

**Phantom Limbs and the Image-Object: Toward a Feminist Materialist Account  
of the Points of Contact Between Tangible and Digital Space**

Conference Proposal for *Material Environments: Sensing Time and Matter in Digital  
and Visual Culture*

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**Abstract:**

What might a feminist materialist account of the relations between so-called “real,” tangible, material spaces and online, digital spaces look like for contemporary art? This paper examines recent work by London-based artists Rowena Harris, Joey Holder and Cath Hughes, in an attempt both to locate productive ways of understanding material/digital tensions, and to address some theoretical and political shortcomings of “dude-centric”<sup>1</sup> theories of the digital. Artie Vierkant’s “The Image Object Post-Internet” (2010), for instance, usefully contextualizes post-internet art’s uniquely hybrid material and conceptual foci; yet his insistence on the seamlessness of transitions between physical and online space is deeply problematic, failing to address either labour conditions or value production within hybrid online/offline experiences. Since Edward Snowden’s NSA leaks of 2013, artists such as Evan Roth have grappled more directly with the troubled relations between materiality, corporations and governmental surveillance online; however, many such attempts at a materialist account of the digital do little more than fetishize materiality as the hidden “real” of the internet. Harris, Holder and Hughes pay closer, more critical attention to the relations between physical touch and the optical infinities of digital space. Harris examines minute translations between touch and screen; she analyzes disjunction, rather than advocating seamlessness. Holder’s sensuous digital collages take online space as a proposition for proliferation, envisioning it as a medium that (quite literally) reproduces life. Hughes analyses the ways in which online platforms subtly reshape the most intimate of women’s experiences: the production of families. Each of these artists, I argue, treat digital spaces as “phantom limbs” of sorts, extensions of embodied materiality that interrupt expected distributions between sensuality and agency within highly specific corporate, ideological and phenomenological contexts. They theorize points of contact between bodies and digital spaces as part of a sensuous politics, whose disruptions bear much weight on material experiences and embodied beings.

**Bio:** Emily Rosamond is a Canadian artist and writer. She is a Commonwealth Scholar in the Art PhD program at Goldsmiths, University of London.

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this term from Paddy Johnson, “Enough with Dude-Centric Net Art Shows,” *Art F City*, 17 April 2012 (online), available at: <http://artfcity.com/2012/04/17/enough-with-the-dude-centric-net-art-shows/> [Accessed 15 April, 2015].