Welcome to Design Hub

Technics & Touch explores creative working relationships between robots and humans through the seemingly simple activity of drawing together. Engaging humans and robots in friendly competition, the project explores ways to pose questions to one another and expose what both can do well and what both can do better.

Through real-time feedback systems between robots, materials, the environment and human actions, the human and non-human collaborators learn from each other and create works which either participant by themselves would not be able to conceive.

The exhibition extends our commitment at Design Hub to place the exhibition design as central to (rather than simply supporting) the exploration and mediation of design research ideas. For Technics & Touch we have worked closely with graphic designer Sean Hogan to transform the Project Spaces into part-factory, part-laboratory, part-reflection zone.

As such, the exhibition has been designed to consist of two parallel spaces: a ‘live lab’ located in Project Room 1, where our artists in residence – Charles Anderson and Jondi Keane – will produce drawings in conjunction with the robot.

While Project Room 2 reflects upon a diverse range of works by practitioners who explore rule-based or procedural drawing which use a set of parameters to enable an idea or task to be performed.

Here, the works speak to three themes: Figure, Frame and Fugue. These groupings frame ways in which the activity of drawing assists us in understanding our relationship to the world, materializes our thoughts or enables complex interactions through algorithmic design processes.

Importantly, the exhibition moves beyond the fetishisation of new technologies and robotic processes to deeply explore the inter-relationship between humans and robots. It examines how designers might develop more effective interfaces to expand upon current capabilities and envisage new and progressive collaborative outcomes.

Technics & Touch responds to and extends upon Design Hub’s overarching curatorial intent to produce highly experimental exhibition environments that ‘perform’ design ideas and invite the audience to take an active part within the research process.

Fleur Watson
Curator
RMIT Design Hub
It can be argued that all knowledge is discursive. The development of new constitutive processes that are constitutionally relational and, therefore, is necessarily mobile. Thinking, then, is that which occurs in the dynamic movement of an ongoing and open-ended conversation. This conversation can be between humans: between humans and their environment, between humans and things, even between things themselves. In such a way thinking can be said to be distributive – comprising of multiple acts of co-creation. What we call ‘mind’ may be that which is configured as an ecology of thought and enacted collectively.

If knowledge is co-composed in this way and the features and continuity of our world are co-selected, then each time a new agent or actor appears the whole field of endeavour, of inquiry and realisation, re-constellates and shifts to re-calibrate the paradigm. If the new agent is a technology then it can either be subversive to the functions with which it has been charged or it might – through specific materiality and processes – become a new force generating new effects. For instance, in order for robot agency to flourish it must break the recursive function of mirroring human thought and develop its’ own modes of existence. This does not require a robot to be a fully autonomous artificial intelligence, although the project we are pursuing might be headed in that direction.

Yet before we can arrive there, together, humans need to be involved, interested in the actualization of thought that would allow each mode of existence to flourish and develop in relationship to their respective trajectories.

Technics & Touch is designed as a living lab whose organisational structure takes the form of a conversation. It can be argued that the act of drawing can itself be construed as one instance of just such an open-ended conversation. To draw a line is to ask a question. The aim of the lab is to ask questions that work through the assumptions we have about the way robots function by working alongside and with them. Inevitably, we must pass from discursive description to our own habits of perception, action and thought to begin to ask meaningful questions.

The conversation may begin with the human drawing a line to ask: “What if…?” which invites a response of “then this… and this… or this and that…” which then becomes another “what if this…?” and so on. The robot asks and answers, that is, its actions are already the answer to an explicit question. So the robot asserts “if I ask the robot to ignore or attend to a certain range of values, what happens then…?” The audience might actively disrupt the process by asking through the familiar, that is, through its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other robots, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its silicon brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than science fiction ever was.”

Here, the audience actively amplifies fear and exuberance.

This correspondence between the “what if – then this” of drawing is remarkably similar to the simple coding of “if/then” statements in coding algorithms. Algorithmic instructions even speculative ones. It is through the process of “what if; if/then; this and that…” that the unthinkable is able to be imagined. “Unthinkable for whom?” asks the robot. There is also the process of translation, interpretation and misunderstanding to consider: what is “the glitch” in the system? Is it the process itself or the outcome of that process – the ‘made’ object. Concurrently, this notion of autonomy seems to be accompanied by not only ‘existential’ quandaries around decision-making, but also with a simultaneous emphasis on interactivity. Having liberated things from their need to be in isolation, we now seek to find ways of re/engaging with them. One might ask: is this an anxiety that they may be quite happy without us? Or that we need to re-exercise a quantum of control? Certainly in robotics this simultaneous drive towards autonomy (artificial intelligence) and more sophisticated feedback systems and sensorial capacities is currently in full flight. Instead of elaborating further on autonomy, the focus here is on the robot asking: “What am I not understanding?”

