Aesthetics of Control Session Outline:
2:30pm to 3:30pm: Archaeology and Art Practice Building: Room 285

Description:
Imagining virtual/digital spaces as participatory and performative environments that center diversity of bodily expression and radical embodiment. Can we explore unquantifiable bodies within the metaverse instead of reducing our humanity to traceable information patterns? What if we imagined technologies that allow for more diversity of expressions and movements rather than erasing or reducing them?

Summary of Presentations:
Jaime del Val
The concept of a fixed point of vision was developed in the Renaissance and that is entirely the base of our interfaces we use today. This view creates a radical impoverishment of the body so that our body remains very still and we only move our hands in small discrete ways - small kinesthetics of the eyes and fingers in relationship to the fixed vision point. This way of organizing the world relates to how we build the so-called Metaverse. As the body diminishes in this paradigm it requires heavier and more planetary scale

machinery - where bodies are made more and more immobile. There is a connection between more immobilization of the body and large scale interconnected global machinery. This creates in turn a “trash planet” and a “trash human” as more and more heavy metals and plastics are discarded in landfills, and more minerals are mined in extractivism-based methods.

The use of “trash-human” by del Val is a play on the idea of a post-human, trans-human, or techno-human that is popularized when talking about the metaverse and the body. Enhancement of the body to a technological body is tied to a trash body that is tied to mass extinction of the planet. This is a self-extinction process, reduction of our capacities (kinesthetic impoverishment) and covering our planet in trash as we invest more in un-sustainable technologies. This all comes together in a paradoxical way. The technological singularity and the “trash” singularity will most likely come together in some fashion on a similar timeline as an Extinction Singularity. There appears to be an exponential acceleration towards this future eventually precipitating over the coming decades.

The purpose of control (of our vision in particular and our current understanding of our bodies is to erase any indeterminacy in the movements of bodies and flows: human, non-human and inorganic). But indeterminacy is core to life and evolution as variation, and increasing diversification. How do we face this? How do we regain our lost sense of body and of kinesthetic variation? Proprioception is a big part of this change. Can we move away from the confining fixed point perspective and regain a more indeterminate and rich capacity to sense? This demands reconceptualizing what we are and how we move in relation to the world. Del Val holds that proprioception is the most important sense in humans and non-humans. Proprioception is the way we can know ourselves and the world as related, not separated, and as in variation, not by fixing ourselves and the world. It is the matrix through which other ways of sensing and knowing are part of a movement of variation of ourselves and the world in which we are not imposing a movement of a fixity onto the world, everything moves reciprocally all the time. The way we see becomes part of our proprioceptive matrix. The predominance of indeterminate variation in the cosmos is due to the ubiquity and unavoidability of quantum fluctuations (a core principle of physics since over 100 years) that Del Val proposes to consider not just a state

but an neverending variation. Quantum fluctuations underlie every “structure” of our universe including ourselves and our thoughts, but also the largest scales like in the amorphous matter distributions of galaxy filaments, each one conatining hundreds of thousands of galaxies, including our own, as part of this neverending variation. Del Val suggests that the human body is a further evolution of the quantum-based model of the universe. The body is an expression of quantum fluctuations: it is a formless fluctuation field, and its indeterminacy needs to be sustained.

Radical Movement Philosophy proposes that there is only movement. Movement is not displacement but formless fluctuation fields. A universe’s evolution is a never ending variation process propelled by quantum fluctuations. In other words, how we move is how we think. The more varied our movements the more varied our thoughts. Body Intelligence (rather than Artificial Intelligence) is about letting the body, as proprioceptive field, as formless fluctuation field, unfold un endlessly varied and self organizing rhythmic fields, by reaching down to the billions of years of bacterial evolution from which our proprioceptive field has emerged as decentralized system. This is where a potential revolution could occur rather than an AI dystopia of

control. We are our proprioception. People who lose a sense of proprioception lose a sense of self and a sense of the world. When we feel a bottle or a piece of bread, for example, we feel these things through deformation of our muscles as tensional field, muscular fluctuations in combination with our vision and other senses. This is a radical reversal of our fixed point of vision fixation.

