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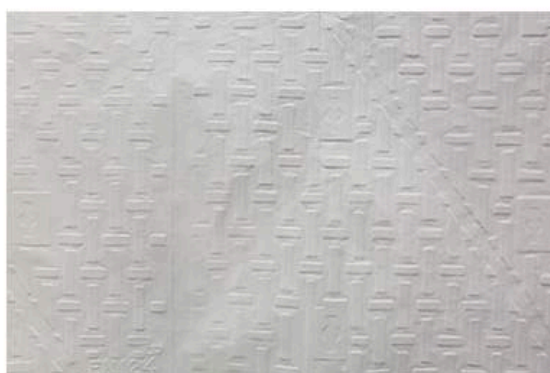
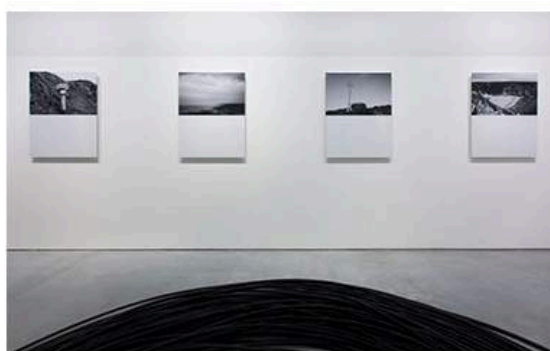
# VOICES OVER THE HORIZON

by Louise Benson | April 10, 2015



The online world is often mystified into an ephemeral, intangible realm of 'cloud' storage and lightning-fast transfers. In an increasingly connected Western world, it is often surprising just how few of us could really explain the inner workings of our smartphones, laptops or tablets. The latest versions of our devices emerge ever-smaller, further embedding this disconnect between our seamless daily interactions with technology and the physical reality of their hardware. Meanwhile, data storage is outsourced to vast server farms, and miles of cable are embedded into the remote terrains of our landscape. This rupture between the weightless digital mythology and its actual materiality is a focal point for many artists whose work confronts technology today, from [John Gerrard's photographic survey](#) of Google's immense data server building in Oklahoma, to [Emma Charles' documentation](#) of the fibre optic cables that link America's trade capitals drilled through the Allegheny mountains.

Evan Roth's solo exhibition, 'Voices over the Horizon', at Carroll Fletcher gallery entwines the two poles by plotting his journey into the workings of the internet. Using ghost-hunting equipment, he reframes his



voyage through its parallels to the DIY pursuit of the supernatural world. The wonderment and mystery with which technology is often approached is here equated to the tracing of paranormal activity, both rooted in unseen and often unknown forces. Relics of his voyage are placed around the gallery, anchored in screens, cables, photographic prints and even a whitewashed stone pyramid, discovered by Roth at the point where the first transatlantic cables connected with those to Europe.

The Cornish coast, where early telegraph cables have now been replaced with fibre-optic Internet cabling that is estimated to carry 25% of the world's Internet traffic, forms the site of Roth's investigations. Invisible signals and mobile interactions are captured on infrared and ultraviolet cameras, playing out in purple, ghostly footage. Amidst the natural landscape, visual reminders of the seemingly intangible emerge, forging a spiritual journey that feels far removed from the chaotic network of our online world.

*PM: 'Voices over the Horizon' incorporates sculpture, photography, video and technological artefacts. How did you go about selecting, and distinguishing between, these mediums for the show?*

ER: I didn't set out with an interest in utilising any specific materials in the show; rather, their use was dictated by what I found in the research and expedition phases of the exhibition. In all of the pieces I wanted to share with the viewer some of what it felt like to stand on the beach directly above the fibre optic cable and what it felt like to share physical proximity to the network. In some cases this led to photographs and video, and in others it involved creating a sculpture from 2km of fibre optic cable.

*PM: You describe a loss of innocence with regards to our relationship with the internet. How does your work rediscover some of the uncorrupted optimism that accompanied our initial fascination with technology?*

ER: I found a lot of optimism during the trip: in the ghost hunting community and their tools, in nature and in the resulting work. The act of the pilgrimage had a profound effect on me, but my optimism in the Internet itself has not returned. I think in that sense my trip ended very much like most ghost hunting excursions in which the primary objective is never reached, yet the investigator is left with many "personal experiences" (a term often used by



paranormal investigators) that further their commitment to continue the search.

*PM: If your journey to Cornwall was a modern-day pilgrimage, what did you find when you reached your spiritual destination?*

ER: Many of the things that I found show up directly in the exhibition (e.g. dramatic nature, a mysterious pyramid, cryptic manhole covers and a formerly secret NSA/GCHQ Internet spying station). In all of these encounters, however, the one thing I kept finding was isolation. There is a poetic contradiction in going to search for technology and telecommunications but finding instead nature and solitude.

*PM: You were drawn to ghost-hunting as a way to connect with the invisible technologies operating around us, in the same way many in the paranormal community would with disembodied forces. How was the experience of working within the DIY ghost-hunting community?*

ER: I really admire the sincerity and optimism of paranormal researchers, even when their search is sometimes so hard to separate from loss and failure. I think their relationship to technology is somewhat similar to the early users of the web, where primarily individuals and amateurs, building their own tools with little outside influence from commercial interests, drove it. I continue to draw a lot of inspiration from this community's approach towards technology and communication.

*PM: How did creating and using custom-built devices like the 'ghost box' for your work help you relate to the technology that is the internet?*

ER: Ghost hunters (or paranormal researchers) are typically searching for disembodied human energy, which is what I'm interested in searching for as well, but just in a different context. Ghost hunting technologies, like many of today's social media platforms, are made by believers who attempt (and often fail) to use technology to give us human and emotional connections to people who we rarely see in person.

Paranormal researchers often talk about the phenomenon of apophenia or matrixing, which



involves our brain's natural instinct to want to find patterns in randomness (e.g. finding faces in the clouds or seeing apparitions in the mist). The notion of producing technologies that allow us to see things we want to see (rather than what might really be there) seems connected to our online identities and relationships, where we create and craft idealized avatars and count our "friends" by the thousands. In this sense I feel there is not only a technical rationale for using ghost hunting equipment (e.g. tools for visualizing invisible human energy), but also a metaphorical connection to society's larger relationship to technology.



*For more information on 'Voices over the Horizon', click [here](#). To see more of Evan Roth's work, click [here](#).*

