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a public course + research platform

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DEDICATION

In the spirit of the alternative forms of knowledge production that this project advocates, I must recognize here all the wonderful people who guided this research.

To mum, who, from an early age, I would listen to tell me how, once again, she was the only woman in an IBM conference room of men. This project, like everything I do, is inspired by you. You live in this research.

To David, my siblings, and family members who encouraged me to indulge in all my techno-feminist fantasies. To Tyler especially, who has shared numerous conversations with me about failure, bias, and visibility. I have learned so much for your sublime trains of thought.

Special thanks the School of Visual Arts and to Anselm Franke, David Frankel, Brian Kuan Wood, and Steven Henry Madoff for their astute and encouraging readings of various drafts of this project.

To John, Maria, Monica, Molly, and Yinka, thank you for sharing in this adventure.

To Beans, whose constant warmth and companionship I could not repay even with a lifetime of cat treats. But I'll try anyway.

To the many artists whose work has inspired this research, Morehshin Allahyari, American Artist, Zach Blas, Tabita Rezaire, Caroline Sindere, Paul Wiersbinski, and others.

And,

To everyone with a red line under their name in Microsoft Word.

This project is for *you*.

SEND IN THE CYBORGS

We braced ourselves for the angry kiss of the virus.

The sting of bleach in the air, our skin as coarse as sand, dry from the application of hand sanitizer. As we plunged into the deep end of chaos, we waited to be swallowed by waves of anxiety. Markets crashed, hospitals were underfunded and unprepared, borders closed—the entire globe consumed with the instinct of self-preservation. Feelings of self-protection and mistrust tend to swell during times of fear.

As with any global crisis, each of us will be remembered for our behavior during this time. What instinct did we embrace: the instinct of self-protection, or the instinct of compassion?

Did you lash out, or did you comfort?

If you have extra, did you share?

If someone relies on you for income, did you pay them?

If your neighbor lives alone, did you help her prepare?

If you wondered how someone is doing, did you call and ask?

Were you kind to your body?

These are disorienting times.

REWIRE YOURSELF

This project began life as an essay on the body and play in technology. Born into our world of screens, hyperbole, and excess, the project matured out of a certain spiritual and ontological nausea. Slowly, over two years, my little essay began to take the form of *<Ctrl + Shift 1>*. Across its various stages, the essay-cum-program remained focused on collectivity and embodiment, emphasizing community and the sharing of information. But pandemics such as the one caused by the coronavirus COVID-19 are inherently anticomunity. They prey on our desire for connection.

We will not shut down, and we will not shut up. *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* will instead confront the violent storm of COVID-19 by transferring the project online—now titled *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* (virus version). Creating new autonomous community zones is necessary if the project is to survive this moment. Like an antibody's response to a virus, *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* responds to the rising current of alienation surging through our bodies.

As we aspire to mutual aid and solidarity across the globe, *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* embraces the mass of unknowns and fears in our current collective functioning. By operating as a (web)site of creativity and play, *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* will attempt to find new ways to connect, share, and create communities in an age of growing and imposed isolation. I view this new format as a translation; to show the process of conversion, I have chosen to leave the text of the program in its original form. The thesis of this messy little program remains, and seems ever more urgent: how can we look at solidarity through difference? And what are the consequences of moving these conversations online?

With people across the globe told to stay home and avoid contact with others, the coronavirus pandemic has deepened our reliance on the technology industry's largest companies. Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Microsoft continue to benefit from changes to consumer habits. Stay-at-home orders have increased the number of subscribers to the videoconferencing service Zoom. Cloud computing has become crucial to the home worker. Traffic has surged on Youtube and Netflix.

But as coronavirus surveillance escalates, our privacy plummets. In January, South Korea posted the detailed location histories of its citizens who had tested positive. In Italy, China, Indonesia, Israel, and across the globe, similar digital surveillance tools are used as a means of exerting social control.¹ These increased surveillance and health disclosures only further widen social and economic divisions that also make the virus deadlier: a self-reinforcing cycle, a devastating feedback loop. By securing surveillance-camera footage, smartphone data, and credit-card purchases, governments and Big Tech further deepen the consequences of inequality. Inequality itself only heightens the spread of the virus—vulnerable populations are 10 percent more likely to have a chronic health condition.²

For the moment, COVID-19 will continue to restructure public institutions, including schools and universities, as well as businesses and public services. People are losing their homes, daycares, pensions, and prospects for work, and we are hearing the idea, voiced at high levels of government, that some populations are disposable, some bodies unimportant. Marked by social and economic deprivation, these bodies—these people—are always the most vulnerable of our communities. The original structure and content of *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* enacted the demands of techno-feminist, queer, and postcolonial theorists through the gathering of bodies in a public, persisting, and activist assembly that sought to break and remake our technological world. *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* is built and propelled by similar priorities of community, empathy, reconciliation, empowerment, and collectivity.

For bodies, individual and collective, an unmistakable and heightened sense of precarity has emerged through events outside our control. Precarity is a feature of our social bond, vulnerability apart of our commons. The point is that this profound sense of expendability and disposability is differently felt across the globe. COVID-19 does not discriminate in its germination, but it does depend on a set of networks that fail to support our mutual dependency. In other words, no one person experiences a lack of access to a virus test or subsequent medical care without a social and economic failure to organize an emergency response to the growing health crisis, a response accessible to all. And no one person suffers from unemployment without a political and economic system that fails to recognize the needs of all its populations. Each of us can itemize the damage this virus will cause in the plural.

2. Ibid.

1. See Max Fisher et al., "As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread," New York Times, March 15, 2020. Available online at www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/coronavirus-inequality.html

We have been brought to this moment through a series of failures—failures in recognition, failures in accessibility, failures in direct action, among others. To speak of failure, however, is to remind ourselves that the chaos of failing breeds new possibilities for pleasure, play, and experiment. The behavioral and spatial limitations engendered by capitalism may also yield liminal spaces oscillating between alterity and agency. As such, failure can offer relief from the labor of gender performance and can encourage new modes of self-recognition. It can generate new kinds of spaces of protest that promote solidarity, learning, and interdependency. This is the critical rupture that *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* sets out to offer: an alternative (web)site of knowledge production.

A fundamental restructuring of our socio-economic and techno-political order is now all the more necessary. In an age of growing paranoia, what public space is must be radically reimagined. Embracing a plural existence in a new kind of virtual public space, *<Ctrl + Shift 1.vv>* makes broad demands of recognition and value. As bodies, we will suffer, but we also resist, and together, in various locations across the globe, exemplify new forms of sustainable collectivity and social bonding.

This is our revolutionary moment.

CIS-DOMS OF CONTROL

Most of recorded human history is one large gender data-gap. The chroniclers of the past—historians, archaeologists, ethnographers, scientists—have (intentionally or not) left little room for women’s role in the evolution and construction of humanity. Instead, the lives of (white) men have been taken to represent those of humans overall, in a presumption of universality that has often left the marginalized invisible. And these insidious biases, ingrained as “objectivity,” are everywhere—in our films, our literature, our language, our city planning, our economics, our science. The histories we tell ourselves, the stories of our present and future, are all marked, disfigured, and shaped by this ever growing silence. Representation of the world is the work of men. They describe and create the world from their point of view “and confuse it with the absolute truth.”³ He is the Subject, the Absolute—she the Other.

This is certainly not a new observation: as long ago as 1949, Simone de Beauvoir famously declared that “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.” What is new, however, is the context in which the world continues to take the lives of men as representing humans overall. This context I speak of is a world increasingly reliant on Big Data. Numbers, technology, algorithms—all of these are crucial to understanding how Big Truths are today compounded by Big Algorithms corrupted by Big Silences. And while statistics are a type of information, so too is human experience. Indeed, place, class, and nationality all inform the differences and similarities between and across contemporary experience. So if the people making decisions that affect us all are white, differently abled men, that too constitutes a data gap.

Since computer algorithms now shape our world in profound and mostly invisible ways, it is time we demand a closer inspection of the values that are prioritized by algorithmically driven software. *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* emerges out of these subversive and urgent demands to make visible how race, capital, and gender are factors in creating unequal and unfair conditions. Organized as a single day-long event, *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* is a series of screenings, lectures, performances, and workshops informed by trans- and interdisciplinary approaches to feminist ideas and concepts.

3. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 50.

Intended to create a place of reflection and action at the intersection of technology, gender, race, and sexuality, this discursive program is entirely open, free, and accessible to the public.

Discrimination is embedded in computer code and increasingly in artificial intelligence. On the Internet and in everyday uses of technology, algorithms predict whether we will be valuable customers and whether we're likely to repay a loan. They selectively filter what we see on social media and in the news, sort through résumés, and evaluate job performances. They inform prison sentences, calculate who your most compatible partner might be, and monitor your health. These unseen algorithms have often been created with good intentions—to replace subjective judgments with objective ones, for example. By their very nature, however, algorithmic models are simplifications with significant blind spots, and these blind spots reflect the decisions and priorities of their creators, sacrificing accuracy and insight for efficiency, speed, and profit.

