

SFMOMA: Kris Ravetto Responds to *Predictive Engineering*

Friday, September 16, 2017

Speaker

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00:00:03:09 KRISS RAVETTO: I'm going to repeat a bit. And my thank yous, of course, to SFMOMA, to Robin, to Rudolf and Jill for inviting me, to Julia for making this wonderful piece. I am an academic, so it's nice that we've staged academic, then curator, then academic. So I will cling to my paper, but I'm kind of the worst academic, because I have allergies. So I'm going to hold onto my water glass, as well. I'm Kriss Ravetto, by the way. So I'm also going to talk about time and duration. But hopefully, have a little bit of a different take, and talk about my experience of the piece and my sort of observation of the piece in the last few days that I've spent probably good chunks of time, three and four hour a day, sort of looking at people watching the piece.

00:00:53:10 So if you've spent time upstairs with *Predictive Engineering cubed*, you will have been addressed, seemingly directly, by a voice that moves from speaker to speaker. This voice, Julia's, informs rather than instructs, telling you that you have already been watched, analyzed, and therefore, your movements are predictable. On average—and this is just from three days of hanging out—you look at yourself. You like to look at yourself projected on the screen. The younger you are, the more you're likely to like yourself on the screen. [laughter] You find the messages unsettling and strange, while the prerecorded performances in private spaces like the bathroom or the kitchen, where you see naked people running, rummaging through the refrigerator, fighting on the stairs, or climbing inside the building, interjected into the almost live feed, are usually a source of humor. But among the many observations this immaterial and often intermittent voice gives us, there are a few invitations. Today I have decided to accept the invitation—oops—to crash the system.

00:02:12:09 I am well aware that every invitation comes with contingencies, like the one that Julia tells us, "Please don't substitute sensation for imagination." The invitation to crash, however, presents us with a double entendre, extending an invitation to an uninvited guest, who may or may not RAVETTO (Cont.): not wreak havoc on the system. But just what system or party have I been asked to crash? This, I believe, has been intentionally left up to my imagination. Rather than describe the transformation of *Predictive Engineering* in its three iterations or how it fits into Julia Scher's oeuvre of work, I would like to start by taking *Predictive Engineering* seriously in all of its playfulness. In all of its playfulness, it makes us think about the significance of words like prediction, engineering, security, and how they're applied to surveillance. It calls to attention how an authoritative voice could also be a seductive one. And it demonstrates how terms leak, blur, or collapse into each other, as for instance, predictive analytics and social engineering. And I want to briefly talk about how these two terms, because they make claims about how we value time and how we manipulate human behavior— Okay. So these two terms.

00:03:45:09 Then I want to follow up by taking one more invitation, and that is to explore *Predictive Engineering's* own concept of durational aesthetics, in the context of surveillance and the security state. So here we have predictive analytics. And that's why brought this first. We're told that high-speed motion capture artificial intelligence devices and smart technologies that use data aggregators are better at reading humans than humans are at reading themselves. Unlike Google analytics, we are not capable of mentally retracing all of our own comments, selections, and purchases in and movements through digital and social media. Nor are we

able to calculate and anticipate our next moves by correlating, measuring, and interpreting all of our moves against those belonging to others. *Predictive Engineering 3* shows us how non-human devices—surveillance technologies, algorithms, feedback, and data flows—anticipate human gestures, emotions, actions, and interactions, thus intimating that we are machines, and our behavior may be predictable precisely because we are machinic.

00:05:01:22 In fact, this anticipation is a feedback loop that we humans have created by designing software that can study our traces, inputs, and moves. One could say that prediction is a trick we play on ourselves, just like the trick that Julia made to the patrons in SFMOMA in 1993, when she told them that the recording was live, and showed them a prerecorded image of naked people running in the next hallway. The image and suggestion that live recording was taking place produced more running. And according to Julia, this running wore out the museum's carpet that RAVETTO (Cont.): linked the two hallways. Even so, we would not be able to play these kinds of tricks, had we not developed sophisticated surveillance technologies that we have. Often with predictive analytics, we are fed back an images of ourselves in quantifiable terms. But those devices that record, trace, and analyze minute details about our behaviors also capture and organize our experiences into patterns, biorhythms or computer-generated narratives, like Facebook's Look Back, offering us an image of ourselves. This is an image that sums us up in terms of preexisting facts and criteria and provides us with a graphical expression of quantitative information, readymade to represent oneself. That is, this self is already a product of social engineering.

00:06:40:12 Okay, so this leads me to the next term. In the age of Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, one—me—I'm not likely to be diagnosed as a paranoid delusional for believing that my every move has been watched, recorded, analyzed, predicted, and possibly engineered. But the awareness of ubiquitous surveillance modifies our behavior, our speech, and possibly even our willingness to be politically active. We euphemistically say that this knowledge of surveillance has a chilling effect. Law professors like Jennifer Lynch, Shane Cannidol[sp?], and lawyers like Ben Wizner believe that such pervasive and invasive surveillance not only makes us more conservative—that is, more likely to accept the status quo—it is also incompatible with democracy. Setting aside government-sanctioned spying, we need not[?] only think about how predictive analytics, predictive marketing, body language analysis, and neural marketing work to know that there are automatic processes working behind our selections, and possibly our desires. We leave traces of our interests, purchases, conversation, and personal feedback online. And we can assume that we have left enough data to profile our income, age, marital status, sexual preference, political outlook, level of education, where we live, and where we have been. Ironically, we willingly offer up all sorts of personal information to social media and search engines like Google, and even more to the services designed to protect our identity, our precious data, and our money. We provide perfect strangers with our birthdays, Social Security numbers, mothers' maiden names, our place of birth. You guys get the idea. And here, the paradox is we offer things up in order to both get rewards and at the same time, conceal and protect what we hold most dear.

RAVETTO (Cont.): 00:08:43:09 Okay. So I'm going to move to durational aesthetics, which sort of leads me to the time of prediction, time as anticipation. First, as prediction indicates, we are placed into a speculative time, a preemptive time of possible desirable and undesirable future outcomes. *Predictive Engineering* asks us to think about how speculations on the future have already invaded our sense of presence. The voice warns us real time will be predictive time. This speculative time becomes itself a model of how such predictive time influences geopolitics, policy, and the movement of people. I'm going to put up the next example of prediction time. This is an image that comes from human geographers working in a company called GeoConnexion, who built a geography information system, a GIS, in 2013, to map out and predict all possible areas of radicalization

in Algeria. The bivariate mapping techniques used in this model are far more sophisticated than the closed-circuit television we use to monitor the museum, for instance, or ATM cash machines. Closed-circuit television was designed to maybe see in real time, but to react to events that have already or are taking place. Predictive technologies like GIS mark the shift away from responding to potential risks or opportunities, to preempting speculative risks and creating targets of opportunity. Here, the predictive again leaks or bleeds into social engineering. Is this a speculative map or an imaginative one?

00:10:41:12 Okay, so my next time zone, which is the me, myself, and I that lives in live time. It is not just the paradox of real time predictive analytics that Scher's installation presents us with; it also forces us to see that the time we live in is fraught with contradictions. While the machine time may operate in the real time of prediction, we live in a time that is leveraged. The installation asks us to leverage what you know against what you have seen. I will call the time it takes to leverage your knowledge or our perception reflective time, for it is the time it takes to recognize ourselves in the mirror. Within this reflective time, I also recognize myself as the subject of the image I behold, just as I recognize that I have been subjected to a certain form of image capture that makes me its subject or target. But *Predictive Engineering* demonstrates that there is a disconnect between the mirror in which I see myself and those images that are being projected on the screen. On the screen, I'm slightly out of step. I see myself in delay. But I pose to see myself in the future. I'm caught in an untimely vision of myself as present, in the mirror; past, on the screen; and oriented towards the future, in the gestures that I'm making before the camera, that might possibly appear in the screen in RAVETTO (Cont.): the near future. As Gabriel Tarde argues, all perception implies an embodied repetition of ourselves. And this is a quote. "Every act of repetition, inasmuch as it involves an act of memory, which it always does, implies a kind of habit, an unconscious imitation of self by self. It is through such a process of mediation that perceptions can be cast as re-presentations, an imitation of self by self, and thereby by made accessible of performance of self." But how can we crash such a system, when we and it are constantly rebooting? These performative gestures before the camera are different than those of the people caught on Scher's surveillance cameras on the sixth and fourth floors or in the lobby and in the café, since these people who suddenly appear on the screen are not necessarily aware they are being watched. But can we really claim that their gestures are more authentic simply because they have not been asked to confront the fact that they are being watched?

