-:: Invisibility :: Complexity :: Resistance :: Intentionality ::-
Department of Computational Arts Curatorial Theme, 2020-2021

The year 2020 has seen the unfolding of a pandemic and a global response that is unprecedented in its scale and scope at any time in history. It has been a time of great loss, including the loss of life, the loss of financial and personal security, the loss of opportunity, and the loss of human connectivity. As artists, thinkers, and creative practitioners, this is an essential moment for us to engage the world and use our unique perspective to confront the urgent matters of our time. The computational approach to making provides us with a unique standpoint in this conversation where we bridge the domains of art, science, and technology to critically engage the world through a discourse on technology at its roots. By using code and signals as an expressive medium we can reimagine past, current, and future technologies, steering technological impact and influencing our mutual prosperity and collective futures.

It is in this spirit that the Department of Computational Arts in the School or Arts, Media, Performance, and Design at York University presents our curatorial theme for the 2020-2021 school year: *Invisibility :: Complexity :: Resistance :: Intentionality*. In choosing this theme we sought a delicate balance between finding an umbrella that is large enough to capture a variety of perspectives, while being poignant enough to inspire meaning through our approach. Just as a virus adapts, so does our culture, and the world around us, therefore this theme is designed to be adaptable as well.

Invisibility
The notion of Invisibility draws its inspiration from, *Invisible Cities*, a book by Italo Calvino where Marco Polo describes to Genghis Khan the city of Venice as a tapestry of different cities. Each city described in the book is a unique perspective of a group or individual inhabitants of Venice. In a similar manner the pandemic has impacted all of us in different ways that are unique to everyone, and not always apparent to each other. The pandemic is as personalized and individual as it is global. The virus itself is invisible, and it seems that the only effective way to control the virus is for us to isolate ourselves and become invisible to each other. The lines of communication that produce telematic linkages between us are also invisible, yet bring us together to form artificial and essential bonds across the globe. While in contradistinction, the pandemic has also been an instrument of revealing that has exposed the inequities of society, such as in delivery of health care, racial injustices, and the impacts on the environment resulting from the radical shifts in human activity since the pandemic began.

Complexity
In systems theory, complexity can be described by the interactions within a system and its accompanying feedback loops that result in constant change of the system itself. The experience of being in a pandemic has alerted the public to the nature of complex systems in an entirely new way, from exponential growth to the interactions of microscopic and global scales. The pandemic is a complex system that spreads on the pathways of humanity's connection with each other and the world around us, both in biological and social aspects. The world is grappling with the challenges of managing complex systems in desired ways that intersect the boundaries of the bio and the social as seen in the form of social distancing directives and sanitization protocols, as well as the control of disinformation in online news and social media. The pandemic provides a new perspective on the role of human activity in climate changes as well. The pandemic results from the same causes as the climate crisis and exposes the complex relationship we have with our environment and the dangers of disruption to the essential life systems of our interconnected world.

Resistance
Resistance is a measure of the capability of an immune system to adapt to invasive pathogens that cause disease. As a society we are attempting to resist the most catastrophic effects of the pandemic and its impact on our infrastructure, which would potentially lead to devastating loss of life and well-being. The trade-off is a loss of freedom in exchange for a 'new normality' that includes the voluntary submission to wide-scale surveillance, compression of work-life and home-life, and increased automation that could open doors that are difficult to close and have unpredictable long-term effects. Resistance is present in resistance to systemically racist infrastructures, while longstanding they have been recently brought to light through exposure of our policing and judicial systems, historical teachings and monuments, and the disparity of impact of the scale of the effects of the pandemic itself on people of colour, especially in lower income communities. Resistance has also seen the rise of anti-isolation and anti-mask protests that have emerged from the politicisation of the pandemic response. For example, there are efforts to discredit and dismantle established institutions, such as the World Health Organization, that we rely on for our mutual benefit and well-being in order to support an ideology that the current pandemic response is devised to control society as a whole.

Intentionality
Intentionality as a theme is a provocation to see this moment as an opportunity to face the challenges of our time and to think of new potential directions and new forms of association and interaction with our world and each other. In our response to the pandemic we felt it is important to scrutinize our technological landscape and critically engage in how our approach to technology has supported us and failed us during this life of physical and social isolation. We have the opportunity to question what the 'new normal' may be. To even ask ourselves 'why be normal?' and help shape the direction of the technologies of the future from a unique perspective that engage questions around *Invisibility*, *Complexity*, and *Resistance* with *Intentionality* in order to help change our future world.

This coming year we will forge ahead with innovative exhibition formats and engaging professional practices that will address some of the new challenges and possibilities for artists and the creative industries in the current moment. Students and instructors are invited to respond to this call. In the Fall, instructors and students are invited to respond to the themes outlined above with the intent of contributing work to an online exhibition and conference-style discussion held in mid-December 2020. As the crisis continues to unfold, our plan is to adapt our response and carry the momentum of this initiative through the Winter term 2021. The theme will ultimately be the highlight of the Digital Media annual Showcase and End of Year Show, which is scheduled to take place in April 2021. If a face-to-face event is still not possible an online event will be developed in its place. (For a view of current and past exhibitions, please visit: http://dmgallery.apps01.yorku.ca/).

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