When we split ourselves from the world - detached from proprioception - this separation allows for colonization practices. The world becomes something that can be measured and controlled. Proprioception is an entangled and more complex sense of understanding. It is related to movement and transformation, self-organization in relation to others. We sense others in the process of moving with others and with the environment. Fluctuations are there fin our movement always and can express without getting determined if we allow them. Affordances are one way to approach how to create both ourselves and our environments as movement relations that don't have to get determined. Del Val talks about his art as 'life techniques'. The most important one shared in the talk are the dis-alignment techniques that allow us to tap into the non-rational capacity of the body to constantly vary in subtle ways - movement as an internal fluctuation between 360 joints

(combining them all together creates nearly infinite possibilities of movement and thinking). The attempt to determine movements (of humans, non-humans and planetary flows) over the past millennia has unleashed the Sixth Great Mass Extinction, for which reinventing ourselves towards embracing indeterminacy and undoing human suprematism in all its forms is the greatest possible evolutionary challenge, that we urgently need to face, for a metahuman mutation and a planetary health.

Karen Nakamura:
Karen would like to bring into the conversation disability, sensitivity and crip-sensitivity - thinking through the modalities of how we interface with larger technological developments and how those new technologies see us humans or non-humans. Often technology gets framed as assisting with human “liberation”. Or, a method of liberation. Think of movies like *Avatar* where the disabled marine can have an able body through his avatar – fall in love again, and save the world. Many times the notion is that the upcoming Metaverse will liberate people by giving them fuller lives. This is based on an ableist conception that disabled bodies are reductive in some sense or that the problems of living full lives are found in our disabled bodies or minds

rather than social institutions or other ways of knowing the world. This notion that the technology itself will allow us to outsmart or make better our “disabled” minds or bodies is built on a conceit that is highly problematic.

We want to critique that while also being aware that there is value to technology. Liz Jackson is a crip theorist and technologist who talks about what she calls “disability dongles” – technology that supposedly meets disabled needs, but fails to do so because it’s not aware of actual disabled needs and uses. She gives as an example a youtube video of a new high-tech wheelchair that can supposedly climb stairs, but in the background of the video is a ramp going up those same stairs. In addition, the new chair looks terrifying to ride. None of the able bodied engineers are shown actually sitting on the chair let alone riding it up the stairs. All these things are presented as “savior”technologies. Another example is the self-driving car which has always been presented as a savior technology - for blind drivers, for example, but they never fulfill that promise. In the end, we (disabled people) are not seen as actual users of these new cars. Even worse, it is apparent to the disbled community that the self-driving algorithms used by these cars were not trained with a sufficiently large database to account for different types of pedestrians - people

using wheelchairs or walkers, people using canes, people using service animals, and so forth. The self-driving car may read us as non-human like mail boxes or trash cans and not stop for us.

Disabled people are at this phase in thinking about data futures that we are at risk of being seen by our robot overlords as non-human. I have a friend who because of his height doesn't trigger automatic door openers. For job seekers, automated AI-based resume screeners don't see our unique experiences that would contribute to the diversity and strengths of companies. We are not seen (by robots) as being the type of humans the company might want.

As our data goes into these large frameworks, what are the ways we become recognizable as human (or non-human)? It is a bit ironic that I'm wearing an ape face mask [for covid reasons] right now. Because there is a lot of discussion right now about critique of the boundary between humans and non-humans. Sunaura Taylor in her first book examines the tensions between animal liberation and disability. And in that gap, disabled folks are often compared to animals – from someone who has tremors, to how someone walks differently, to someone who is having a meltdown is behaving. These

are often described in animalistic terms. Taylor says the comparison to humans and animals should be looked at more and that we should ask ourselves “what is wrong with being an animal?” That animals are kin. She is next working on looking at the environment and looking at what it would mean to have disabled environments. Living in a world in which we live in a disabled environment.

Nakamura also wants to talk about the notion of different kinds of time, like Berkeley time and Crip-time (note, this doesn’t always mean being late to things). Crip time is also about who is allowed to have a future. It is tied into notions of queer futuries. Allison Kafer asks “do we (as disabled/crip people) get to have a future?” For folks with disabilities, time is often cyclical. Disabled people are told to wait for treatment or other things before engaging in the world. We get stuck in a constant loop of forever waiting. Is our future always metaphorically heading downwards? The question of how we deal with time is not always aligned with linear time and able-bodied time. To what degree can Crip-time be seen as gaps in time, time no longer exists, or time slows down? Nakamura would like to talk about various modalities being presented for example in the field of video games and the play with time in that

space. There has been more critique of time in that field and she would like to see more explored there.

