.



Artists and their audiences invest emotion and cognition in the often-inanimate medium of the art work. Many artists cannot function without forming personal relationships with their materials. The designed world we live in is populated with objects that intentionally resemble living beings in form or behavior. This complicates the distinction between creator and created. In daily life, when confronted with technology that fails to yield a desired result, people talk to their machines, scolding and pleading with them as if words could affect the operational parameters.

A related, and inverse, phenomenon is that of “technomorphism”, a neologism for the tendency to describe human behavior and emotions in terms of metaphors drawn from our interactions with technology. Most technologists subscribe to a mechanistic system of reasoning, which would initially seem to exclude anthropomorphism and its inverse as bad science. In practice, however, they often find it useful. Anthropomorphizing technology may be seen as an expression of humility, recognizing the importance of emergent, non-designed behaviors of complex systems. Con-

sciousness and other human traits are observed to be interesting surface phenomena independent of the platform upon which they are implemented. Humans are often equated with machines. If a human machine can have intentions, it is no less credible to posit that a given system “wants” a specific outcome than to state that its designer does. Seen in this light, every act of personification, whether the object of the classification is human or otherwise, is in fact a guess as to the nature of the complexity of the object at hand.

Formed by artists and technologists, the COLLISIONcollective is premised on the sometimes abrupt intersection between art and technology. Its practitioners are drawn to this synthesis as the epicenter of forward-looking cultural adaptation. COLLISION: technomorph explores the tendency, in the artist and the viewer, to interpret things in both human and technological terms. The



works included are all drawn from previous COLLISIONcollective shows and have been chosen for the light they shed on this inquiry.

John Slepian’s *Caged* overtly plays to our sympathies. At first glance the metal mesh screen of the cage seems to constrain its uncannily familiar but alien captive. On closer inspection the real constraint is revealed to be the video

screen that underlies it, dividing the viewer’s world and the cage’s interior, creating a barrier through which only information can pass. The piece evokes empathy, fear and revulsion, drawing the viewer to the uncomfortable recognition of their own captivity - and their identity as one machine interacting with another.

With *The Holy Toaster*, Daniel Paluska questions the validity of our deepest convictions as elements of an engineered system. He presents a common appliance that “miraculously” produces human likenesses to which many ascribe religious



and cultural significance. That it is so easily accepted draws to our attention the historically-inherited “reification circle” wherein the socially invented and sustained norm of divine intervention has become so accepted that we think of it as natural law. The holy spirit that moves it is none other than 120 Volts AC.

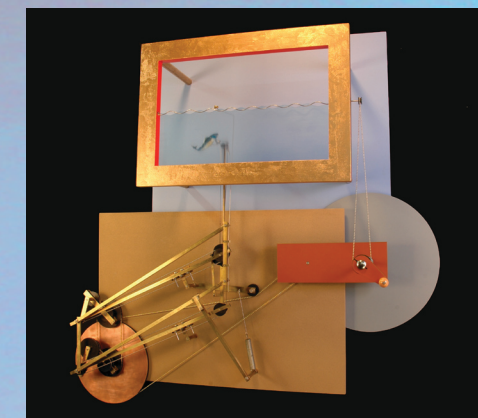
Andrew Neumann’s *Quartet* assumes the dynamics of biological processes with its repetitive, self-regulating mechanical motions. A simple analog system of feedback loops produces subtly complex behavior. Its organs of communication, four video screens,

monitor carefully-composed, introspective views of these processes, suggesting questions as to the nature of self-awareness.

The interaction of groups is dealt with in jackbackrack’s *Follow the Leader*. Despite its formal abstraction, the behavior of his “robots” is immediately recognizable as the pecking order of the playground, the dynamics of which extend to the highest levels of our society. He holds a mirror to the hierarchy we exist in, stripping away meaning and context, showing the transitory nature of winners and losers in a zero-sum game. Roy Pardi also shows us a social

microcosm with his piece *Evaporation (Tipping Point)*. Using simple, repeated elements, he models the role of individual complicity in the deliberate manipulation of the media landscape.

In *Pulling Pears from the Pond*, Erica von Schilgen caricatures the anthropic principle. Her faux-naïf tableau, composed of media references, remains inert without an observer to activate it. The viewer-participant becomes the selection criterion for the creation of “life” in this little universe. Chris Fitch’s *Tantalus Mackerel* presents a mechanical parable of the human condition. The machine exists on two distinct



levels: the proscribed viewing port, where a drama unfolds, and the complex clockwork that enables it. As in von Schilgen’s work, Fitch makes the viewer the active force driving the cycle of fixed destiny described by the limited parameters of the system, reminding us of our own lack of control as creators. These works bring to mind the words of Albert Einstein: “What really interests me is whether God had any choice in the creation of the world”.

William Tremblay and Rob Gonsalves make use of an actuator array to respond to human frailty. In *Wave Puppet* they abstract the elemental power of the sea to a simple classroom demonstration, engaging the viewer with a comforting reduction in the complexity of the physical world while drawing attention to the resulting loss of fidelity. Rendered safely anthropomorphic, the surface takes on a voluptuous but distinctly mechanical nature. *Organ Organ*, by Eric Gunther, augments the human body to reveal a novel mode of perception. Its playfully biomorphic affordances present a classic human interface, offering comfort and seducing the detached observer to become part of the system.

