IJoC Media Genealogy

Cinema/Cybernetics/Visuality:
A Conversation with Orit Halpern

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In this interview between Orit Halpern, associate professor of anthropology, sociology, and interactive design at Concordia University, and Eddie Lohmeyer, PhD student in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media Program at North Carolina State University, Professor Halpern discusses the challenges of writing a history of big data and interactivity and the possibilities that such a history might provide for advancing media criticism and practice. Particularly vital to the conversation was a discussion of method, the relationship between design, art, and scholarly practice in the humanities, and the challenges to rethinking, reworking, and revising older theoretical discussions concerning cybernetics, cinema, and biopolitics.

Keywords: cybernetics, media history, visuality, cinema

Eddie Lohmeyer:
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and discuss some of the complexities that have been necessitated by relationships between digital media, power, and knowledge. First, how do you feel your work explores some of the intersections between media epistemologies and power?

Orit Halpern:
All of my work is really interested in thinking about the intersection between media practices and histories of attention and perceptions, as well as the relationship between how we modulate and organize our attentive field and both knowledge and power, and ultimately to politics. I would like to give a lot more attention to the organization of the senses, and to sensory perception. In that sense, I think I am sitting within a field of people in the study of media and history such as Jonathan Crary, but also in political science, like Jane Bennett. I'm really interested in thinking about new locations where politics happen, but also thinking about the sensory and affective nature of contemporary media systems and how that impacts our everyday lives.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
I think that provides a good lead into discussing new methodological approaches that have required genealogical and archeological examinations of media. To what extent does your work, and specifically your book *Beautiful Data* (Halpern, 2014), use a kind of Foucauldian examination of vision in relationship to media? To what extent does your work map out particular statements as they exist within discourses of cybernetics, design, and social sciences, as well as across historical strata so as to unveil, to quote Foucault, "several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science . . ." (1972, p. 5)?

Orit Halpern:
Okay. Well, those are great questions. In the interest of clarity, I'd like to split these up. In terms of the Foucauldian examination, of course, my work is heavily influenced by Foucault, and I therefore seek to ask basic questions about how one might historicize something so seemingly natural and ahistorical as vision. Of course, this also opens series of other questions. I also come from a feministic epistemological background, so I want to expand feminist concerns with materiality, the relationship between the mind and body, and the historical relationship between knowledge, power relations, and sexual and racial politics, and, finally, with population and its control and production through different media technologies and epistemologies.

For me, obviously there is an interesting question about how one might create a history of attention and distraction, and how does one mobilize that history to enact changes in the contemporary way we design and build technologies? We have done a very good job in the 19th century. I think a lot of media genealogy focuses on that period, as well as the period leading up to and including World War II, but there has been a lot less inquiry in the history of science beyond that. Digital media often provokes problems of causality and time for historians.

Also, for me, the critical thing in this book was attempting to merge that historicization of the senses with a close interrogation of the sciences. I did not want it to be a history of technology, because I think that our current focus on built or existing technologies ignores questions of desire, aspiration, epistemology, and imagination that exist before and often outside of specific material instantiations in built objects; discourses that may never materialize as a final technology and yet may have incredible impact on how we, of course, design and produce contemporary media systems. And so for me, that comes to your second question. . . . I don't know if I'm being clear at all.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
No, you are. Please continue.

Orit Halpern:
Just to offer an example. I study the sciences often labeled "cybernetics": the studies of communication and control in animals and machines. Cybernetics is both a kind of object of study and also a method. You have to take seriously what you study, and if you want to ask me about my method, it is hybrid, of course; it comes from a lot of places, but in many ways, I often mime the logic, or I take really seriously the matter I'm studying. It kind of pushes back on me and forces me to challenge some of my initial,