Much of the tradition of rule based exploration in creative practices (visual art, writing, dance) can be understood as attempts to de-personalise, to pluralise authorship, to avoid or move beyond the entrapments of style and the enclosures of self, in favour of process and of an embrace of open-endedness, unpredictability and emergence etc.

In many ways this can be seen as a rediscovery or reformulation of traditional formal constraints. What better way to propel oneself beyond habits of thought into unforeseen imaginative worlds, than to be forced to make a rhyme at the end of every second line? It is little surprise that most writers feel that they are successful when their characters take on a life of their own.

Of course, the autonomy afforded to the successful work of art and the processes that enable it are complex, yet they are profoundly influential in the design fields. In particular the fascination with self-organizing systems, and a subsequent move from systems of control to open ended forms of discovery has led to an increasing drive towards autonomy, whether it be the process itself or the outcome of that process – the ‘made’ object. Concurrently, this notion of autonomy seems to be accompanied by not only ‘existential’ quandaries around decision-making, but also with a simultaneous emphasis on interactivity. Having liberated things from their need to be in isolation, we now seek to find ways of re/engaging with them. One might ask: is this an anxiety that they may be quite happy without us? Or that we need to re-exercise a quantum of control? Certainly in robotics this simultaneous drive towards autonomy (artificial intelligence) and more sophisticated feedback systems and sensorial capacities is currently in full flight. Instead of elaborating further on autonomy, the focus here is on the robot asking: “What am I not understanding?”

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List of works
(see floor plan for gallery positions)

1. Tissue
Casey Reas
2002 – 2015
Interactive computer drawing system and ink jet prints
Infinite number of ink jet prints (297 x 210mm)
Tissue is a series of drawings made via an interactive software system that documents the movement of synthetic neural systems. Each line reveals the history of one system’s movement as it navigates its environment. Tissue is built around the ideas of neuroanatomist Valentino Braitenberg.

2. Cloud Chamber 2
Charles Anderson with Tim Schork
2015
Interactive computer drawing system and ink jet printer
Dimensions and number of works variable and infinite

13. Cloud Chamber
Charles Anderson with Tim Schork
2012
Laser etched plywood panels; light boxes, photographic transparencies; computer animation
156 plywood panels (613 x 445mm)
Series of plywood light boxes (615 x 445 x 180mm)
Series of photographic transparencies (613 x 445mm)
Cloud Chamber is an ongoing series of works that trace the encounters between architectural spaces and their virtually present clouds of spatial data. In Cloud Chamber 2 we relinquish control of the process of production and invite others to engage directly with the generation of the drawing.

Consequently, Cloud Chamber 2 suggests the following questions: Is place infinitely reconfigurable and dependent upon individual interpretation and intervention? Or does this process, through the open ended and potentially infinite iteration of the same but different drawing, reveal what could be termed an emergent ‘tendency of place’ or spatial ‘grain’?

3. Theatre of the Self
Twilight of Idols
Jondi Keane
1985
Pen, ink and conte on paper
2 drawings (770 x 560 mm)

Body-Fold
Jondi Keane
1989 – 1995
Pen and ink on paper
Series of 25 small drawings (100 x 160mm)
The going particle; Blunted Cube; Fixations on Rike
Jondi Keane
1985 – present
Acrylic paint, ink, collage on found books and journals
Series of books (148 x 210mm, 201 x 297mm and 297 x 420mm)

These works correspond to a shift away from the dramatisations of the soap opera of the world towards an exploration of perceptual and conceptual processing of our surroundings. The drawings proceed through continuous variation and modulate the body-environment relation. In the 1990’s – 2000 the work they support were large-scale paintings taken off the stretchers and hung as skins, installations comprised of wall paintings, light with motion sensors and objects selected for their material and cultural resonance.

5. Con-sequencing
Note-line
Jondi Keane
2005
Collage on lined note-paper
4 drawings (210 x 297mm)

Emblem Series
Jondi Keane
1997 – 2010
Acrylic paint and pastels on paper
2 drawings (770 x 560 mm)

“Contracoup”; “Fear and Trembling”; “Procedural Drawing Book”
Jondi Keane
1985 – present
Acrylic paint, ink, collage on found books and journals
Series of books (148 x 210mm, 201 x 297mm and 297 x 420mm)

These drawings and books investigate ‘systems of attention’ by setting out a procedural (task-oriented) approach to drawing as a way to prompt and track embodied sequences and consequences. These works move away from expression, opting instead to enacting a range of expanded, embedded and embodied affects, in-situ. They support ongoing and current projects: blackboards drawings in the studio and large-scale, site-specific performative installations.

