

About the artist

Kevin Day's practice and research, encompassing sound, video, graph, web, and interactive media installations, examine contemporary art's critical capacity in response to the current socio-political issues of digital culture, subverting the encoding, extraction, and exploitation by data colonialism and information capitalism. Informed by the philosophy of technology, critical theory, media studies, and digital materialism, his research and practice question the ubiquitous logic of framing the world through information, indicative of an information-based way of knowing, and resist the extraction and abstraction of algorithmic processes through an insistence on the presence of "noise" in the information-capital complex.

Day was born in Taipei, Taiwan. He received his MFA and PhD from the University of British Columbia and is currently based in Vancouver. He has exhibited at venues such as the Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver), Center for Creative Media (Hong Kong), Qubit (New York), Centre CLARK (Montreal), The New Gallery (Calgary), and University of Hamburg (Hamburg), and presented his research through the top international platforms for art and technology such as SIGGRAPH, ISEA, and Leonardo. His work had been generously funded by the Canada Council for the Arts and SSHRC. Currently, he teaches digital art in the UBC Bachelor of Media Studies program and the politics of algorithmic and information systems at the UBC School of Information.

About the author

Alice Yuan Zhang is a Chinese-American media artist. Her practice traces the relationship between technology and ecology, and how this constitutes humanness across time and space. Her work takes form across mixed reality, browser-based, and physical installation, addressing themes of somatics, memory, migration, networks, infrastructures and materialism. Her research unfolds into public engagement through talks, performances, gatherings, and writing.

Alice co-founded virtual care lab in 2020 and co-developed the Solidarity Infrastructures course at the School for Poetic Computation. She has presented works and lectures through institutions including Gray Area, Oyou, Transmediale, Goethe-Institute, Trust, NAVEL, The Music Center, and The New Institute. Her research has been supported by CultureHub, Processing Foundation, and 0x Salon, and her writing has been published by Outland, re:arc Institute, Are.na, The Digital Review, and Ehippus Labs.

Typeface: Fungal by Raphaël Bastide and Jérémy Landes (Velvetyne Type Foundry). Find online in the context of the project fungal.page.

Inter / Access

950 Dupont St., Unit 1
Toronto, Ontario M6H 1Z2

interaccess.org

Gallery Hours
Tuesday—Saturday
11AM—6PM
Admission is always free

Founded in 1983, InterAccess is a non-profit gallery, educational facility, production studio, festival, and registered charity dedicated to emerging practices in art and technology. Our programs support art forms that integrate technology, fostering and supporting the full cycle of art and artistic practice through education, production, and exhibition. InterAccess is regarded as a preeminent Canadian arts and technology centre.



THE MEDIUM IS THE ENVIRONMENT

Essay by Alice Yuan Zhang

September 11 – October 12, 2024

Kevin Day's the "medium is the environment" is a multimedia installation that seeks expression for the carbon footprint of the Internet, though it concerns the physical dependencies of digital systems at large. Despite the ubiquity of digital systems in today's global society, their ever-accumulating cost across dimensions of labor, ecology, and geology remains elusive to definite calculation. As artist-researcher-educator, Day's integrated practice critically combines informed accounting with creative form, inviting the visitor to consider the implication of virtual infrastructures through both mind and body.

The space is dark and shapeless, further obscured by an occasional flux of fog. Between moments of visibility, the visitor may be able to decipher video being projected onto the ground. This visual component serves as fog's mirror counterpart - each scene references a fragment of what makes up the ecosystem of information and communications technology ("ICT"), from the interface layer of Zoom to the

networked city-scale of Vancouver, from the landscape of Mica Dam which powers British Columbia to semiconductor factories in Taiwan. There is little direct connection between the scenes but rather the general sense of vastness between scale and locality, model and real.

At some point, the video sweeps through a landscape of an open mining pit for copper and cobalt owned by Katanga Mining Ltd. The company operates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo while headquartered in Canada and more recently absorbed by Switzerland-based Glencore, the world's largest commodity trader. Such transfers of currency and control are as fluid as data traffic, mere background activity flowing unannounced beneath and beyond the quotidian hum of consumption they tediously uphold.

The business of the Internet depends on the business of natural resources, and the latter depends on whether nature remains available for re-sourcing. Mines eventually tire — Katanga Mining's

previous site Tilwezembe, located in a different province than the company's namesake, is but one of many now suspended from its commission. As one mine shuts and leaves behind a wreckage of ill healths and livelihoods, another is already underway, while the visual representation provided in Day's video serves as broad evidence of extraction, irrevocable and continuous. These motions thrive in abstraction, sustaining our noosphere as geologies and people are affected elsewhere. As the usual consumer loses track of the scale of usage and production alike, mass agency becomes dislocated amidst the quick current of technological change.

The medium of fog lends itself to generous shifts in measurement and meaning-in-conversation, Day shared with me his initial intent to automate the smoke machine's durations according to increments of the exhibiting institution's real-time data usage. As this proved difficult to deduce, this installation translates from gigabytes of Day's personal usage. It is often the case, in any effort,

to measure and communicate the true impact of ICT technologies, as each packet of information passes through a varied network of devices and pathways, nodes and admins.

Discrepancies are common among attempts at analysis, depending on which variables of sustainability are taken into consideration. One independent non-profit, Green Web Foundation, offers a "green web check" to inform conscientious users if a particular website runs on green energy rather than the status quo source of coal. This verification depends on whether the website's hosting provider has been registered in the organization's database, for which they must first meet an outlined set of requirements. A further look at the criteria¹ reveal a work-in-progress of what constitutes proper evidence of "green-ness", ranging from the type of renewable energy, to any use of green tariffs or environment attribute certificates, to any purchase of reputable carbon offsets (which require their own verification). It is easier to determine that a website is

green if it is hosted on independent infrastructure (an admin-managed solar-powered local server, for example), yet the onus still falls on the host to provide this context to a central source of truth. Meanwhile, most websites rely on the big-three cloud providers Amazon, Google, or Microsoft, all of which have data centers located across climates and continents, each operating at a varying degree of "green". In order to eliminate disruption and sustain the always-on access that their customers pay for, these cloud providers distribute hosting responsibilities among the many data centers. To complicate matters further, there is the hybrid and very likely scenario of a self-hosted website that calls upon other databases. As such, the main website is not the only destination but a dynamic composite of information from additional websites, which then differ in their hosting strategies. These many cases would render Green Web Foundation's verification process currently impossible². Google.com, however, is marked Green.

How do we relate to such pervasive obscurity? Whether actual sites of exhaust are in or out of view, the white heaviness of the air serves as Day's experiential reminder to re-tune our senses. Inferring from the various contexts the video offers, visitors may interpret the fog that surrounds them as exhaust all along the supply chain-of-heat, water, sweat, exhale. They may likewise ponder the psychological and systemic fog that comes with complexity, whether as side effect or precisely the product. But if analysis were led by the body, does a familiar affect permeate the current state of the World Wide Web? Leaning into the dreamlike nature that fog likewise affords, might we imagine (or remember) alternative modes of connectivity, more responsibly spanning networks of information as well as socioecological relation?

[1]<https://www.thegreenwebfoundation.org/what-we-accept-as-evidence-of-green-power/>

[2]<https://www.thegreenwebfoundation.org/support/im-using-a-cloud-provider-why-is-my-site-shown-as-grey/>