The challenge in understanding algorithmic oppression is that we often think of terms such as “big data” and “algorithms” as neutral, harmless, or objective. The reality is anything but. The cybertopian ideal, Safiya Umoja Noble writes, is inextricably linked to “neoliberal notions of individualism, personal freedom, and individual control.”⁵ These myths, or rather these persistent dominant narratives, suppose a techno-world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, sex, gender, economic power, or station of birth. In accepting this assumption, in refusing to acknowledge that technological discrimination by race and gender is a form of oppression, we deny ourselves the framework necessary for understanding the role ideology plays in positioning the subjectivities of communities in dominant and subordinate ways. The long-term consequences of automated decision-making technologies include a further masking and deepening of social inequality, in part because the people who control these technologies openly promote false notions of meritocracy. And so women and people of color are caught in an algorithmic feedback loop that profiles people by their differences and in the process helps create an environment that justifies the assumptions of its creators. *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* is concerned with developing a public conversation on algorithmic oppression, and on how digital information-sorting tools have become so fundamental to the classification and organization of information that they condition all of our lives. Here, the project asks, at what cost?

5. Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 85.

NO FLIGHT FROM EMBODIED EXISTENCE

The Age of Enlightenment, which emerged in Europe between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth century, was associated with the pursuit of a rational, scientific understanding of the natural and social world. The movement pushed Western societies to homogenize, categorizing people with fragmented experiences of life and labor into essential types. Economic development, health care, education, and public policy advanced in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, but little consideration was given to the complex and varying experiences of women, people of color, and LGBTQ2IA+-identifying people. Instead, everything from city planning and public transportation to trade was subjected to the criteria of a sexist and racist taxonomy that has left an enduring legacy. For all the concern with the supposedly universal rights of “man” during the Enlightenment, the rights of nonwhite people and women were overlooked and worse. Indeed, the essentialism and universalism associated with Enlightenment ideals are intrinsically hostile to the recognition and visibility of women and other oppressed groups. So while ideas of freedom and individual rights took root in Western nations, so too did these same countries develop the still-present process of oppressing indigenous populations for gain, to the point of extermination. Colonial domination and expropriation marched hand in hand with the enlightened idea of liberty, and alongside liberalism grew our modern understanding of race and racism—the inscription of abstract qualities to different ethnicities. Physical difference became the basis of relations of domination, making painfully clear the problematic nature of the questions of recognition and visibility embedded in the Enlightenment and its legacy. This “universal” outlook became an instrument of discrimination, racism, and exclusion that persists in the field of Big Data.

The struggle for recognition and visibility is an embodied one. It involves a public insistence on existing and mattering that rejects the tendency toward essentialism. And if embodiment is not subject to universal standards, then it is also not algorithmically standard. Algorithms erase context by abstracting experience into generalized patterns. They dematerialize the body, obscuring the complexity of embodied specificity—obscuring difference. The body and its specific behaviors are also where systems of power stop being abstract and become material. If the right to appear is to be honored universally, then the idea of a technology based upon different values is crucial. It is essential to ask:

What happens when our individual and collective actions are anticipated and monetized by algorithmic forecasts? What remains of the world when it is being interpreted for us by machines? What does feminist data look like? How does a burgeoning digital-queer generation employ the energy generated by cyberfeminism, and what role do cyberfeminist positions play in contemporary society? How do we make a search engine? Why and how do we write computer programs?

As social systems have moved over to algorithmic platforms, questions that were once purely technical have become political. Computer scientists and engineers are no longer able to answer them on their own. Artists, however, are uniquely equipped to answer these questions. By demystifying the tech industry and its biases, artists can attempt to inform the world's peoples about the services they use.

THE REVOLUTION IS EMBODIED

There has to be a way to find and forge a new set of bonds and alliances—one that links interdependency and embodiment to the principle of equal value. And to do this we must illuminate the powers that differentially allocate recognizability. By drawing on the ungoverned, instant, and value-based nature of the Internet, *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* is equal parts a “public course” and a research platform. The artists and artworks chosen for it take on the implicit forms of racialization found in Big Data, and the program explores what a queer, feminist, and postcolonial digital infrastructure might look like by committing to an embodied existence full of fleshy, mortal beings. *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* is guided by Judith Butler’s assertion that embodied ways of coming together—of assembly—signify a new understanding of the public space of appearance, of the right to appear, to be visible.⁶ The program also embraces Édouard Glissant’s argument for opacity, which he defines as an alterity that is unquantifiable and as such exposes the limits of visibility and representation. So defined, opacity works against the totalizing gaze of algorithmic models, and it is offered up as a generative and necessary aesthetic frame for a contemporary feminist and queer engagement with Big Data. Here, calls for opacity serve as a way of reclaiming identity markers at both the individual and the community levels.⁷

6. See Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

7. See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

In functioning as an authoritative recordkeeper of digital engagement, data has come to play a significant ontological role in recognition of the self. In the case of Google, the search engine records our inquiries, our curiosities, and our thoughts. Here, privacy and identity are constructed within a commercial webspace controlled by the Silicon Valley elite at the expense of vulnerable populations. At any given moment, unseen algorithms prioritize predatory misrepresentations of people, such as the hypersexualization of women and girls, because doing so is profitable. Physically assembling in a shared space and time, *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* will show how Big Data operates simultaneously as an ontology of vulnerability, an ethics of recognition, and a politics of persistence. In *<Ctrl + Shift 1>*, instead of Big Data dematerializing the body, the body, through assembly, materializes discourse.

