In his 1980 text, *L’invention du quotidien* [translated into *The Practice of Everyday Life* in 1984] French philosopher, Michel de Certeau, distinguishes the difference between daily existence and ‘everyday life’, based mainly on the notion that ‘everyday life’ is repetitive and unconscious. de Certeau explains that people individualize mass culture by altering the quotidian [objects, laws of language, and most importantly to my thesis, ritual]. With this in mind, I invited Winnipeg-based artists: Leah Decter, Michael Dudeck, and Freya Björg Olafson to devise projects that would be performative with an additional residual component to act as installations at PLATFORM for the remaining weeks of the exhibition. *RITUALIZ’D* is meant to offer an investigatory look into notions of ritual from various starting points -- personal, mythological, and digital.

The latest in her investigation titled *AVATAR*, which explores/exposes the digitization of gender and the body, Freya Björg Olafson’s new series, *A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location)* (2010) functions in two distinct ways in *RITUALIZ’D*. Opening night Olafson performed a quasi-collaborative set with chatroulette.com users. The website, www.chatroulette.com, is part of a new influx of user-driven content online that allow for live-stream peer-to-peer (unmediated) interaction using webcams. More often than not, these sites are populated with a mixture of men masturbating and young women seeking “chat” sessions with yet-to-be-discovered “friends.” For PLATFORM, Olafson projected a live session onto the gallery wall for the audience, unbeknownst to her online ‘collaborators’, as she performed a dance excerpt from the *AVATAR* project. The mixture of users that night was tamer than anticipated, with a number of men trolling for stimuli, but not necessarily pleasuring themselves. As she was dancing Olafson instructed me as to what to write in the chat box of the site and how to respond to other chatter’s questions. Overall the outcome was very funny, intentional or not, as so much improvisation winds up.

What is left in the gallery space is a laptop on a white plinth with a looping sequence of three videos from the *A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location)* series: *Dialogue*, consisting of a mundane written back and forth between the artist and an anonymous online chatter; *Brief Interaction*, a selection of webcam snippets where the artist superimposed a video excerpt from an earlier *AVATAR* performance for various surfers to gawk at; and *Sustained Engagement*, at which point the gawking moves into chatting of gob smacked chatroulette.com users and the artist herself. Alongside the works in video is a series of four black ink drawings on paper that offer an awkward outline of a
presumably female body morphed and contorted, informed through but also crippled by technology. The bulbous head, sagging breasts, and articulated fingers are each mirrored by the shape of keyboard keys, loose squares and buttons that offer no direction / connection but rather are imbedded into the figure itself. These videos and drawings, make reference to the female body as subject, and questions the role of technology and a hyper-digitized world in the staging and definition of gender.

Leah Decter's ongoing performance / installation, wig (2010), activated each Thursday afternoon until the exhibition’s conclusion, reconstituted what took place opening night when the artist dispersed numbered tickets to the audience prior to taking her seat centre-stage. Once seated facing away from the audience with her live image projected onto the wall of the gallery, Decter began her performance by clipping one lock of her curly black hair, followed by calling numbers she'd drawn from a paper bag at which point the audience was offered (in turn) the scissors to cut the artist's hair. This lasted approximately ten minutes, culminating with Decter taking the scissors back in order to cut off large clumps of her hair. The performance went on as the artist began nailing locks of hair (not the recently cut hair, but other hair from a separate stash) directly onto the projected frozen image of the artist from moments before.

By reworking her shorn hair into an ever-shifting figurative mural using drawing techniques and gold nails, Decter calls upon notions of impossibility but also defiance or perseverance as the figure she attempts can never be finished due to insufficient material -- a life unrealized, but also somehow undefined / indefinable and unknown / unknowable or unable to be complete(d). Throughout the exhibition, and of course during these weekly performances, the replay of opening night’s performance was projected onto the wall, looming over the artist-at-work. Following the original performance, a printer was installed adjacent to her evolving mural which in fact provides traces of the weekly drawing sessions. Throughout the day the printer would spit out sheets of paper covered with lines as digital monitoring traces from the artists drawing movement that in turn reference EKG-like traces.

