Bodies-in-action as a medium of design

**Keywords:** embodiment design; bodies-in-action; kinesthesia; dispersed design practices

1. Workshop Organiser/s

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2. Context of Workshop

In this workshop, we invite participants to explore bodies-in-action as a medium of design, in an effort to broaden conceptions of and possibilities for design practice.

Interaction designers have demonstrated growing interest in the performative body as a major variable in designed systems, aspiring to “whole-body interaction”, “interfaces that are in some way physically embodied” (Hornecker, 2016), and the development of systems that will “more fully engage people’s bodies” (Zimmerman & Forlizzi, 2014). However, most design-led research on human bodies has been concerned with how bodies interact with the forms and products of design—artifacts, spaces, interfaces, communications and services. By considering bodies as a medium for design as ‘embodiment design’, extending from Dourish (2004), we hope to contribute new ways of thinking about the body in design, particularly the design of bodies-in-action.

This inquiry has the potential as well to inform more general conceptions or theories of design, which have also historically been grounded in professionalized versions of design practice, across degrees of expertise (Cross, 2004), as well as ‘amateur’ design practices resembling professionalized design. (Jencks, 2013) We work with a conception of design as a ubiquitous, “dispersed practice,” a general practice applicable to any context and domain (Schatzki, 1996). This conception of everyday design practice draws from theories of practice informing design (Kuijer, 2014) and builds on a long-standing assertions about universal applications of design, from Simon’s “everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed
at changing existing situations into preferred ones” (Simon, 1969) to Manzini’s recent discussion of “diffuse design” (Manzini, 2015).

Researchers of science and technology studies have helped to show that designed systems are mere vehicles, “devices” configured in and used for the performance of practices (Suchman, 2007) which can include a wider range than convention holds, such as biochemical processes, concepts, stories, methods and models (Singleton and Law, 2012). Building on this in our research, we consider bodies-in-action as devices by examining a range of practices—somatic and stage-acting methods, free-running, runway model walking—as well as professional design practices incorporating bodily performance, such as body-storming and experience prototyping. Working from interviews, a case inventory, and workshops with designers and body-based practitioners, we will present archetypes to suggest forms of embodiment design. This is not to establish a typology, but to generate discussion, to augment our learning with additional design perspectives, and to invite interest in embodiment design as a form of ubiquitous design practice.

3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

Participants will interact with and contribute to a set of archetypes representing forms of embodiment design (design working with bodies, particularly bodies-in-action). These will be presented in digital and analog formats, mostly as static and dynamic visuals with some verbal or text elaboration. These archetypes are derived from research across a range of body-based practices and fields of practice, as well as practices in professional design attending to and/or making use of bodies-in-action.

Participants will be invited to reflect upon and contribute their personal experiences of embodiment design, addressing ordinary bodily practices as well as practices applied by professional designers working in body-based approaches. We will invite participants to participate in body-based “kinesthetic” demonstrations, design activities and group discussions. Participants will access and contribute to expanding lines of inquiry considering the body as a medium of design by exploring design across multiple forms of bodily practice, debating the assumptions of embodiment design practice, and discussion the implications for definitions of design as a ubiquitous, dispersed practice.

4. Intended Audience

We invite anyone from any background to attend. The only requirement is that attendees be willing to participate in hands-on, collaborative, and body-based movement exercises. Participants should be interested in considering design as a ubiquitous practice, which may require de-prioritizing, for now, concerns about professionalized design and expertise. Our ideal number or participants depends upon the length of the workshop. If we schedule a half-day workshop, we can accommodate a larger group of 10-30 participants. For a 1.5 hour workshop, 5-15 participants.
5. Length of Workshop
A half-day (3 hour) period would be the best option because we are interested in a rich discourse. We will include multiple distinct participatory activities, and want everyone in attendance to be able to share their experiences. However, we can work with any time period between 1.5 and 4 hours. Please note, the number of participants will need to change depending on the length of the workshop. (see #4)

6. Space and Equipment Required
Movable tables and chairs for workshop activities, and open floor space of around 1 square meter per person for movement. (This would be ideal. Less open space is also workable). A screen or projector with sound and laptop connection to show video and images.

7. Potential Outputs
We will document our workshop outcomes in terms of new learning on embodiment design and design as a dispersed/ubiquitous practice. This may include controversies and debates, new questions, exposed assumptions, new research connections, among other topics. We intend to share the results of this workshop as one of several workshops and stages of research, in future conferences and publications, within and outside of the field of design.

About the Organisers:

Organiser 1
Kakee Scott is a PhD student in the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University. She previously worked as faculty in Strategic Design and Management and Environmental Studies at Parsons the New School for Design, New York and Paris.

Organiser 2
Stephen Neely, Artist Lecturer in the music embodiment pedagogy Dalcroze Eurhythmics, School of Music, Carnegie Mellon University. Stephen is also a PhD student in the School of Design at CMU researching embodied tangible interactions and the body as performative tool.

References: