

AKIMBLOG

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TERENCE DICK
 PUBLIC STUDIO AT THE AGYU / SARAH ANNE JOHNSON AT THE MCMICHAEL
 COLLECTION
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Like 8

Getting back to nature is an increasingly complex endeavor, not simply because it raises these two questions: 1. Were we ever there in the first place? 2. When did we leave? The simple answers might be 1. Yes and 2. We haven't, but that doesn't do much to clear up our muddled thinking about the world that grows outside our windows (and sometimes on our window sills). There are too many overlapping and deeply entrenched assumptions to be found in our various histories, technologies, biographies, and psychologies of biology to reduce our place as human animals in the world to an "everything is one" ethos.



Public Studio, *Everything is One*, 2016, LED screen, saplings

Public Studio, the collaborative art practice of **Elle Flanders**, **Tamira Sawatzky**, and (at least in this particular exhibition) a number of expert contributors, make exactly that suggestion in the central work of their ambitious Art Gallery of York University exhibition *What We Lose in Metrics*. However, their *Everything is One* installation turns the table on purists and inserts a gargantuan LED advertising billboard within the gallery to serve as a source of light for a nursery of saplings. Before reaching this point, the viewer has travelled down a shadowy tunnel beneath overhanging branches, discovered a cabin in the woods, journeyed through the collective unconscious of film memory by viewing a collage of ominous wooded scenes from Hollywood's past, and then walked in step with a series of video game players who promenade through virtual forests that have had their attack modes largely neutralized in order to allow for contemplation.

Contemplation is definitely in order here because the dense textual overlay, from the scrolling declaration of the Rights of Nature to the poetry incorporated into the gaming works, takes time to unfold and requires parsing. Those not acclimatized to the worlds of *Assassin's Creed*, *Skyrim*, or *Dragon Age* also need to adapt to the uncanny valley realism of the digital realm before they embrace this most recent extension of nature. In doing so, the question of whether all nature is an extension (as in: is all nature unnatural?) can be added to our list.