In the space of this program, I propose we remember that the term "queer" designates not merely an identity but also an alliance. As expanded upon by Butler, the term is a good one to invoke as "we make uneasy and unpredictable alliances in the struggle for social, political, and economic justice."⁸ At a time when embodied life seems—at least ideologically—to be an endangered species, it is crucial to keep disembodiment from being written, once again, into prevailing concepts of subjectivity. In arguing for incorporating difference into technology, instead of inscribing sameness onto it, *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* marks a turn from disembodiment to embodiment. Since bodies are dependent on other bodies and support networks, the true space of alliance lies between people, and that action is invariably bodily, even in its virtual forms.

Screenings and lectures will acknowledge how Big Data incorporates human biases against women and people of color into its architecture. By manipulating the tools of surveillance capitalism, we can begin to restore agency to the user and demand not only responsibility to others but responsiveness to the Other.

CTRL + ALT + DELETE

Just as difference is vital, so too is our commons. By understanding how algorithmic models use specific but general descriptors to group large populations into definitive categories, we see how, by burrowing deeper and deeper into specific ontological experiences, we erase and undermine our commons. Through the hypersegmentation of algorithms, people see less and less of themselves in other people. This segmentation contributes to a climate in which alt-right ideologies such as racism, misogyny, and Islamophobia are normalized. Online, extremists engage in extensive disinformation campaigns that deliberately attempt to deceive or mislead. Amidst the resurgence of fascism and authoritarianism, a global information war is currently afoot. As digital platforms continue to filter the world into information factions, narrowcasting (the opposite of broadcasting) has become the norm. Our algorithmic surveillance economy has developed in new ways that keep people from across the globe from seeing the same information. One need only turn to the recent Facebook scandals to see how capitalism foregrounds practices of tracking and targeting hyperpersonalized information.⁹ These practices, also used by Google, Instagram, and others, have splintered audiences, leaving deep currents of alienation and vulnerability running through and across time and space. It is vital that we develop an information culture that puts questions of environment, experience, and politics over capitalistic ends, and that focuses on human experience and the radical interdependence of all beings.

9. Facebook has been plagued by scandals. Allegations against the company range from its use of a psychological experiment to examine the effects of changes in the News Feed on mental health—an experiment conducted on 700,000 Facebook users without their knowledge or consent—to claims that the company has censored content. And then there is Facebook’s role as a vehicle of “Fake News,” whether to target voters in the 2016 U.S. presidential election or to incite a genocide in Myanmar. See, e.g., Mary Meisenzahl, “The 11 Biggest Scandals Mark Zuckerberg faced over the last decade as he became one of the world’s most powerful people,” Business Insider, December 12, 2019. Available online at www.businessinsider.com/mark-zuckerberg-scandals-last-decade-while-running-facebook-2019-12 (accessed March 25, 2020).

MINING VALUES

<Ctrl + Shift 1> highlights the various ways in which technology is interrogated, explored, celebrated, pushed to its limit, reworked, and reinvented by artists, scholars, writers, and others. As a research platform, <Ctrl + Shift 1> aims to build an understanding of the technological divide by presenting the work of artists who use various technologies to invent new feminist and queer trajectories. The project is intended to leave queerness open to endless interpretation—from conversations expressing gender to direct-action activism, from feelings of isolation to moments of ecstatic love. As a public course, the program hypothesizes that ways of avowing and showing certain forms of interdependency and embodiment stand a chance of transforming Big Data and creating more-informed users.

<Ctrl + Shift 1> will begin with a reading circle designed to think through feminist and postcolonial engagements with surveillance technologies. The project's syllabus will be available online before the beginning of the program. This reading circle takes its planned form from the "women's circles" of the past—women-only spaces born out of the increasingly secular and liberal society of the early twentieth century. These spaces acted as sites of solidarity, dissent, and sisterhood, where more affirmative and oppositional forms of emerging feminist consciousness could grow. As noninstitutionalized, recurrent gatherings, circles require heightened participation—both of the mind and of the body—and sit in opposition to the Enlightenment ideals of efficiency, progress, and profit. Here, cushions will be placed in a circle where participants are to be seated. The gathering will begin with a few welcoming words, a round of self-introduction, and an announcement of the particular themes to be discussed and reflected upon. As the participants get comfortable, they should sense a "slowing down" of pace. It is important to note that this reading circle will not be a space where something has to be done, achieved, or performed, but instead will be a place for connecting and fostering a collaborative unpacking of texts and passages through vital alliances. Selected texts will include *Weapons of Math Destruction* by Cathy O'Neil, *What Algorithms Want?* by Ed Finn, *How We Became Post-Human* by Katherine Hayles, and *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* by Judith Butler, among others.