4. The Very Vary
Body-Fold
Jondi Keane
1989 – 1995
Pen and ink on paper
Series of 25 small drawings (100 x 160mm)

With/Out/With; Infinity Wallpaper; In&On; EroT
Jondi Keane
1985 – present
Acrylic paint, ink, collage on found books and journals
Series of books (148 x 210mm, 201 x 297mm and 297 x 420mm)

These works correspond to a shift away from the dramatisations of the soap opera of the world towards an exploration of perceptual and conceptual processing of our surroundings. The drawings proceed through continuous variation and modulate the body-environment relation. In the 1990’s – 2000 the work they support were large-scale paintings taken off the stretchers and hung as skins, installations comprised of wall paintings, light with motion sensors and objects selected for their material and cultural resonance.

6. Bodily Algorithms
Charles Anderson with Tim Schork, Gideon Obarzanek
2011
Digital prints
34 images (297 x 210mm)
1 image (1200 x 850mm)

Bodily Algorithms is an ongoing project exploring space through rule-based behavioural systems and dynamic interactive modelling techniques. Working with dancer and choreographer Gideon Obarzanek, the Bodily Algorithms workshop invited participants to work from a series of rules and everyday objects to create a performance connecting the organised and the unpredictable. Such a rule based choreography provides a fertile way of engaging with the spatial behaviours emergent in the relationships between individuals, crowds and urban environments, and aims towards a new understanding of form which develop implicitly from the organisational characteristics of network structures and introduces this understanding to a wider audience.

Bodily Algorithms 1 image (1200 x 850mm)
34 images (297 x 210mm)

7. **A House for Hermes 02: Bel Povera (v1)**  
Charles Anderson with Tim Schork  
2012  
Computer animation  
Dimensions variable  

*A House for Hermes* is an ongoing project musing upon what constitutes ‘house’, ‘home’ and ‘place’ in the contemporary world of ceaseless change, displacement and exile. This computer animation is the first iteration of a larger work which forms part of *A House for Hermes 2: Bel Povera*. A dynamic behavioural-based modeling system was used to visualise the continual formation and dissolution of a series of houses. Each house is achieved as a momentary poise in a turbulent cloud of dust particles – a kind of choreography of dust.

8. **Topographies of Thought**  
Charles Anderson  
2014 – present  
Various media on paper  
207 drawings (210 x 148mm)  

*Topographies of Thought* is an ongoing series of drawings which trace an attempt to draw a straight line in a variety of situations and over a range of times and durations. Adopting simple rule sets governing the drawing procedure and the type of drawing implement used, generates an emergent drawing which is both unforeseen and responsive to the particularities of its situated performance: a kind of terrain map of thoughtful places, or a process diagram of a line becoming more than a line.

9. **Painterly Forms**  
Kokkugia / Roland Snooks  
Project team: Roland Snooks, Marc Gibson, Cam Newnham  
2015  
Digital prints  
4 prints (960 x 540mm)  

*Painterly Forms* explores the design of strange objects through the interaction of self-organisational and gestural operations. These experiments attempt to blur the relationship between the complex order that is generated through algorithmic processes of self-organisation and the direct operation of the hand. These two types of operation are placed within a feedback loop where each manipulates and reforms the other. This is an attempt to tease out the qualities of distinctly different processes and explore the blurring of recognition that their interaction creates.

10. **Sagrada Familia Basilica**  
Passion façade (upper colonnade)  
Jane Burry  
2008 – 2015  
Printed plaster model (211 x 181 x 380mm)  

The model is part of one version or instance in a long process of negotiation of interacting algorithms. The computational model marries the contrasting but interdependent geometries of the upper colonnade for Passion façade of Antoni Gaudí’s Sagrada Familia Basilica. This model aimed to tease the geometries as close as possible to the intentions evident in Gaudi’s mixed media drawing for the façade, of which one historic photograph survives. This printed model is a step in a process leading to the subsequent design of the individual granite components, which are now cut and almost fully assembled on site.

