
Exploring Durational Documentation

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Abstract

Design work takes time and experimentation and documentation often highlights key points along these much longer timelines. In this workshop, I want to explore the idea of real-time documentation, where videos of design in process are captured and presented in real-time. In doing so, I want to reflect on how time and labor is accounted for in documentation.

Author Keywords

Documentation; durational media; performance art.

Background and Motivation

Over the past two years, I have been engaged in a project that explores how the design of manufacturing machines, namely 3D printers, shape human relationships to materials. This has taken the form of traditional user studies [1] as well as explorations within my own practice as an artist [2,3]. In my art practice, I continually use a system for 3D printing by hand that I designed and built (which has been titled "Being the Machine" and "Redeform") and create updates to the system that allow me to probe into different aspects of human-machine-material-environmental relationships. I document each experiment of "making" with the system via video in order to account for the work that I have done and communicate it to others. These video documents play

two roles. In one sense, they show people what I'm doing and how the system works (or doesn't work). In another sense, I see them as a record of a performance that is intended to provoke questions about normative relationships with machines.

In one performance, I attempted to create a give foot tall bunny made of balloons. This involved several hours spent blowing up balloons and another 8 hours of assembly. Ultimately, the form of a bunny made from balloons never emerged because of the destructive force of several breezes and the instability of balloons as a material for 3D printing. This was a key moment in my practice/research as it highlighted how my own confidence in my design distracted me from attending to my building materials. The "failure" of this performance led me to take different approaches to building that asked, like Louis Kahn, "what does the balloon want to be?" instead of attempting to impose form onto the balloons.

Initially, I created time-lapse videos documenting the project for audiences who did not witness the performance in person. This had been my standard mode of documentation as time-lapse allowed people to see an overview of the process at a length that didn't challenge anyone's attention span. Yet, the magnitude of the failure and the degree of labor that I put into the construction were lost in the time-compressed format. Instead, I chose to keep the video at real-time in order to illustrate how carefully I attempted to join the balloons together, how hard it was to stabilize them in the wind, and to allow people to ruminate on the defeated look on my face when I realized that I spend 8 hours making a giant, wasteful, pile of balloons.

Towards Durational Documentation

This experience has led me to question what we leave out when we document the "highlights" of any design process or compress design processes into formats that can be digested quickly and easily. Much design work is spent working with a same set of materials over and over again, twiddling ones thumbs, or spending time outside the "studio" altogether. I'd like to use this workshop to reflect on:

- How documentation can account for time and labor of design work?
- In which contexts time and labor meaningful aspects to communicate?
- What presentation formats are best suited to communicating time and labor?

For the Workshop

I propose the following experiment for the workshop. I am currently involved in collaboration with Google's Project Jacquard exploring the social implications of clothing-based displays [4,5]. Currently myself and a few others at UC Berkeley are developing parka's with patterns that react to changes in their wearers skin conductance, a measurement that corresponds to "excitement" of various sorts. I plan to capture real-time video of 4-8 hours of meetings discussing and developing the project. These meetings will take place at our offices at UC Berkeley since I am assuming that confidentiality will be an issue capturing video at Google's offices (an interesting implication of this approach). This documentation is largely experimental but I imagine it as something that communicates our design process, how collaboration unfolds, and where the ideas we eventually will present "came from" so to speak.

I'd like to play this video back as an ongoing stream in a non-distracting place during the workshop. I imagine this functioning like a durational video piece one might see at an art museum with a narrative that unfolds over the day that viewers can step into and out of at various points. Participants could check on the video whenever they wish and we could, as a group, reflect on the opportunities and challenges of long-format, real-time, durational documentation.

References

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