deductive ideas that have already come in with a Foucauldian framework. At the same time, when you actually look at all the ways people took up cybernetics, there are multiple potentials that emerge there. On the one hand, we have this vision of American empire and a biopolitical story, but on the other hand, we have a proliferation of possibilities, both for rethinking ourselves, our cognition, and different design practices. And there are radical differences between the individuals that I discuss, such as the urban planner Kevin Lynch and Charles and Ray Eames. So there are incredible, different implications for their design practices, and yet, in many ways, they also share the same epistemology, and so you are always interested in examining both homogeneity and heterogeneity in the historical field.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
You know, when I think about the type of methodology you utilize in your book *Beautiful Data*, I immediately draw a connection to the same type of methodological and pedagogical process used by midcentury designers that we see in "communicative objectivity" discussed in your book, in which patterns of vision are extracted from flows of information.[1] You specifically draw upon the work of Ray and Charles Eames' installation *Think* for the IBM Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair in which multiple screens projected flows of abstracted numerical data and information through which viewers were positioned to extract specific visual patterns. Would you say that the Foucauldian methodology you draw upon parallels practices of looking that arose through an integration of cybernetics, design, and the social sciences that you describe as a type of communicative objectivity?

Orit Halpern:
I think in a lot of ways that if you take seriously what you study and you immerse yourself in it, you begin to replicate it. Yeah. And I'm definitely an information overload kind of person. I like to throw things at people that they have to make connections between. I mean, this is very Eames design pedagogy 101. And in many ways, that frustrates some readers and some people love that. I mean, it's always a dangerous thing, but at the same time, for me there is an excess amount of simplification we've created around terms like militarization or securitization, or even cybernetics, which, still for the most part, has a very negative valence. And also we have created a fantastical teleological narrative around first and second order cybernetics, that replicates dominant discourses on Silicon Valley and in the creative industries—mainly that the history of computing has moved from "bad" centralized computing on large mainframes controlled directly by large institutions to ever more open, transparent, and democratic networks. So, for me, it's really important to convolute that as a historian, and actually as a political statement too, and in terms of how we are thinking about our technologies and telling their histories, and that is also determining how we are designing. In many ways, my practice also mimes them, but the more

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[1] In *Beautiful Data*, Halpern proposes what she calls "communicative objectivity" as an aesthetic, pedagogical, and epistemological practice by which an observer analyzes and extracts patterns from a flow, an inundation of data and information. She looks specifically at the formation of communicative objectivity during the middle of the 20th century as an "epistemological ideal" in which perception became reconfigured as a type of interactivity between observer and the flow of information that developed from the coming together of design practice and pedagogy, and cybernetic theory. See Halpern (2014, p. 15, p. 28). Also see the entirety of chapter 2, titled "Visualizing: Design, Communicative Objectivity, and the Interface."

I read them and cybernetics together, the more I realized how much they share, and of course poststructuralism has an incredible relationship to cybernetic thinking. It's kind of fundamental to it, and in itself could demonstrate one of the potential alternative genealogies of cybernetics.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
Clearly, the work of Gilles Deleuze plays a role in the methodology you employ in *Beautiful Data*. In many ways you draw upon Deleuze as a means to open up and think about the spectatorial possibilities, practices, and visuality of cinema. I'm curious to ask what it would mean to tell a history of digital media through an unveiling of certain conditions, techniques, and effects, taking both Foucauldian and Deleuzian perspectives into consideration. Your work certainly draws upon a type of Foucauldian archaeology, but at the same time you explore cybernetic theory and design practices through a kind of Deleuzian media thought, particularly in the way you are doing Deleuze through Henri Bergson's concepts of temporality, but also through Deleuze's philosophy of cinema in thinking about images as pure, autonomous flows of movement and time. With that said, I was hoping you could speak to how both Deleuzian and Foucauldian perspectives have influenced your work.

Orit Halpern:
Well, my Foucault is very Deleuzian. I will say what I mean. I like Deleuze because he's a model, and he and Guattari often give you concepts with which to work, but I also think it's really important to realize that it's a form of philosophical practice; for me it's not about repeating their work. So, it's not about quoting Deleuze, it's about a certain form of enacting philosophy with an investment in making the world lively and dynamic, and increasing complexity rather than giving in to the impulse to simplify arguments. For me, this is most centrally about disavowing certain causal arguments. I mean, for history this is very hard because historians like to explain how A lead to B. Even with all the critiques of history, particularly from literary theory, it's just very hard for historians to break away from that, and also, this is not an age where people like complexity. We like editorial commentary, and the media presses us in this direction. People don't want to find out that the world is more complicated; instead, they want to find out that there is an easy answer. Maybe that is a long-running problem. So, there is pressure against complexity and multiplicity. There are also a couple other ways Deleuze speaks; the first, I think, for me, is the basic point that power is *productive*, and that is a very Deleuzian reading of Foucault. A lot of people have this idea of disciplinary society, like surveillance, it comes down, it controls you. It's . . . etc.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
Oppressive? Repressive?