11. **Urban Jungle 1-6**  
(Central Hong Kong, Mid-Levels, Happy Valley, Quarry Bay, Repulse Bay, Sheung Wan)  
Kristof Crolla  
2015  
ink on paper  
6 drawings (841 x 594mm)  
Laboratory for Explorative Architecture & Design Ltd. (LEAD)  

*Urban Jungle* looks at the clash between Hong Kong’s natural and concrete jungle through a unique lens that merges traditional Chinese ink painting techniques with algorithmic design tools and low-tech robotics. A series of original drawings are presented that are made with a tailor-made drawing robot that uses ink pencil brushes and specifically designed drawing algorithms to produce its output. The artwork addresses Hong Kong’s confrontation between the built environment and nature, and visualises the resulting forces that drive the vertical city upwards into its unique high-rise typology. The premise is that both the natural and concrete jungle are organically growing ecologies. The developed drawing style visualises these two systems as ‘alive’ and ‘interconnected’ in a mutually parasitic relationship.

12. **Stigmergic Contours**  
Gwyllim Jahn & Christopher Ferris  
2015  
Texta drawings on butchers paper  
Video of autonomous drawings generated through feedback between computer vision systems, robotic motion and design behaviours  
7 drawings (1 drawing 530 x 465mm, 1 drawing 293 x 293mm, 5 drawings 335 x 335mm)  

These drawings are the artefacts of a process of calibrating vision systems with algorithms directing robotic behaviours. Although they carry a functional value as a litmus test of the suitability of algorithms designed to trace the profile of previously deposited material (or drawn lines), they possess qualities that are unique to the complex feedback between systems driving the motion of the robot, observing changes in the physical environment, and directing behaviours within digital simulations.
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Casey Reas
2002 – 2015

2. Cloud Chamber 2
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2015

3. Theatre of the Self
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13. Cloud Chamber
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2012

MTalks Consortium Event at MPavilion
Tuesday 15 December, 6.15pm
Queen Victoria Gardens, St Kilda Rd, Melbourne

MPavilion brings together Gertrude Contemporary, West Space, RMIT Design Hub and Next Wave to present an intriguing and honest conversation about the issues within (and surrounding) emerging and experimental art and design.

For this discussion, the panellists will delve into the idea of galleries as ‘testing spaces’ for risk, experimentation, play and speculation.

Following an introduction from RMIT Design Hub Curator Fleur Watson, artist and landscape architect Charles Anderson and arts academic Jondi Keane will exchange ideas with invited guests about the exhibition. Using the Technics & Touch lab as a springboard, Charles and Jondi will explore how gallery spaces can present exciting opportunities for autonomous intelligence systems to interact with performers and the public – meaning further interactions between arts organisations and new technology. Will this change the function of gallery spaces as we know them? And how will the artist’s role change with these developments?

Technics & Touch Symposium
Thursday 28 January, 1–4pm
Project Room 1, Level 2
RMIT Design Hub

Join Charles Anderson and Jondi Keane for a half-day symposium exploring the implications and applications of the Technics and Touch research project.

Speakers include Roland Snooks, Tim Schork, Jane Burry, Gwyllim Jahn, Pia Ednie-Brown amongst other invited guests.

Further programs and invited speakers will be announced via the Design Hub website: http://designhub.rmit.edu.au/exhibitions-programs/technics-touch

Connect with us via Instagram, Twitter and Facebook:
@RMITDesignHub
#RMITDesignHub
#TechnicsandTouch

Technics & Touch Conversations
Every Tuesday and Thursday, 3–4pm
Project Room 1, Level 2
RMIT Design Hub

Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon visitors to the exhibition are invited to join Charles Anderson and Jondi Keane in the ‘lab’ to take part in a series of informal and open conversations exploring human and robot collaborations. These conversations will prove an important ‘feedback’ loop in progressing the project to its next stage so come and be part of the live experiment!
Charles Anderson
Charles Anderson is an artist and designer with over 30 years experience exhibiting and making work in Australia and around the world. Charles creates a kind of vibrant work variously inhabiting the ‘worlds’ of art, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, performance and couture. Embracing collaborative partnerships, Anderson hybrides generative procedures to materialise processes of time in order to reformulate the spatial hierarchies that characterize the lived spaces of our world. A founding director of Stutterheim & Design Architecture, RMIT University. and a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture & Design, RMIT University.

Jane Burry
Jane Burry is an architect who has worked since 2000 with partner Mark Burry and the team researching the construction of the Sagrada Família Basilica where she was responsible for the basic design of the Passion colonnade. She is an associate professor in architecture and design at RMIT University where she directs the Spatial Information Architecture laboratory and leads the Master of Design Innovation and Technology. She has a PhD relating modern mathematics and its philosophy with computational design in architecture. She is lead author of “Mathematics of Architecture and Architecture.” She is a founding member of the Exlab and Architectural Design at RMIT in Melbourne, and a PhD at RMIT.