Michael Dudeck is influenced by a pre-history of his own making for his project, Cathexis (2010). A Greek term Dudeck interprets as imbuing sexual energy into a person or object, the performance of Cathexis saw Dudeck and a male companion clad in butoh-style costume and white body paint engage in laboured breathing exercises while they made their way through the crowded gallery that was full with the heavy bass of an electronic musical score played overhead. Once the two reached their set: of three deer hides strewn across the floor and onto which Dudeck had primed with paint with meticulously drawn mandalas in blue ink beside a bucket of water and a strobe light; Dudeck laid his partner down and began to ceremoniously rinse and wash away the paint from his skin. Once the majority of the substance had been removed, Dudeck then picked up the strobe light and shone it onto the figure and then into the air, repeatedly, until he rested the light on the
floor and the two left PLATFORM and walked down the street in an attempt to distance themselves from the space of ritual, from the soaked hides full of bleeding and running ink, drying over the remainder of the exhibition and contorting like bloodied gauze on a battleground, or a cum rag in a teenaged boy's room. Dudeck did not return until days later.

Prior to this performance, the artist installed three large-format digital photographs onto a mint-green/blue painted wall of the gallery. These images illustrate the artist and his performance partner in a private previous iteration of Cathexis. The artist mounted these unframed works on paper to the gallery wall using a mass of white nails hammered in close proximity all along the border of the paper, effectively creating a stitch-like patterning especially once lighting was introduced, allowing for shadows to loom and connect like sinew or thread.

These installations act as catalyst environments in which to perform three separate pieces based on rituals of everyday life [ie: fueled by the repetitive and unconscious]. However, larger issues such as representation of illness, appropriation of cultural privilege, and ethical use of image in public domains have all come into play with RITUALIZ'D. It is important to offer a place in which to allow for questioning, especially if and how ritual remains present in our lives. de Certeau theorized ritual in the everyday through repetition. Indeed, there is repetition in Decter's ongoing weekly performance drawing; and there is a visual repetitiveness in Dudeck's framing device of nails as needles; and how more repetitive can we get than our relationship to the Internet, something Olafson makes painfully clear. Repetition is nothing without memory. As memory filters all we experience, ritual too, embodies and comes from a place of memory. Our individual and collective memories function and reinforce sources of understanding our everyday, recurring existence. These three artists, in each their respective fashion, contribute to a dialogue concerning memory and ritual: Decter uses social memory of illness and superficial appearance in order to re-imagine and interpret certain instances of trauma; Dudeck, by inventing a pre-history but still informed by existing ceremonial processions, offers an alternative understanding to the memory of how sexuality is nurtured; and Olafson's navigation of the Internet [perhaps the most commonly visited alter in the 21st Century] in the hopes of producing a duet for the purposes of her performance alter in the 21st Century] in the hopes of producing a duet for the purposes of her performance work, comments on the importance and fragility of data as memory in our techno-fueled lives.

J.J. Kegan McFadden
Director/Curator
EXHIBITION
20 May - 26 June, 2010

RECEPTION + PERFORMANCES
Thursday 20 May | 7:30PM sharp!

WEB PROJECT LAUNCH
ARCANA | CARMEN HATHAWAY
Thursday 20 May

WORKSHOP WITH FREYA BJÖRG OLAFSON
PEER-TO-PEER SOFTWARE 101
Thursday 17 June | 7:00PM

PANEL DISCUSSION
Thursday 24 June | 7:30PM

PLATFORM
J.J. Kegan McFadden, Director / Curator
Larry Glawson, Administrative Coordinator
Natasha Peterson, Outreach Coordinator
Glen Johnson, Technician

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