MEGAN YOUNG / Research Statement

I am an interdisciplinary artist utilizing new media tools, performance structures, and community engagement to identify and disrupt intersecting systems of oppression. My scholarly research and creative projects reveal how hierarchies of power are imprinted through acculturation and artifacts. In our post-digital age, these unequal binaries are being hard coded into daily life through the platforms and pre-sets of physical-digital interactions. I combine my training in creative coding, visual design, and performance disciplines to unseat discriminatory systems and build alternate realities.

My work draws from phenomenology and cultural anthropology, including research by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, political scientist Iris Marion Young, and psychiatrist Chester Pierce. Merleau-Ponty's writings demonstrate the malleability of identity creation through time and the importance of the body as a first interface with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2000). Young demonstrates how acculturation and rules of social deportment shape an individual's conception of their own abilities (Young, 1980). Taken together, those theories demonstrate how limitations on the body produce conflicts of identity (Young, 2004). That premise becomes all the more potent for those representing historically marginalized populations in the United States, when considering the repetition of casual degradation in social interactions. Pierce uses the term "microaggressions" to describe such occurrences (Sue, 2010).

I consider how biased social systems are being reproduced and distributed through human-computer interaction (HCI) developments. HCI combines visual design, technology, and behavioral research. It is essential for the commoditization of daily life in our experience economy, even as it perpetuates entrenched privilege. While some HCI designers are considering how to take a "justice approach," undesired outcomes persist (Fox et al., 2016). The issues associated with HCI pervade private shopping, personal banking, and online job applications. However, the most concerning applications are being utilized in USA law enforcement and international warfare. Researchers including Simone Browne (2015) and Iván Chaar López with the Precarity Lab (2019) demonstrate how present day tech interfaces follow patterns established during the transatlantic trade of enslaved persons. This is certainly not a new issue and I recognize the history of surveillance and technological control of precarious bodies in my ongoing examinations.

As other researchers have discovered, technology has surpassed the role of mere tool and must be invited in as an influential collaborator (Carlson, 2016). Taken that way, I collaborate with multiple interfaces, including: Max MSP, Processing, and other interactive software; 3D printing, 3D pens, and lasercut manufacturing; Arduino, Rasberry Pie, and other physical computing components; surveillance cameras, body cameras, and other forms of live capture.

My research is applied through exhibition and performance, in addition to academic presentation and publication. Dissemination is also conducted through guest lectures, workshops, interviews, and artist talks. Notable venues include the New Media Caucus Symposium: Border Control, International Symposium for Electronic Arts, International Workshop on Movement & Computing, and the Conference for Research on Choreographic Interfaces.

I regularly engage multi-year collaborative projects resulting in development of new physical computing techniques, custom software, and unique approaches to digital interfaces. A recent project, titled *Cloud of Whiteness* (2017) combines research on surveillance, race, and immigration with considerations of the body. This installation and performance work serves as a microcosm of institutionalized racism. Users move red clay and white painted bricks toward the construction of monuments, walls, or shelter. A surveillance camera tracks those changes by processing live-feed video through costume software. If participants disrupt the average luminosity (whiteness) of the installation space, it activates a kinetic sculpture through physical computing techniques. The sculpture is actually a miniature theatrical snow cradle, set in motion by a pulley and motor, so that it snows whiteness back into the exhibition space. SPACES is the original commissioning venue, though related works have subsequently been presented through the Ammerman Center for Arts & Technology at Connecticut College, commissioned and presented by Chicago DanceMakers at Chicago Cultural Center, and presented by The Current Sessions in New York. As a resident artist at the Ammerman Center, I co-lead workshops and talks on this project, with research published in the Biennial proceedings.

Another project, titled *And Me in My Place (2013 -)* compares the Downing and Roush stage model of feminist identity development (Downing & Roush, 1985) to Young's research on physical conditioning and public performance of identity. I conduct one-on-one movement sessions directed by participants in their workplace settings. All sessions are documented through video and post-experience notes. Then, I create experimental video portraits from documentation and apply principles of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) to contrast moments of passive acceptance against indications of other Downing & Roush stages. The project demonstrates how physicality is central to the process of identity creation. Essays detailing methodology, findings, and relevance of this work are in process and proposed for publication through Feminist Media Studies, International Journal for Performance Arts & Digital Media, New Media & Society, and similar. The digital portraits have been presented as new media art in venues including: the World Trade Center of Montreal as part of Art Souterrain: Labor Improbus, Woman Made Gallery, Book & Paper Center Gallery, and Rooms to Let: CLE.

I look forward to the challenges and breakthroughs still to come. I continue to present at conferences and use those opportunities to prime my writing for publication. I commit to deepening the breadth and scope of my research through relevant extramural activities, including art and technology development residencies and research groups. I welcome the opportunity to present course offerings aligned with my artistic practice, including: socially informed courses in Interactive Design, Installation Art, or Media Performance. Finally, I am eager to expand my research and practice through engagement with new colleagues and creative practitioners.

References

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