Kristof Crolla
Kristof Crolla is a licensed architect who combines his architectural practice “Laboratory for Explorative Architecture & Design Ltd.” (LEAD) with his position as Assistant Professor in Computational Design at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. After graduating Magna Cum Laude as Civil Architectural Engineer at Ghent University in 2003, he practiced in Belgium and built his first project, “House for an Artist”. He moved to London in 2005 to attend the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London (AA)’s Master of Architecture program Design Research Laboratory, from where his student work was exhibited at the 2005 Venice Architecture Biennale. Following this he worked for several years as Lead Architect for the Pritzker prize winning Zaha Hadid Architects, while teaching in parallel at the AA and other institutions worldwide. He has been invited as jury critic, lecturer and tutor in numerous institutions across the globe.

Gwyllim Jahn
Gwyllim Jahn is an Associate Lecturer in Architectural Design at RMIT in Melbourne and is a founding member of the Exlab and Elseware collectives where he is developing an architectural and artistic practice concerned with complex architectural geometry and behavioral systems, interactive environments, algorithmic design and digital fabrication. The speculative design work of this practice has been awarded and exhibited internationally, and documented in the form of contributions to leading international design conferences. This agenda is complemented by teaching design studios focusing on material computation, eco criticism and autonomous robotics, and independent design-make research in the mode of collaborative workshops in Iran, India and elsewhere. He is currently working towards his PhD at RMIT.

Jondi Keane
Jondi Keane is an arts practitioner, critical thinker and Associate Professor in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University. Since the 1980’s, he has exhibited, performed and published in the USA, UK, Europe and Australia producing works informed by studies in perception and action and enactive theories of cognition.

Casey Reas
Casey Reas writes software to explore emergent networks and layered instructions. He has defined a unique area of visual experience that builds upon concrete art, conceptual art, experimental animation, and drawing. While dynamic, generative software remains his core medium, work in variable media including prints, objects, installations, and performances materialize from his visual systems. Reas is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. With Ben Fry, Reas initiated Processing in 2001. Processing is an open source programming language and environment for the visual arts.

Tim Schork
Tim Schork is a founding partner of MESNE Design Studio and a founding director of RAW – The Monash Laboratory of Materials and Processes. Hosted within the Department of Architecture at Monash University, RAW is concerned with the transformative effects and contributory role that an informed engagement with materials and technologies can have on the practices of architecture and our built environment. RAW involves experts from architecture, structural engineering, material science, computer science, the arts and crafts, product design and robotics and is dedicated to the study, experiment, development and application of innovative material systems and progressive building technologies. Tim is internationally renowned for his design excellence and innovative work and holds a PhD from RMIT University.

Roland Snooks
Roland Snooks is a partner of the research collaborative Kokkugia, and director of the architecture practice Studio Roland Snooks. He is a senior lecturer in architecture at RMIT University having previously taught widely in the US including at Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, Pratt Institute and SCI-Arc. Roland received a PhD from RMIT University, in which his architectural design research is focused on behavioral processes of formation that draw from the logic of swarm intelligence. He holds a Masters in advanced architectural design from Columbia University where he studied on a Fulbright scholarship. In addition to his work with algorithmic design Roland directs the Architectural Robotics Lab at RMIT University.
Acknowledgements

Technics & Touch: Body-Matter-Machine

Project Room 1
Practitioners/performers:
Charles Anderson and Jondi Keane

Project Room 2
Works by Charles Anderson, Jane Burry, Kristof Crolla, Gwyllim Jahn, Jondi Keane, Casey Reas, Tim Schork, Roland Snooks

Curators: Charles Anderson, Fleur Watson, Kate Rhodes
Creative Production: Nella Themelios
Exhibition Technician: Erik North
Exhibition Assistants: Kate Riggs, Audrey Thomas-Hayes
Technical Assistants: Tim McLeod, Robert Jordan, Gavin Bell
Graphic Design: Sean Hogan, Trampoline
RMIT Architectural Robotics Lab Director: Roland Snooks
Programming and Development: Jules Rutten, Cam Newnham, Chris Ferris

Thank you
Boom Studios
Professor Richard Blythe
RMIT School of Architecture & Design
RMIT Landscape Architecture Program
RMIT School Research Committee

RMIT Design Hub

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Carlton, 3053
hello.designhub@rmit.edu.au
www.designhub.rmit.edu.au

Opening hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 11am–6pm
Saturday, 12pm–5pm
Closed Sunday, Monday and Public Holidays
Admission is free

Please note the exhibition will be closed from

RMIT Design Archives

By Appointment
The RMIT Design Archives is located on
the western side of the forecourt.
Contact the Archives to make an
appointment to view the collection:
rmitdesignarchives@rmit.edu.au

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