

Maladies Of The Infinite

Text by Johannes DeYoung and Federico Solmi

Reality isn't what it used to be. In the summer of 2019, it was hard to miss the semi-centennial celebrations of the Apollo 11 moon landing. Museum exhibitions, cinematic features, daily news coverage, and social media kept much of the American public occupied swiping, tapping, and clicking in commemoration of the emblematic event. The moon landing on July 20, 1969 was as much a sign of human desire as it was a feat of scientific technical accomplishment. Apollo's Muse: The Moon in the Age of Photography, an exhibition organized by Mia Fineman and Beth Saunders at the Metropolitan Museum of Art stands as testament to generations of poetic expression projected at the moon. Its metaphors for human aspiration, melancholy, and desire remain as relevant today as in centuries past. Now more than ever we find heightened resonance for lunar poetics, especially when expressed in contrast to present day attention economies where desires never cease.

In 2018, Federico Solmi and I initiated a dialog that would evolve into an exhibition at Artspace New Haven. The title of our exhibition, *Strange Loops*, takes its name from Douglas Hofstadter's

seminal text, *I am a Strange Loop*, a book that explores self-referential systems as paradigms for human cognition and the emergence of ego. In the early decades of the Twenty-first Century, lunar poetics illuminate the contemporary drive for self-actualization, especially where notions of identity and desire have become inextricably intertwined with the technological drives that enable such expressions. As artists working within the trappings of Twenty First Century media culture, we share interest and concern in the social and psychological effects of media culture at large; the paradigm of the self-referential loop is an especially relevant metaphor.

Models of recursion exhibit heightened cultural relevance in the media landscape that has evolved in the twelve years since Hoftstadter's publication. The space race that once propelled humankind to new celestial heights accelerated technological developments that have irrevocably shaped the foundations of contemporary human experience. Fifty years after the moon landing, our tools are no longer mere voyage-enabling instruments, but psychic extensions of ourselves — black mirrors for self-reflection. Today, we find ourselves enwrapped in an unprecedented digital technological revolution without knowing the consequences that we will inevitably pay. Infinite scrolling media feeds, click-bait, and virtual echo chambers of like-minded digital tribes facilitate our current race to the base. If it feels like a downward spiral, we want to know more about the centrifugal forces that drive us.

French sociologist, Émile Durkheim, described a relevant condition in which unregulated desire cannot be satisfied, but rather becomes more intense — a malady of the infinite. The artists represented in this exhibition do not share immediate or explicit aesthetic relations; instead, their works tide toward thematic motifs, exploring the boundaries of human experience in an age of emergent technologies, whose capacity to redefine and transform our environments occurs at increasingly rapid and massive scales. Accelerated cultural and technological transformation stirs complex sentiments of optimism and anxiety. In such a moment of cultural anomie, the works in this exhibition serve as sites of expression, experience, and reflection, asking timely and challenging questions of cultures whose embrace of techno-fetishism, digital colonialism, and born obsolescence have placed the Anthropocene into precarious balance. While humanity's race with and against the machine is not a new story, it is one that remains hyper-relevant in the first quarter of this century. Our current base-race only further emphasizes the bottomless pit that has haunted the moon for millennia, one that brings us closer to an archetypal lunar poetic, one that spirals us nearer the brink of a timeless and infinite abyss.

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