Orit Halpern:
Right. It's repressive. But for me, power is really, really productive. It creates things in the world. Some of those things are what I consider morally wrong and some of them are excellent. I think doing a Deleuzian history is about being ready to take in the possibility that entities, even ones like militaries, are productive things, even as they are extremely violent. This is a morally scary thought, and I am in no way advocating wars or militaries, but if we want to begin asking about how the future might become different from the past, then we have to question the inevitability that the military origins of something, for example, like computing, means that computers can only be used to create wars. World War II should not

inevitably lead to the Cold War, and now wars on terror and drones. So it's ethically important to realize both how power is productive and how it is historically specific, because otherwise the world, I think, just gets excessively reduced, and our abilities to act also get incredibly reduced.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
That is a great answer and I hope to move our discussion of these methodologies and the power relationships they bring into question toward how one might conceive of an archeology of cinema through cybernetics. Your work seems to hint at a minor history of cinema as a cybernetic, communicative interface that steers away from dominant, historical narratives of cinema in the 20th century, those major histories defined by technological advancement and its role in constructing certain reality effects. What would it mean to think about cinematic history as cybernetic?

Orit Halpern:
You know, this is something we could think together. We could do a dissertation and it would be awesome! The real question is: What is at stake in this question of cinema and cybernetics? In the first manuscript of my book, I had a lot of cinema, and my reviewers made me take it out. Almost because they felt like Lev Manovich has made us understand digital media only in terms of cinema and this is the wrong thing. The critique rests on an argument that somehow cinema is fundamentally not computational and that there is an alternative history of mathematics and logic that somehow is external or outside of the use of mechanical recording instruments. I think there are different and interesting stakes in trying to understand what it means to merge the statistical and the optical, or the computational and the optical. But I also think that in disavowing the fact that that connection has been made at multiple times in history in different ways, you also affirm the constant novelty of digital media, which is also inappropriate. It should also be noted that whether affirming this connection between computation and cinema or denying it, we continue therefore to insist on a clear dialectic between the logical and the material, the digital and the analog, and so forth, older splits that constantly affirm the hegemony of Cartesian dualist thinking.

More broadly, I think that cybernetic histories open up multiple genealogies by which to rethink media and challenge existing technologies; it opens us to vectors such as the life sciences, the cognitive and neuro sciences, the environment, the human sciences, art, and architecture. Histories of cinema have often recognized the association of cinema to science, art, politics, and philosophy in the late 19th and earlier 20th centuries, and cybernetics allows us to situate the digital within longer running histories of population, observation, and subjectivity. Furthermore, cybernetics was in many ways an idea that was never realized and was never consolidated. There is no one cybernetics; there are many cybernetics. In many ways it allows us to rethink (potentially) both cinema and computing away from a focus on realized technologies alone, and to include histories of ideas, discourses, and knowledge. So I think that is one of the compelling possibilities of rethinking cinema in terms of cybernetics, rather than in terms of the digital.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
So, perhaps we can think of the development of contemporary cinematic technologies as not necessarily bound to the term digital, but as something that works within cybernetic processes that allow us to think about the body, the observer, and the spectator in new ways; the potential for a body to generate new

intensities, perceptions, sensations from an encounter with the cinematic image, instead of thinking about a body as a passive spectator at the will of an ideological apparatus. When I look at the projection of still images in Charles and Ray Eames' *A Communications Primer* (1953), it would seem that the observer is colliding with this flow of autonomous images and ideas about communication practices and the processing of signals, in turn opening up new sensory and perceptual pathways for the viewer. In other words, I feel that your work often argues the case for a more active, perhaps interactive spectatorship conceived through these alternative histories. Does that make sense?[2]

Orit Halpern:
I'm so glad you read it that way. That is a big separation between myself and the other prominent discussions about those same cinema installations, which don't negotiate the question of what form of observation or spectatorship is happening at all. And nor do they open to the idea that this is a different mode of sensing and being in the world. The body is really interesting. This is something that I fought with for years in grad school and at some point kind of left as the baseline, and instead looked toward the materiality of these media and then tried to understand their impact in terms of how they arrange the senses. So I am very into a Rancieriean influenced politics concerning the organization of affect.

