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UB DMS
MFA Media Arts Production
Statement of Purpose
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Toward a Media Art of Poetic Performance

Casablanca In Cairotronica Supper

smoky room full of artists circled round
tables and ornamental lampshades talking
and mustached Frenchmen smoking in
corners and German Austrians and loud
Arabic drinking and laughing cheers hurrah!
To Egyptian Stella- woman in orange head
scarf and large based red plush chair
sherbet Smokey tapestry the feeling is
impossible the feeling is untenable the
feeling is high and oh so very high
I sit and am full and am jet wondering lag
about media artists and if this room is
important or is a school band trip to Prague
in the 10th grade
And if I am One of The Gods or just a
collector but I guess collectors are important too
So shoulder on and cobble on and the Brit
says “we’re troubadours” and I am saying
“yes” and now I’m still making things that I don’t understand
But I know the feeling is there and maybe I’ll
get it for me and mine or maybe die and it
comes to nothing that makes me sad
But that will have been a good life too

- Cairo, Egypt. May 2018

As Richard Sennett settled into a panel conversation following a lecture on craftsmanship earlier this year, a familiar dilemma began to emerge in the dialogue. His conversational partner was speaking on the anxieties of making and selling art in a workshop setting, and Mr. Sennett responded with the wisdom of a longtime performer.

“This comes down to the old Marxist idea of use value versus market value,” he explained in a framework that pits the political and economic infrastructure of the performing arts against that of the object based visual arts. For an audience of cultural laborers producing

films, lectures, games, exhibitions, and interactive environments at the intersection of art and technology, this could not have been more relevant of a discussion.

As an artist and researcher, I myself have been investigating these anxieties in depth over the past half decade, especially as questions of economics and politics pertain to the identity of what is largely categorized as “media art” or “new media.” Computer driven installations, electronic poetics, and interactive environments neither occupy the economic or cultural positions of musicians playing concerts or painters making paintings. What then are these things, and what are they actually doing in the world?

My current answer was in part revealed to me during my time at the 2018 edition of the *Cairotronica* media arts festival in Cairo, Egypt. I was invited there to exhibit a piece that I have been working on over the past couple years, titled *The Ambient Internet is a Folk Song Also*. Produced out of my time at UCLA’s Design | Media Arts department, the installation positions the capture and translation of internet data as analog to cultural traditions of poetry and folk music. My crucial realization in showing the work this time, however, was just how often I and the other artists present needed to physically accompany the works on display.

It went far beyond the usual maintenance and technical difficulties — anyone who has ever been involved in the presentation of computationally powered artworks knows the frequency with which these types of things occur — and became a part of the experience of the artworks themselves. Each time an artist was present to demonstrate their work, to guide an audience in enacting its technical functions, to perform the artwork — the reception was immediate and the energy palpable. This kind of intervention is necessitated by the youth of the genre and the often times opaque semiotic language that arises from the perversion of ever-updated consumer technologies. Audiences are, understandably, unsure of how to navigate these materials when they are displayed in the familiar look-don’t-touch context of things like sculpture, painting, and video.

Out of this excited chaos, though, several artists and theorists have caught my attention whose work offers a path toward a more engaged, more responsive media art - one where performance takes an increasingly important role. Artists like Jeffrey Scudder, Tan Lin, Goodiepal, and Jeremy Bailey, among others, cultivate in their practices a kind of mobile workshop-lecture-tech-demo-performance art. Economically and politically, this kind of work reinvigorates Fluxus notions of democratized art spaces and anti-market sentiments while offering revenue streams outside of the traditional art industrial complex. It also critically engages with ideas from a theorist like Boris Groys, who argues in his 2008 book *Art Power* that “A digital image, to be seen, should not be merely exhibited but staged, performed.” As I have tracked these ideas further, I have started to push my new work more intentionally into these areas, albeit with my own influences and artistic agenda at play. Earlier this year I performed *Honey Mustard & Diesel Fuel* at a backyard venue in Los Angeles, a one hour performance of poetry in a set filled with video works, Processing sketches, and images from my photographic archives.

This research, however, is far from over, and the financial and technical resources available to me at UB’s Department of Media Study would allow this research to flourish in content and in scale. The work requires me to go much deeper than ever before into areas of economic history and the anthropology of performance in order to produce poetic encounters that

capture the kind of audience attention necessary to effect change. This research will also contribute to and benefit from work already being done in the Media Studies department, like Josephine Anstey's performative lectures in the Intermedia Performance Studio, Margaret Rhee's investigations into digital poetics, and Andrew Lison's work on the theory and history of new media. The interdisciplinary requirements of the MFA curriculum here will also provide opportunities for me to work across campus in spaces like the Poetics program in the Department of English, the Electronic Poetry Center, and the Outriders Poetry Project, all of which will enrich my output as an artist and scholar.

I am also particularly looking forward to contributing to the department as an educator through teaching assistantship opportunities. My theoretical areas of expertise include critical theory, film and media theory, philosophy, art history, and literature. My technical skills include analog and digital photography, photo editing, videography, video editing, fluency in the Adobe Suite including Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, After Effects, and Premiere Pro, 3D experience in Maya, Rhino, 123D Design, and 3D Printing with MakerBots, coding experience with Processing, HTML, CSS, and Javascript, projection mapping and interactive environments, and computing with interfaces like Arduino. My background as a creative technology teacher to elementary and high school students, STEAM educator, and mathematics tutor will serve me well in this role as I continue to develop as an arts educator.

Finally, there is perhaps no more necessary time than now to undertake this work within a publicly funded research university like SUNY Buffalo. In our current ecological and political climate, it is imperative for the artist-poet to perform relentlessly and create communities intentionally - performance that reclaims agency by reworking military and consumer technologies, and communities that investigate new ways to organize and survive within our current global systems. After all, to paraphrase the artist and cultural scholar Azra Akšamija, this "is an existential minimum...culture is a human need."