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**“Digital Threats and Security Aesthetics in
Three Museum Exhibitions :
Three Versions of Our Present and Future”**

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Room PER E130 / 17:15 – 18:45**

Abstract :

Digital threats and issues of cybersecurity are difficult for most people to comprehend because the way people experience digital media creates an illusion of privacy and confidentiality. In this essay I explore the aesthetic problems I identify as the experiential gap and digital opacity in order to analyze museum exhibits where efforts to represent digital threats and cybersecurity have literally materialized in displays that seek to make tangible security and threat scenarios that are otherwise largely outside the realm of sensory experience. The analysis draws on aesthetics to consider the museum-goer's experience, and decodes the hidden cultural messages and values embedded in three exhibits: The Weapons of Mass Disruption room at the International Spy Museum in Washington DC, the Cyber Detectives exhibit at the Tech Museum in San Jose, California, and the traveling art exhibit Covert Operations which has been displayed at the San Jose Art Museum in California and at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona. Given how entwined digital media are in people's daily lives, we might see discourses about digital threats as part of a technosocial imaginary that describes the world we inhabit and possible futures ahead of us. The three exhibits examined here tell very different stories about the kinds of threats digital connectivity poses in our lives, revealing the complex contours of the struggles over competing visions of technology, security, and society.