

Abstract Machines (2025)

Multimedia installation

This project is my Honors Thesis in Music. It was presented to the public on April 4th and 7th, 2025.

Description: Abstract Machines is a large scale installation divided into three rectangular ‘chambers’ enclosed with organza curtain. Each stages a different mode of sonic interactivity which engages the audience by responding to their sonic and physical gestures. Progressing through the installation veils and unveils different layers of dependence and data flow between chambers.

Through The Curtain is a kind of experiment, an open-ended exploration of a cluster of issues/themes that guide my practice. These are:

1. What it means and what it feels like to be extracted and abstracted as data
2. Cybernetic ‘animacy’ as it relates to strategies of interactivity in contemporary computer/multimedia art
3. Digital ‘weightlessness’ and the obscuring/repression of its dependence on physical computing infrastructure and industrial labor

Below, I describe the progression of the installation and try to give some of the conceptual color.

Stage 1: A bath of noise; interference, static, the errant snippet of radio broadcast. A broadband radio/emf receiver reads signal activity in the chamber. The receiver is hidden, but connected to a network of wire running along the curtains and scaffolding, a kind of sculptural antenna. The sound from the receiver is played into the space from monitors behind the curtains. As you move in the space, your distance from the receiver/wire network modulates the audio feed – because of the antenna effect of the human body, as well as the movement of personal electronic devices (cellphones, smartwatches) on one's person.

Stage 2: A quieter space with a moving camera feed on one wall. As you move and make noise, a hidden beamforming microphone array tracks your sonic position. This controls the video feed, which tracks and pans to the position of the sound source. A kind of haunted CCTV which sees by listening. As more people enter the space, you can see the tracking become frustrated, less precise.

Stage 3: An observation room. You can sit and watch as the computer looks for faces in the second chamber. Through the headphones, you can hear the raw video data sampled as audible noise.

Stage 4: There is no exit through the third chamber. To leave the installation, you must backtrack through the first two chambers. My hope is that the audience experiences the interactive systems differently when returning to the entrance—and notices the ‘hidden’ camera feed from the third chamber that is projected into the first.