In attempting to write a history of contemporary interactivity, however, I began to contemplate a new set of questions. In particular, as we are moving toward clouds and cloud computing and different infrastructures that are leaving these models of spectatorship or even observers behind. Here, I am really thinking about machine-to-machine systems (for example the flash crash of the markets in 2010), as well as the many modes of producing population in terms of selling data and monetizing interactions that do not necessarily return to or cohere into a stable, single subject. We might think everything from aggregated data for financial instruments to Fitbits and quantitative self-movements. Not to mention the entire realms of interactive design and cognitive and behavioral sciences dedicated to architected environments where we are induced to click, watch, and download without consciousness and at ever greater speeds. This is one of the challenges for media scholarship right now: rethinking our ideas of medium, attention, and politics without having a stable spectator or subject at the center of the analysis. This is not about disembodiment; everything gains a materiality, but not necessarily equality. I hope to ask about the terms by which we think notions like agency without objectivity, identity, or full consciousness (this isn't to say no consciousness, just not a full command over the world), and also how we account, of course, for the nonhuman.

And still some sense of the observer's separation from or limitation by the body. The latest Jonathan Crary (2014) was very typical of this. In *24/7*—I don't know if you have read this book, it's about the end of sleep. It's really quite charming. But, anyway, it's funny because he did all this history to critique the observer, but what's interesting is the fact that he insists on the limits of the body as the kind of final pushback to capital. It appears that we often cannot really think media without an observer clearly linked to single, individuated, human bodies. And we constantly return to disciplinary understandings of those subjects (even if unconsciously or nonpurposefully).

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[2] To view *A Communications Primer,* see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byyQtGb3dvA

Eddie Lohmeyer:
I think that is the problem. It is often quite difficult to conceive of media without a viewing subject.

Orit Halpern:
I mean, I don't know if we ever will, but I think as a thought experiment it's interesting to ask.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
What about cinema on a larger scale? As in harnessing the projection of cinematic images to say, reconfigure a population in its relationship to territory? Perhaps practices of looking at moving images on multiple scales can move us away from thinking about a single spectator watching a film?

Orit Halpern:
On one hand it can. Those practices you suggest emerge at particular points in history and reorganize the field of observation and visuality in ways that change the relationships between populations, identities, territories, and individual bodies. In my book, I most clearly discuss this in relationship to the 1959 installations of the United States in Moscow. But many scholars have taken to examining minor practices by artists, avant-gardes, etc., using film as a way to rethink what the medium is and how it operates on individuals and populations.

But on an epistemological level, the question is whether merely increasing the sites we study is the same as changing our questions about how media work and what constitutes a medium. To paraphrase Dostoevsky, "we all know the answers, it is the questions we do not know." The take-home message from this really interesting conversation might be about changing our questions. I believe that in media studies we often frame our research—coming from a history of film criticism—through questions like: What is cinema? What is an interface? How do we define a medium as separate from another? We try to define media ontologically. One begins to ask if that is still a question that will guide us in attempting to develop forms of critical engagement with the world and ideas about the types of futures we would like to live in— alternative imaginations of both technology and media? I'm not particularly concerned in knowing whether an image is cinematic or photographic or digital. I'm only interested in those categories in so much as they assist me in attempting to understand the operations of the contemporary environments I'm living in, and to recognize the instability, contestability, and unknowability of the future. The work of media genealogy is to contest the naturalization of particular *techne* and technologies. More importantly, the function of critique, even today, is to imagine not how we must live, but how we would like to live in the future.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
So what would be better questions to ask? Who is making these image statements? Where are they showing up? What are the conditions that define their coming into being?

