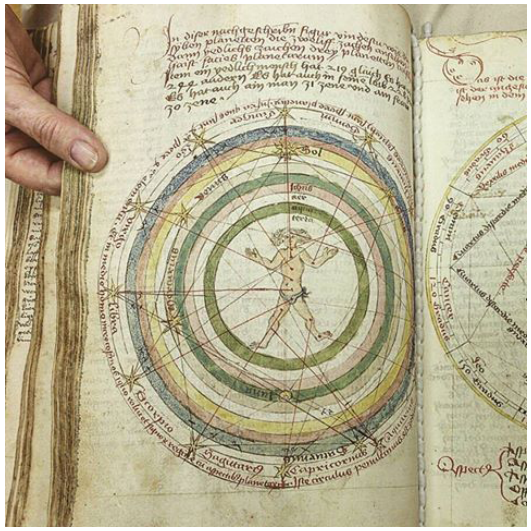
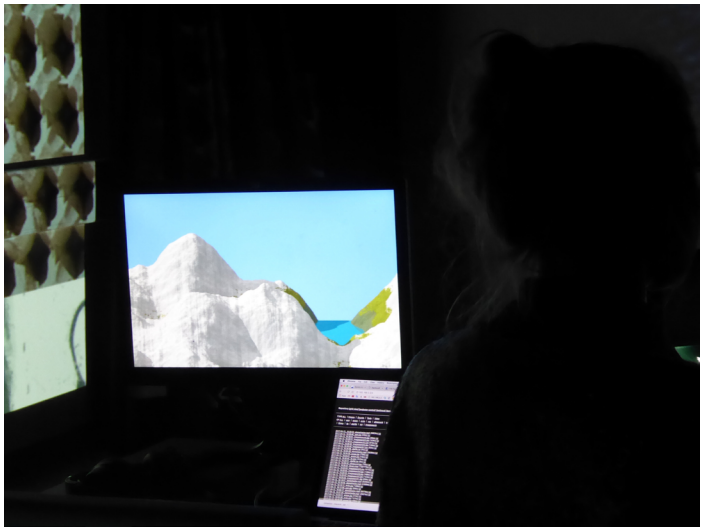
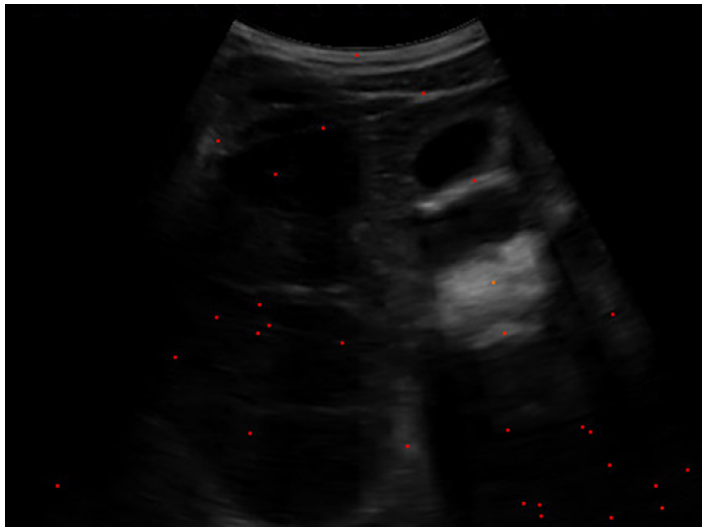
BECOMING.A(THING) : A SEMIOTIC INSTRUMENT
Š PELA PETRIČ AND MIHA TURŠ IČ







Reflecting upon supercomputing, *becoming.a-(thing)* is a modular artwork —like a score— that can take different forms, display variations and variable elements.
The following description, as well as the video, relate to the presentation of the work at its premiere at the LifeSpace Gallery in Dundee in Spring 2017.

becoming.a(thing) presents itself as an audiovisual performative installation that associates objects, data, algorithms and humans, what the artists call a «Congress of Actors».
The objects include such things as computers (loads of them) among which the suitcase-sized supercomputer 'Wee Archie' [1], an ultrasound scanner, SD card, articles, books, microscope, microphones, cameras, video projectors.

The algorithms encompass speech-to-text and image recognition softwares, *XMountains* [2] a fractal terrain generator developped by Stephen Booth one of the EPCC scientists envolved in the project, a 'star extractor' [3] algorithm used by astronomers to identify stars and galaxies in raw telescope images, a weather forecast software.

The data are ... anything from images to texts, to pictures of cells under a microscope, to all kinds of measures about everything possible including the «weight of information» taken from a loaded card on a high precision scale and of course data/measures about humans.
The humans are the artists and the scientists that took part in the project of course, the mechanical turk that describes the generated image of the mountain, but also the audience, circulating between all the devices and projections, witnessing and (un)volontarily contributing to the flow of information and data processed.

The goal of an algorithm, of a software, is to solve a specific problem, to perform a specific task and to decipher and interpret a specific set of data. Even more so with supercomputers. And we rely on them to make sense out of huge amount of data that we are not able to process or to understand by ourselves any more.

What would happen if we were feeding the machine with any data, for instance an ultrasound image of a womb to a star extractor? Would that still make sense? For the machine as well as for the humans? In *becoming a.(thing)* algorithms are fed with unexpected inputs and they are asked

to make sense of them. This outcome is then further processed with another algorithm, and so on. Everything becomes a data to feed the machine, understood as a system, that produces outputs that in turn may become new inputs, in a constant flow. In the process humans may just become a 'thing» in the computerized society of 'thinginess'.

For the artists, «what we get is an emergence of meaning that does not have the meaning that was intended for. The important thing is to really consider the process of semiosis, not only something that is only attributable to humans, but that also emerges from the materiality of the objects that are involved in this congress of interpretation, in this process of meaning-making. Ultimately, the piece is a semiotic instrument, a tool to understand ourselves» [4].

Resource

[1] **Wee Archie**, a Raspberry Pi model of a supercomputer
https://www.epcc.ed.ac.uk/discover-and-learn/resources-and-activities/what-is-a-supercomputer/wee-archie

[2] **XMountain**, a fractal terrain generator written by Stephen Booth
https://spbooth.github.io/xmountains/

[3] **Star extractor software**
https://www.astromatic.net/software/sextractor

[4] **The semiotics of supercomputers, by Susan Fourtané**
http://www.featart.eu/index.php?id=63

CREDITS

«Becoming.a(Thing)» has been created by Špela Petrič and Miha Turšič
in collaboration with George Beckett and Nick Brown, EPCC Edinburgh, www.epcc.ed.ac.uk
INTERTWinE, www.intertwine-project.eu
and Slavko Glamočanin, Naprave, www.naprave.net

«Becoming.a(Thing)» has been created as part of the FEAT/Future Emerging Art and Technology project, featart.eu

FEAT is an initiative of eutema GmbH (AT), Stichting Waag Society (NL), and youris.com (BE).
FEAT has been funded by the EU backed programme FET (Future and Emerging Technologies) Open.
It has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement
No 686527 (H2020-FETOPEN-2015-CSA).