Next follows a screening of Zach Blas's film *Contra-Internet* (2017). Presented in a room darkened cinema-style, *Contra-Internet* appropriates queer and feminist approaches to technology to speculate about new forms of resistance. A film describing a futuristic queer society rising from the ruins of a burning Silicon Valley gives viewers the opportunity to imagine what a queer, gender-critical resistance might look like in a time of network crisis.

As a way of unraveling the ideas and research that lead to the inception of *<Ctrl + Shift 1>*, I will deliver a presentation, *WHAT A SHAME TO HAVE A BODY*, to be followed by a panel discussion. To open up a conversation on what a contemporary techno/cyberfeminism might look like, this exploratory talk will offer an overview of early feminist approaches to new technologies. With an emphasis on smaller audiences and thinking more locally, the talk is less a formal presentation and more an exchange of ideas that question the hegemonic temporality of our media ecosystems. By analyzing how play can be used as a tool of transgression, I will then ask two essential questions: how, and at whose expense, are algorithmic models being installed and enacted? And how can we look at solidarity through difference?

In response to the lecture, artists American Artist and Aria Dean will reflect on their own art practices and on how they think through ideas of surveillance technologies and networked existence. The artists will discuss technology as both a result of patriarchal and colonial power structures and a means to control the narrative of race, gender, and social norms. This panel is intended to provide listeners with a more comprehensive framework to examine how information is wielded to produce exclusionary models that describe, organize, and misrepresent reality. In speaking of their respective practices, Artist and Dean will show how and why artists are uniquely adept at addressing issues of technological bias.

Subsequently, Caroline Sindere will lead a participatory lecture on methods of creating a collaborative feminist data set. Equal parts lecture and workshop, the hybrid presentation will require more than the detached observation of the viewer, asking instead for active participation. A challenge to the often static format of conventional symposium-style lectures, Sindere's presentation will abandon the matrix of classroom etiquette for the equally complex matrix of temporal experience—of action, activity, and occasion.

By necessitating a participatory role for the assembled public, Sinderson will create a conversational space, allowing participants to become active agents in the development of a feminist data set.

Paul Wiersbinski's virtual-reality game *Mortal Toys* (2014) will similarly invite participants to reflect on their commons by collectively unpacking surveillance structures in order to form a new shared consciousness for body and mind. The program will include, not the VR game itself, but a durational video of people playing it—a documentation of play, in which notions of jest and improvisation produce a hybrid installation space that generates ideas about immateriality, intimacy, and the future role of social interaction.

Throughout the day's activities, a video installation with works by Morehshin Allahyari and Tabita Rezaire is available to view. Here, white boxes are neatly stacked to form a kind of support or display stand for two monitors that sit on top of them. To be viewed wearing headphones, this video installation provides an opportunity for participants to slow down, meditate, and digest Allahyari and Rezaire's techno-virtual worlds. Allowing for these softer, quieter moments is crucial, as *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* will demand of its players a prolonged and intense participation throughout the day.

Through the work of the selected artists and panelists, *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* participants will take away with them a greater understanding that people are substantially more fluid than the parsable data categories into which algorithms sort them. By demystifying the tech industry and its biases, we can begin to see how the continuous erasure of embodiment is both a political and an ethical issue. *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* is thus an ethical demand for political legitimization in both its content and form.

FROM ACCESS TO EQUITY

It is crucial to recognize and reveal not only how negative biases against women and people of color are embedded in search engine results and algorithms but also how these machine-learning systems promote the private interests of those located in economic privilege and power. As Blas's artistic lens reveals, technologies designed to recognize the patterns, or "scores," that emerge across different data sets end up entrenching political control and concentrating power.

Filtering, ranking, and allocating citizenship, rationality, and privilege, they assume a standard global time and space but do not actually “correspond to any empirical reality,” as Hito Steyerl writes.¹⁰ In *Contra-Internet*, pattern recognition confronts what Steyerl posits as “the wider question of political recognition.”¹¹ A queer science fiction film, *Contra-Internet* recognizes that gender and race are not the only axes of social hierarchy. The film reimagines scenes from Derek Jarman’s queer punk film *Jubilee* (1978) and follows its characters on a 1955 acid trip guided by an artificial intelligence named Azuma. Transported to a dystopian future where the tech campuses of Apple, Facebook, and Google burn, Blas’s characters bear witness to the death of Silicon Valley. By unearthing the Internet as a function of totalizing capitalism, *Contra-Internet* playfully examines how companies like Google, Facebook, and Apple (among others) subtly choreograph our knowledge and the ways we discover it.

10. Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (New York: Verso, 2017), 51.

11. *Ibid.*, 50.



Zach Blas, *Contra-Internet: Jubilee 2033* (film still), 2017.

Operating within a techno-feminist framework, Sinders' *Feminist Data Set* (2017-) investigates methods of data collection to turn them to a feminist end. The workshop focuses on creating a data set that would act as a powerful resource to train AI to locate an intersectional feminist way of thinking. Throughout the workshop, a data set will be created that questions and explores themes of racial and gender dominance. The creation of this data set will act as a means to combat technological bias by generating new forms of agency. The workshop is intended to create a feminist AI by using collaboration to disrupt the structures of domination mediated by algorithmic computation. By looking at multiple methods of data collection, participants will debate how to label data, whether or not it should be included, and what it means. Crucially, this workshop shows that data is something created by a group of people whose values and positions it reflects.



Caroline Sinders, *Feminist Data Set*, 2017.

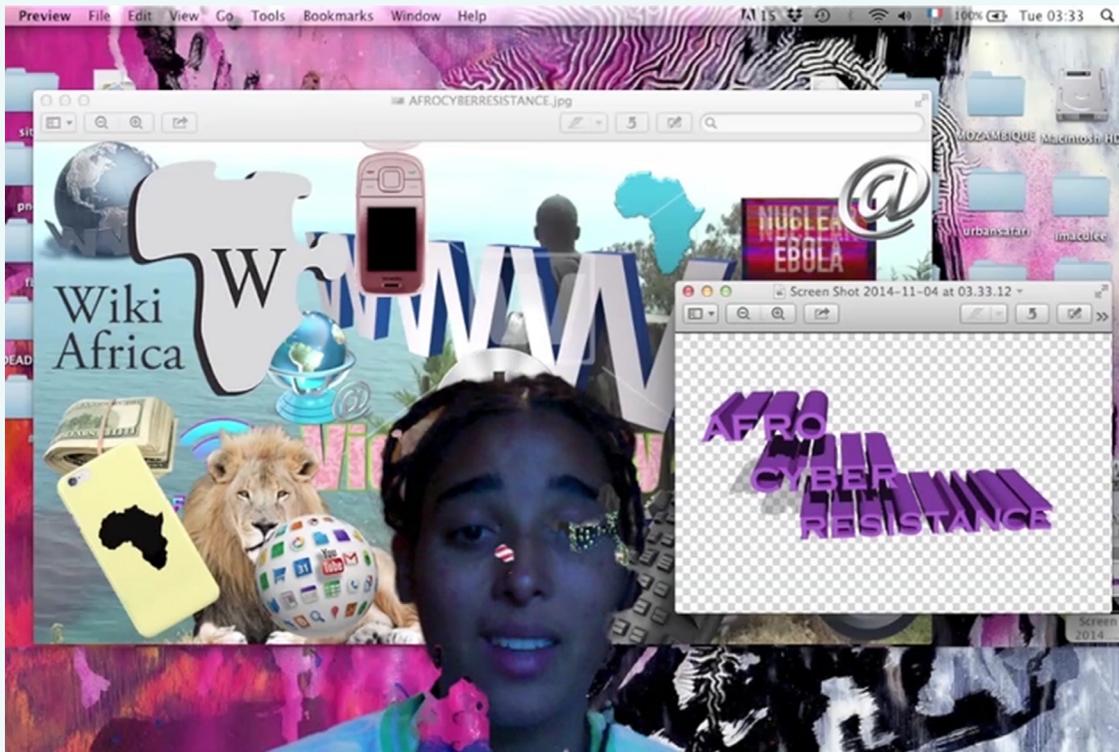
Wiersbinski's video installation *Mortal Toys* is a VR game about control and being controlled. Projected onto a wall is a video of past participants in the game wearing a pair of prototype video glasses connected to small wireless surveillance cameras. Through body movements and improvised choreographies, they can "control" others while also being "controlled." Here, play is essential, even as the performative installation confronts the limitless intersection of money, power, and resources.

In this way *Mortal Toys* operates as an agent of resistance to surveillance. Coupled with the forty-five-minute video is a small collection of images providing a snapshot of the initiation and production of the project. Ultimately, *Mortal Toys* pushes its participants to explore the violence of a society obsessed with algorithmic speed and the destruction of public space through an accelerated concept of time and efficiency.



