

Screen Bodies: Interactive New Media Art and the Body as Backdrop, Support and Surface

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Over the past four years, one aspect of my research in the field of Modern and Contemporary Art History has concerned the recent rise of a portable and powerful projection art medium on an international basis. Following developments in digital technology from the 1980s onward, professional artists, guerilla artists, and eventually design firms increasingly turned to large-scale environmental projections as a means of communicating with a wider public and also affecting the fabric of urban space. Two of my articles published in peer-reviewed journals in 2012 dealt with the cultural and ethical ramifications of this remediation of public art, video art, and protest art in the rise of a new projection aesthetic, and currently I am drafting an essay for an edited book on the subject of interactive art prototypes constructed with microcontrollers.

My research proposal for the summer of 2013 is an expansion of these previous forays into developing areas of New Media Art, and another crucial step toward my goal of completing a book manuscript on contemporary digital art in the next five years. In collaboration with Emma Jonas, who will research the ties between New Media Art and Modernist painting, my focus for the proposed project concerns the ramifications of digital art that uses the body of the viewing/experiencing subject as a material, support or screen for its aesthetic operations. Much like Jonas, who will examine the legacy of “immersive” works that gained ascendancy during the mid-20th century, I plan to draft an article that considers the ramifications of the human body as a backdrop for the operations of a pseudo-sentient interactive, projective and digital work of art.

At the Elektra International Digital Arts Festival in May of 2013, I will view and document New Media works of art that either subsume the form of the human body through aggressive and totalizing modes of projection, dissolve the body through ghostly practices of ‘telepresence’ virtuality, or subjugate the body to the activities of roboticmechanical works of art. With Jonas’s help, I will also interview prominent New Media artists such as Rafael-Lozano Hemmer and participate in technical workshops that will instruct me in the engineering methods of their groundbreaking work. Returning from Elektra, I will pursue historical and theoretical research that should illuminate remediation of painting, dance, and other forms of popular culture spectacle from the late 19th and early 20th century in these emerging artistic trends of the new millennium.

Part of my research on New Media art was supported by an Atkinson Travel grant for summer, 2012, when I attended the annual Mapping Festival in Geneva, Switzerland and the Documenta Exhibition in Kassel, Germany. Currently I am a finalist for a Fulbright grant to teach a course on New Media art in São Paulo, Brazil in the spring of 2014. In addition, Jonas and I will consider applying for an Oregon Arts Commission Grant in the fall of 2013 that would support projection-based installations on campus and at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art.