Orit Halpern:
Those are great questions. That would probably be a start. But we might also wish to recognize that we can't always answer things like "the conditions that define media coming into being," accepting subjective

and partial perspectives, to cite Donna Haraway again, is also a key element in perhaps moving away from an investigation of what media *are,* to what we might want media to *become.*

Eddie Lohmeyer:

Now I would like to move toward an art historical inquiry that I think certainly parallels your scholarly methodologies and your work in general. Would it be appropriate to draw parallels between cybernetic thought that we see in midcentury design practices and histories of conceptual or performative art in which process and documentation in many ways take precedent over the technical skill of the artist, who throughout the majority of Western art history has sought to produce an illusory reproduction of reality? Would it be possible to conceive of anarchaeology of process situated within discourses of midcentury design, as well as other art historical discourses during the 20th century?

Orit Halpern:

I think that parallel is very pertinent, certainly in the terms of the '60s, even '50s, starting with Fluxus, experiment in art and technology, minimalism, also in American avant-garde film figures, such as Maya Deren, Stan VanDerBeek, Michael Snow, and Stan Brakhage, and individuals like Carolee Schneemann in feminist performance, also Eva Hesse. I could continue. . . . There are so many that embraced or discussed process as a key feature to their work. I think that we can mark moments when the discourse becomes ubiquitous and is explicitly articulated as the main function of art. I think that by the 1960s this is very evident (although I'm not an art historian and am sure there are debates about this). That said, the obsession with process predates the war; for example, the Bauhaus was always obsessed with process, of course.

Eddie Lohmeyer:

That is a good point.

Orit Halpern:

The post–World War II period certainly borrowed things from previous movements in the 20th century—Dada, Surrealism, Bauhaus, etc. What might be different is that often artists didn't see themselves as leading technologists, but rather, perhaps, hacking or pushing technological processes until they fold. What I noticed is that in groups like Fluxus, the obsession with using machines, and mechanizing process, competed with an effort to produce concepts of processes that were particular and imminent, nonreproducible. So performances like *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* were never recorded. The hope was that, unlike automated machines, art machines would not repeat their actions, but rather create surprises. The real challenge for thinking about process, for many artists, and perhaps for us today, was how do standardized processes display emergent properties? So for example, there is a famous art performance, this amazing suicide robot Jean Tinguely did titled *Homage to New York*, it's a really famous installation, are you familiar with it?

Eddie Lohmeyer:

I am not.

Orit Halpern:

Well anyway, it's awesome. He basically gets together with, I think it was Billy Klüver from Bell Labs, and they built this beautiful, beautiful machine. The machine is going to commit suicide in the course of the performance by slowly taking itself apart, because that's the one thing no logical creature would ever do, and this machine is purportedly logical. This act would be the last mark of, I guess, sentience—to kill yourself (which in consideration of contemporary forms of media spectacle is a deeply troubling aesthetic gesture). So there is this amazing self-destructing machine playing in the garden of MOMA, and it almost killed itself (i.e., dismantled all its parts to collapse in a fiery blaze) when the fire brigade showed up and put it out. But the videos are great.[3] The viewers were so excited. So this question between the emphasis on process and automation really animates a lot of the work that engaged with electronic culture. There is a huge tradition there, and a lot of people are currently examining art practices as predecessors to contemporary digital culture.

Eddie Lohmeyer:

Speaking of process, the concept of collage as a particular Foucauldian statement seems to appear within and is traceable throughout multiple artistic discourses that emerged during the 20th century, including practices of midcentury design that utilized cybernetic thought. These projected sequences of still and moving images that the Eames' were producing, or to an extent, the machinic animations of John Whitney in which servo-mechanisms created algorithmic visualizations, the way in which these artists' work were reinforcing a new epistemology of vision, function as a collage of images requiring the use of different sense modalities. However, collage in the surrealist tradition was the result of bringing together seemingly disparate objects to produce something that was dream-like, uncanny, and entirely illogical as a means to unbound Western man from the constraints of reason. But, it's interesting because collage addressed through a cybernetic language as used by these midcentury designers in many ways appears to reconfigure reason.

Orit Halpern:

Yes, as rationality. I mean, part of the third chapter, but also a trend in the history of science now, has been to really separate post-World War II rationality from reason, because reason, for the longest time for people like Descartes, or Newton, or anybody up until basically the 19th century, and even then, reason was what you could not calculate from liveness. As much as we wanted to calculate it, the mathematicians still possessed intuition. A calculator, a computer, was a denigrated individual who solely played with numbers and could not develop concepts, so this move toward this calculable, rational, fast-acting, logical person, as the exemplar of what is now called "rationality" has to be historically demarcated. This is no longer enlightenment reason, and it is actually quite different.

Eddie Lohmeyer:

In relationship to the restructuring of reason into rationality, I also wanted to discuss with you the concept of psychosis in relation to cybernetic theory, and its relationship to a new epistemology of psychoanalysis and behaviorism that emerged during the middle of the 20th century. As you mention in *Beautiful Data*, new methodologies for assessing and measuring human behavior arose during the mid-20th century from

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[3] You can watch it here: http://www.nytimes.com/video/arts/design/100000000761945/tinguely.html

rethinking cognition through algorithmic processes. For instance, I think of the work of social scientist and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson that you mention, who was employing systems theory and cybernetic thought in behavioral sciences to suggest that the paranoia experienced by the schizophrenic patient was comprised of a closed system with opposing signals for the brain to process. These conflicting signals pushed forward the potential for a type of autopoiesis to occur, where the brain as a system might rewire and open up new creative pathways as a solution to this cross-signaling. Is there a way we can think about schizophrenia within cybernetic thought as a productive process that generates creative, artistic possibilities within a population and territory, particularly within our contemporary digital age?

Orit Halpern:
Hmm. It's an excellent question. I don't really have an investment in defining schizophrenia as a medical or aesthetic category, so much as understanding how this language helped cyberneticians reimagine what machines and minds could be. In terms of imagination, this is a difficult question. I am within the paradigm, so I myself don't have purchase. That said, for cyberneticians, and later for critical thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari, the figure of the psychotic posed challenges and possibilities to how we think [about] the human subject. As a thought figure it opened the possibilities that our subjectivities are never objective or cut off from the world. It served as a figure by which to struggle with certain structures of family, reproduction, sex, and capital. For cyberneticians like Bateson, this figure of the psychotic was a route away from normative understandings of the body and health, as well as a way to think about the mind and brain, not as separate entities, but as part of one mind-body organism that is plastic, and ecological; part of—rather than separate from—the world.

In our present, however, it's not clear that this language still serves the same functions for thinking about minds, bodies, machines, and brains. The latest DSM has eliminated the category of paranoid schizophrenia (which is the classic and violent category of schizophrenia associated historically with patients such as Schreber). So apparently it's normal now to be paranoid? In our post 9/11 world (just think *Homeland*), it almost seems normal to be paranoid, which opens up to the question of whether psychosis can still serve any critical function in our present.

Within this context, it is quite difficult to imagine how one might emancipate psychosis from its paranoid (in the case of the U.S., its militarized and security) dimension. But perhaps the normalization of paranoia makes it a worthy philosophical and political act to redefine or hijack this discourse. I feel that at certain points even Deleuze and Guattari run away from this question a little bit. By *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) drop the term. So that, of course, is another question for us. Do we want to hold on to this language and discourse at all? Or maybe we need to find a new language by which to deal with our increasingly fluid subjectivities—not one of psychosis.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
In the realm of interactive, digital art, or digital interfaces in general, I often tend to associate schizophrenic processes with synesthesia, a mixing of the senses where perhaps a population's encounter,

in the Deleuzian sense, with a work of digital art, generates new intensities, sensations, perceptions through the mixing of sensory signals.[4]

Orit Halpern:

Certainly, a history of artistic and literary production suggests such possibilities. I believe there is a politics to teaching how people sense and see the world. That's the kind of opportunity we have right now. I'm pessimistically optimistic.

Eddie Lohmeyer:

I feel the same way.