Nakamura's Disability Lab is hosting two fantastic scholars who are part of the Leonardo Crip-Tech project. First is Carmen Papalia. He is doing a project working through pain. He is trying to think through pain. The disability community doesn't talk much about it. We live with pain, we live with chronic fatigue. It can often be difficult to share this with others until we reach a place of intimacy with another person. How can we manifest pain through video game avatars? Often avatars can represent strength, cunning, power, silence, etc. but they don't have metaphors for addressing pain. Carmen is working through how to address this more fully. The other artist is Moira Williams who wants us to think through our relationship to water through a crip-tech lens. Water is perhaps one of our fundamental rights. Many times the disabled community is prevented from water either through being homeless or access to clean drinking water, or water is contaminated, or we don't have access to the beach front. Often disabled kids in schools don't get to the school field trips due to access. The ties to water and proprioceptive are so essential. What would it be to think about water through the

socio-political dimensions and also the very intimate and basic ways water is life giving.

Jaime del Val on Disalignements:
(is it possible to copy here my brief disalignments exercise? I copy here the text that I sort of read:
“I invite everyone to relax and disalign. Feel the microfluctuations of posture. the body moves, it always moves, unstoppably, by itself. Its state is always fluctuation. Feel the fluctuations of your muscular tensions and joints, let them spread. Feel the chair, floor or table through your muscular pressure fluctuations. Feel the fluctuating caress of your clothes. Feel how the breathing shifts it all. Let it unfold in always new subtle torsions, without rational control. You are a self-organizing swarm of 360 joints, even if you have been told that you cannot move, a power to vary inherited from 4 billion years of bacterial evolutions. This is your neglected sense of proprioception, the more than human amoeba in us. You are a proprioceptive swarm. Its power for endless variation is your BI, Body intelligence, whose power to vary techno human civilizations have been erasing over millennia, as we have become aligned with unsustainable planetary scale technical systems that are unleashing a full scale mass extinction while we become increasingly atrophied

and controlled. By cultivating the smallest ongoing variation we may undo millennia of alignments, a BI revolution for a planetary health.”

Can we awaken a new sense of connecting to the non-rational? Centering the rational has tended to atrophy our capacity for movement. Can we keep accessing fluctuations? We need to practice how to vary our movements through disalignement strategies. One project is called Micro-Sexes that uses cameras placed on the body to reimagine how the “body sees itself” and proprioception itself through tactile vision (not the fixed point of vision). There is another project called Amorphogenesis that uses distributed sensors on the body to create a distributed sense of the body sensation that allows a more indeterminate body schema. Flexinamics structures are an expansion of this, where the body can expand its sense of self through connection to the flexible wearable architectures. It is a flexible architecture that challenges our thousand year-old goal of making rigid architecture, which is tied to killing the planet and we need to undo this outmoded way of designing our architectures. In the Metatotia environment, Del Val works with neurodiverse and differently abled people to work with the smallest movements of the body, multisensory integration,

proprioception, and the minimal ongoing variation of our kinesthetic field, itself and endless fluctuating microcosmos (as Charles Scott Sherrington already proposed in 1906 when first describing proprioception).

How can small movements be re-envisioned and experienced to reveal an infinite world of possibility and range? Can tiny movements be expanded to shift an entire architecture? The sensors are never held by the hands and avoid control with the hands. The body can be connected to something that allows for discovery and the unknown in an intermittent environment. Meta-affordances are indeterminate affordances that allow ongoing reconfiguration of multisensory integration and the proprioceptive field. Del Val has done many research projects on this idea. How other abled bodies can create worlds and vary patterns in an indeterminate interactive environment is part of opening the way for an intrinsically neurodiverse culture where there is no normative homogenizing imposed mode of movement and thinking. The Reverso Centre is a space https://metabody.eu/centre/ in rural Spain where people can come together and work on these ideas and practices. We need other modes of relation other than the dominant paradigm of the trash-human trash-planet. Co-sensing with others, allowing body intelligence to

evolve and unfold is Del Val's favorite practice. See hir new monograph "Ontohackers" https://metabody.eu/ontohackers/ for more on hir theories and practices. S/he is also working on a new project funded by the EU called BODYNET-KHORÓS https://metabody.eu/bodynet-khoros/.

Karen Nakamura:
There is a wonderful film by Regan Brashear called *Fixed*. She asks questions of transhumanism and prosthetic technology in that film. And as Nakamura remarked earlier there is a lot of funding being put into things like exo-skeletons to enable people who use wheelchairs to walk. And yet, there is very little critical exploration if that is actually what people want or are asking for. Is it feasible? There is a wonderful segment in the film where they interview a Berkeley activist who uses a power chair. And the realities of the current industry and insurance is that power chairs are not waterproof. They use 1980's technology. It uses lead acid batteries from the early 1900's. The motors are these primitive DC technologies. We cannot keep chairs operating because they are not designed to be fixable by end-users. We need to make them waterproof. Berkeley is one of the few cities where if you get stranded in your power chair someone will come help

you fix it. In almost every other city this is not the case. As a disabled technologist Nakamura asks, who will be able to use this extremely expensive technology? It is being built for so few people. Only the highly privileged will be able to afford them.

Health insurance will often only provide one chair to a person. So if you have a powered chair, or some other new technology, you cannot have a manual chair. If your power chair fails, you are on your own and might have to check into a nursing home while it is repaired. The economics and the pragmatics never really match up. Nakamura doesn't want to dampen creative ideas, but the lived life experiences need attention. Often the real use of exoskeletons is for the military rather than the disabled communities. Do we want to enable super soldiers? This is often the secret of neuroregenerative technologies. Repairing soldiers who were damaged, or enhancing the current soldiers. The disability community is often used as an excuse to design new things. #actual disabled people need to be involved. We are disembodied and non-existent within many design/technology spaces. Often the newness or sexiness of the technology itself outweighs the actual usefulness. Crip washing a project is what we call it. Nakamura's lab is working with Google right now. They

want to talk to minoritized folks about google products. But it is entirely a crip washing project. They want to make Google more palatable.

Conversations with the attendees:
Attendee: Remembering a film made about stem cell research. It was about a daughter who had a rich, wonderful life but her father was obsessed with making her “whole or normal” again. The daughter wished that he would see what was good about her body already. The emphasis was centered on the technological solution.

Nakamura: This relates to the notion that disabled folks are often in a time of stasis where they are told “why don’t you wait until you get better” before fully living your life. People tell us, “there is a new experimental research project in neuroregeneration so, don’t waste your time in learning to live your life now using a cane or wheelchair. There is always something around the corner. Blah blah blah.” This notion of “we can improve you” is a false notion. We can make you better. This can be a trap where people don’t get to live your life.

Del Val: We completely tend to ignore the fact that it is not just the whole problem of the technology being

elitist, or about the military, but we ignore that certain ways of living are “the way” to live. And we all have to align around this way of living and thinking. We cannot keep pretending that there is only this normative way of moving in the world. This “aligned” way of living in the world is creating a trash planet. We are told that we need to aspire to a normative (and unattainable) way of living. This is driving us to a mass extinction. We should work on disaligning ourselves now - away from the “neurotypical” way so that we can avoid (or reduce) the already ongoing mass destruction of our world. We need to have a radically diverse way of sensing and thinking about the world, rather than rational time-lines and space-lines of movement.

Nakamura: At the beginning of del Val’s talk he said that he doesn’t participate in Facebook. The most lonely and isolated people are often most connected to social media. The people who feel alienated and disengaged can be sold fiery propaganda. They will click through the false news and ads, etc. It acts on our desire to be enraged.

Attendee: New kinds of shoes, bras, living rooms, etc. are marketed to people to live the “normal way,” otherwise you won’t be happy.

Del Val: Facebook is a hyper facist mode of sociality. This is not a metaphor. The way people subject themselves to over-exposure and quantification. There is no sustainable future world in the Metaverse. There is an attempt to make our lives commodified and totally controlled. There is no future in the Metaverse. It is a fascict dystopia of control.

Nakamura: There is an anthropologist from UC Irvine, Tom Boellstorff, who writes about Second Life and how this game brought together people who have chronic fatigue and other disabilities. It was the first time they felt they had a sociality. There are moments when a glimmer of hope when technology might become useful for us.

Del Val: Doesn't that show rather that there was already a deep impoverishment of sociality prior the creation of the game Second Life? We need to re-invent our co-sensing with one another, through proprioception. We need to stop the radical impoverishment of our lives.

Attendee: Curious about the impoverished way of sensing the body and how disability is used. Curious

about when we say “the metaverse is improving us” how can we break the distance without technology?