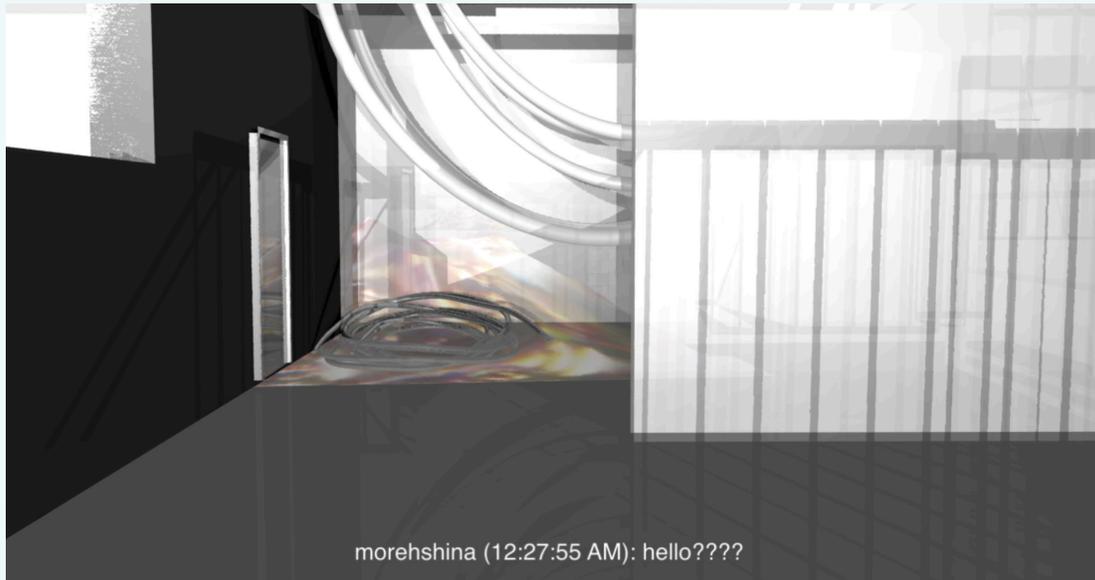
Paul Wiersbinski, *Mortal Toys* (film still), 2014.

Exploring the relationship between technology and privilege, Allahyari and Rezaire question the social and political implications of digital colonialism. Both of their videos focus on the failures and limitations of the lack of global access to technology. Confronting western hegemony online, cyberwarrior Rezaire presents methods of digital, cultural, and political resistance and media activism on the Internet. Her *Afro Cyber Resistance* (2014) is a socially engaged gesture aimed at challenging the representation of the African body and culture online. The artist creates a unique visual language by using the aesthetics of the Internet—gifs, appropriated gradient patterns, bold word art, bits of digital pop culture, labyrinthine web pages—that in combination present a compelling reflection on the Internet as a platform of misrepresentation. As a form of cultural and visual resistance, *Afro Cyber Resistance* champions a different digital future, one that tries to unthink and disengage from Western authority and e-colonialism.



Tabita Rezaire, *Afro Cyber Resistance* (film still), 2014.

Similarly, Allahyari's *In Mere Spaces All Things Are Side by Side I* (2014) uses new technologies to destroy canons of identity and cultural politics, ultimately making clear that space—both online and offline—is not neutral. Doubling down on oppressive technological cis-doms, Allahyari encourages a collective questioning of the perceived standards of technological equality, inviting a more flexible understanding of gender, technology, race, and sexuality. Her video explores the accessibility of the Internet in developing countries. Rather than focusing on technology from a privileged position, Allahyari instead narrows in on the gaps, failures, limitations, and frustrations of the lack of global access to technology. The work is inspired by the artist's saved Yahoo chat histories from a four-year-long online relationship she had while living in her native Iran. Rather than focusing on the relationship itself, *In Mere Spaces All Things Are Side by Side I* instead creates an imagined space between her physical and virtual worlds, connecting the failure of the relationship to the failure of technology and communication. By collaging, meshing, and archiving her conversations, Allahyari reveals her view of technology as a sociotechnical product patterned by the conditions of its creation and use.



Morehshin Allahyari, *In Mere Spaces All Things Are Side By Side I* (film still), 2014.

CHALLENGING CYBER-UTOPIAS

American Artist and Aria Dean have been invited to the `<Ctrl + Shift 1>` panel to discuss their practices and their research within the field of Big Data. Looking at representation in Big Tech, their discussion will focus on notions of refusal to help us visualize and realize a more just technological future. In looking at the pressing issues of technology and society through art, both artists take on the shifting nature of identity in the digital age.

American Artist uses new media, video, sculpture, and installation to reveal the historical dynamics woven into technology and contemporary culture. By looking at blackness, being, and resistance, American Artist's practice reflects on the condition of blackness in Big Tech. Having changed their name in a California court, American Artist intentionally messes with the stereotypes attached to the term "American artist," which, for some, calls to mind the famous white men of the postwar era—Andy Warhol, Dan Flavin, Jasper Johns, Richard Serra, and many others.

Unable to be Googled or validated by a computer, American Artist's legal name-change equally insists on the visibility of blackness as a descriptor of an American artist, and also on the erasure of "American artist" as an anonymous name in virtual spaces. The name change is but one example of American Artist's cleverly insightful practice. An unwavering approach to research, community, and public engagement offers a personal, thoughtful, and profoundly political commentary on the visibility and erasure of blackness in virtual spaces.

By examining the psychological and ideological implications of the positing of whiteness as neutral, Artist's continuous questioning of the immaterial aspects of biometric surveillance, oppressive algorithmic models, and gratuitous data collection provides a necessary framework for thinking about how technology reflects patterns in society at large.



American Artist, *Blue Life Seminar* (filmstill), 2019.

Dean is an artist, critic, and curator who is also the Editor and Curator of Rhizome, a New York-based nonprofit dedicated to championing and preserving digital art and culture. Having joined Rhizome in 2016, Dean has since helped launch the online program and, more recently, a publication, *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*. Dean's artistic practice explores the ontological and phenomenological structures of blackness in Western culture. Working across sculpture, installation, and new media, she methodically maps the many structural relationships that cement the racialized subject.

Within the continuum of visibility and erasure, Dean questions the relationship between the individual and the collective. Rather than providing neat, packaged answers, she challenges the complicated relationship between blackness and the Internet, using the repetition and circulation of its representations to contribute to a larger conversation on the social and psychological effects of new technologies. These ideas in her work make her especially vital as we interrogate the structures that shape the perception and meaning of blackness online.



Aria Dean, *But as One Doesn't Know Where My Centre Is, One Will With Difficulty Ascertain The Truth...Though This Task Has Made Me Ill, It Will Also Make Me Healthy Again (Crowd Index)*, (film still), 2019.

CYBER-FLESH

<Ctrl + Shift 1> is located in a specific time—April 18, 2020—and in a specific New York space, but the program will be live-streamed on a website so that people across the Internet will be able to watch the conversations and workshops unfold. Before the program begins, all of its materials, including the reading-group Reader, will be available online. Additionally, the website will act as a kind of archive, a place for the posting of research, texts, questions, images, and artwork related to <Ctrl + Shift 1>. In this way the archive will function as an active, regulatory discursive system predicated on opening up a space for the taxonomy, knowledge, and information that the program explores. This archival website could also be understood as a methodological apparatus that journeys through time and space to establish a new relationship to history, information, and data.

PROCESSING TECHNO-PATRIARCHIES

By attempting to pave the way toward a more equitable virtual and informational sphere, *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* trespasses on the well-oiled machinery of our cis-white male hyper-tech world. It celebrates work by artists who use the Internet and other forms of contemporary technology in ways that give expression to new subjectivities, who model new forms of collective practice, and who take on aesthetic, subjective, political, and conceptual positions within networked existence. These artists, with their many feminist, queer, and postcolonial interventions into cyberspace, offer a space for an intersectional politics that moves away from the conventional capitalist juridical structures that have long disempowered and exploited women and people of color. *<Ctrl + Shift 1>* emerges out of these artistic and activist practices to educate and engage a public directly and to instigate informed debate about the far-reaching repercussions of these technologies on marginalized lives. By rejecting any inherent authorial claim over the virtual, we can begin to crawl out of the cyberswamp, to corrupt its discourse and hijack its grids of control. We must make ourselves uneasy and live in the discomfort that reconciliation may not be possible.

PRESERVING CONTEXT

Date: April 18, 2020

Time: Begins at 11:00AM

Location: e-flux

311 East Broadway

New York, NY, USA

10002

SCHEDULE

- 11:00-11:30am Hello! A short introduction that includes the opportunity for people to introduce themselves
- 11:45-1:45pm Reading circle: A critical reading circle designed to contextualize the themes explored in <Ctrl + Shift 1>
- 2:00-4:00pm Feminist Data Set workshop with Caroline Sindors
- 4:00-4:30pm // Break //
- 4:30-5:30pm Lecture: WHAT A SHAME TO HAVE A BODY
- 5:30-6:15pm Panel: with Aria Dean and American Artist
- 6:15-6:45pm // Break //
- 7:00-7:45pm Screening of Zach Blas's Contra-Internet (2017)
- 7:45-8:30pm Exchange, conversation

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