Orit Halpern:

I have hope for these things and for learning to work multimodally and opening up. The hope behind transforming the disciplines is that we would be doing it in the ethical interest of transforming perception and experimenting with new possibilities. That doesn't usually happen, but we have to fight for it.

Eddie Lohmeyer:

I want to discuss with you the notion of changing *epistemes* of vision and visuality that your work brings to light. I think of vision and visuality as they are situated within the discourses of the art institution or art museum, as certain practices of looking that shape and modulate a museumgoer's attention toward art histories, and specifically how those histories might construct our knowledge of the world. The art and history museums of the late 19th century organized vision and its relationship to knowledge around a taxonomic display of artifacts, while the contemporary art museum modulates practices of looking toward perceiving the aesthetic qualities of an artwork or artifact within the neutral space of the white cube. When we think about art institutions in the present day, does a cybernetic process of looking come into play? Is there a new episteme of vision that communicates a framework of knowledge within the 21st-century art museum and that operates within a discourse of cybernetic thought?

Orit Halpern:

You ask a really interesting question that is also in many ways geological or topographical. These are intensely layered institutions, so what is always most fascinating is that, you know, I send my students out to check out MOMA and check out The Met, and it's so clear; we went to the redone Cooper Hewitt,

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[4] In mentioning "encounter," I am referring to Deleuze's description of the term in *Difference and Repetition*. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze suggests that the conditions within the world that force us to think must come from within thought itself. This image of thought as Deleuze describes it, does not result from objects of representation in relationship to a preconceived notion of similitude, but rather emerges from an encounter that unfolds through felt sensation as opposed to the recognition of things in the world. The conditions through which thought emerges must be produced from within a system of pre-existing thought while also dismantling a well-constituted notion of how we commonly recognize an object. See Deleuze (1994, pp. 135–140).

and it's so clear what was designed when. There were assumptions about activity, about movement, about even those white cubes, I mean that in itself is a kind of . . .

Eddie Lohmeyer:
Interactivity?

Orit Halpern:
A post '90s interactivity. It's part of a globalization and standardization of the kind of art space, I mean, I was just in Beijing and Shanghai last year, and they have all started these loft warehouse repurposed artistic spaces, right? So there seems to be that kind of thing going on. This obviously raises questions about whether these institutions are deeply invested in both maintaining authority in some sense and consolidation, so they are both using the latest and ordaining their vision of the digital, while simultaneously denying anyone's entry or access to it.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
That to me is quite interesting. Would you say there are conflicting statements between who is allowed access to information and a promotion of more interactive spaces?

Orit Halpern:
Of course, and also, they have this weird question of the object. Artists are still stuck on the object. We can talk process all we want, but what gets sold and what gets seen?

Orit Halpern:
You know, I work in a design-oriented institution and the question of design is that, on one hand, it's much more democratic than art, there are so many designers that work for the digital sweat shop, but on the other hand, there are also real questions about imagination or excess that are often absolutely absent in design. I mean, you don't design things with huge amounts of superfluity, or if there is superfluity, it's called luxury. And that serves a function too, in a sense. So, you know . . .

Eddie Lohmeyer:
Like IKEA?

Orit Halpern:
Yeah. Right. IKEA, and then Jimmy Choo or Louboutin shoes, which serve as the inverted mirror images of IKEA, in terms of cost and image. The amount of the Louboutin shoe and an entire house of IKEA furniture are about the same. There you have it [*laughing*]. And you are like, the fact that I know all these shoe names is already revealing my location. I don't know, these are really, really important questions about how people are trained, and it speaks to the broader politics of attention today in the globally aware, but it's also becoming a very cost-oriented question. I mean, the way people are trained, you know, Harvard, even MIT, is never getting rid of its humanities.

Eddie Lohmeyer:
That's a good point.

Orit Halpern:

There is a class component here. There is a whole question about training a whole slew of people only to service industries in one way, and then an elite education that forces you to train yourself and use multiple modes of attention, from a very scholarly, old school attitude at Columbia or Chicago, which have great books programs, but they will also be the first to give you the resources to learn how to code too, so this war about how people are trained not only in content, but in modes of attention and diversity of media formats, and modes of analysis, is also a new site for class warfare, frankly.

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