Del Val: we have lost a connection to the world and our bodies. If we connected to more around us we wouldn’t be so obsessed with reaching out everywhere through the asme technologies that impoverish our embodied existence while collapsing the planet. The promise of endless connectivity is based on a trash covered planet. It is a colonial project of trying to reach everywhere at the price of limiting our sensori-motor spectrum is a colonial practice. The more atrophied our internal variation the more we expand in homogeneous mechanical displacements that kill the planet. It is already creating a mass extinction. Non-human animals are deeply connected to their environment and to migrations, but the migrations that non-humans do are connected to the flows of the earth. Humans are travel against the flows of the planet. Our entire dominat civilization has been established against the flows of the earth, including of course the animal Holocaust. It is a radical evolutionary failure that we need to face without delay but our deeply rooted human suprematism is making it that these core problems are never dealt with. As for instance human overpopulation, the need to stop

human reproduction, while undoing every historical heteronormative dogma.

Nakamura: During the first half of the 20 Century, Deaf people in the United States often went to Deaf Clubs to socialize after work. There were gathering spaces. In the 1980's those spaces evaporated. Why? TVs got closed captions. Deaf people could now go home after work rather than going to the Deaf Clubs, and thus they could be part of the "regular" world of atomized individuals. It was a huge "advancement" for the "normalizing" of the deaf community. But it was a huge loss for their community. Now through Youtube and other methods, we have seen a new rebirth of Deaf Culture in terms of deaf poets and storytellers – communities are reconnecting. It comes out of an impoverishment that they had experienced for decades. Is technology the crutch or wheelchair that allows us to become mobile again? Or will it put us in an unbearable situation and then technology is the "salve" but the circumstances are not changed.

Del Val: the algorithms that don't distinguish the human from the non-human form expand on humanistic suprematism, inherited from the Renaissance.

A vision-based model - the paradigm of a fixed vision that attempts to formalise the world, this is the core problem, Away with algorithms as world-reduction creating mass extinctions. What I call the Algoricene as age of algorithms, as age of world reduction and extinction needs to be urgently overcome, mutating as species: by embracing the indeterminacy in movement.

Bios of Presenters:

Karen Nakamura is the Haas Distinguished Chair of Disability Studies and Professor of Anthropology. She is a cultural and visual anthropologist whose research focuses on disability, sexuality, and minority social movements in contemporary Japan. Her first book, Deaf in Japan, was on sign language, identity, and deaf social movements. She recently finished a second book on schizophrenia and mental illness in Japan entitled, A Disability of the Soul. For the past year, she has been working on a project exploring the intersections of disability, gender, and sexuality. Her books, films, and articles have resulted in numerous prizes including the John Whitney Hall Book Prize, the SVA Short Film Award, and David Plath Media Award. She is currently finishing a project on trans movements as disability in

Japan while launching a new project on robotics, augmentation, and prosthetic technology.

Jaime del Val is a metahumanist (post)queer philosopher-artist-activist mainly based in Spain, promoting transdisciplinary projects across all arts, old a new media, critical theory and social fields, promoter of the Metabody network (www.metabody.eu) and the Reverso organisation, whose projects have been presented in over 30 countries. Jaime develops ontohacking and BI techniques for reinventing the body and regenerating the planet in the age of algorithms and extinctions. Jaime considers herself as neurodiverse, mestiza, neither human nor man nor woman and is not on Facebook. www.jaimedelval.com

Top Photo: Lisa Wymore (wearing a long sleeve white button down shirt and gray mask) is sitting in front of a

computer gesturing with her hands. She has red hair and light colored skin. To her right is Karen Nakamura. Karen is wearing a black shirt and is turning her head towards Lisa. Her dog is sitting on her lap. Karen is also wearing a face mask (with the mouth of a smiling monkey printed on the front that you cannot see in this photo). Karen is seated. Behind Lisa and Karen is Charis Thompson, an attendee. Charis is seated. She has blond hair and is wearing a gray suit coat over a dark shirt. She is wearing a blue face mask.

Bottom Photo: Karen and Lisa are seen sitting facing a desktop computer screen in silhouette. On the computer screen are three zoom participants engaging with the talk. On the large screen in the front of the room is a picture of Jamie de Val facing forward and smiling. Only Jaime's head can be seen. He is wearing a V-neck black shirt so it looks like his head is floating on the projection screen. He is zooming in from Spain.