00:13:39:12 Okay, so I'm going to move to the different iterations of durational aesthetic, as a sort of history time. So as Rudolf, Jill, and Robin— They've added another layer of complexity to this notion of durational aesthetics, for they are in it for the long haul. SFMOMA has hosted the three iterations of the installation, this being the most recent. And they're concerned with the preservation, the enduring of the work itself. I won't get into the technical challenges to preserving the work, because I think we'll probably deal with this later. But I would like us to think about what duration means. For Henri Bergson, he distinguished time from duration. For him, time was a product of measurement; duration is lived. Bergson's point was not simply to show how various types of time are measured—like lifespan, daily routine, work day, clock time, on time, slow time, play time, overtime, out of time—but how they create their own type of social engineering. More importantly, Bergson asked us to think about duration as a simultaneity or coexistence of heterogeneous experiences of lived time. While some of the technology of images of the older iterations of *Predictive Engineering* might seem out of date, there is a [inaudible] but urgent critical component that endures.

00:15:24:20 And I'd like to end with one of Julia's warnings, but hopefully, in the spirit of her piece, which is a little bit more playful. As Rudolf pointed out last night, there's a sense of urgency around the question of sexuality and nudity in particular. Nudity, we see, is more prevalent in the older iterations of the installation. Nudity has become, as Julia said, risky. How can it be that nudity RAVETTO (Cont.): is everywhere in social

media, on the internet, but the naked body has become vulnerable? Is it that the body has become vulnerable, or something else, something less tangible? Our subjection to what legal scholar Chris Kutz calls the crapification of social media and the internet. He argues that the proliferation of cheap, quick, and out of control image capture technologies results in the proliferation of pornography; but also unbridled bullying, misogyny, homophobia, racism, and all other forms of antisocial behavior. Now, this implies a human behavior, right? Given our ability to communicate in the most obscene ways, we will do so. And I'm not so sure that that's the case, and I think that Julia's piece is also questioning that being the case. And that's why she brought up Jean Baudrillard. So I'm going to sort of reiterate or echo with Jean Baudrillard. He argues that this coupling of desire that's socially engineered with a technology that can do many things produces the ecstasy of communication. And he called it the intimate proximity of everything. But it is an intimacy without presence. It's not lived. It endures by circulation. And this is a form of communication that endures as a contagion. It goes viral, overexposing us, as if we were, in the words of Baudrillard—and this is a quote—“a pure screen, a switching center for the networks of influence,” end quote.

00:17:45:19 So I want to talk just about this line, and then two responses to this line. And in this line, there's of course, another double entendre, the woman as bridge. We could sort of hear the echo of radical feminist of color Gloria Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and also the coupling of this line, the notion of reproduction. And here are the couple of responses, one from the Italian government, and the other from the internet. I'll translate, for those of you who don't know Italian. So Julia, the Italian government has taken you seriously, and you've created a new holiday called Fertility Day. So their ad is on the right, which says, “Beauty doesn't have an age, but fertility does.” So Italians are suffering from depopulation, right? So this is a campaign to return us to the bridge. And the other says—I'm sorry about the kind of crassness of this—“Remember to take a dump.” So the time of the body here is being presented as a going viral that is a little bit more playful. And playful obscene, in a way that isn't obscene in the sense of the government sort of getting in there and trying to get you to reproduce. Okay. So these are the responses that make us aware of the absurdity of the demands we are often seduced by and confronted with. And now I'm done. [applause]

00:19:36:25 [END]