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Review

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REVIEW

6th International Conference on Motion and Computing

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The following is a review of the 6th International Conference on Motion and Computing at Arizona State University, October 10–12, 2019. The theme of the interdisciplinary conference was Movement Imaginaries and included papers, panels, presentations, performances, demos, and workshops from both scholars and artists from a wide range of disciplines. This review focuses on the panel “Generative tension in cross-disciplinary collaboration”, from John MacCallum, Teoma Naccarato and Jessica Rajko considering the question: “what aspects of your practice/research are invisible to your collaborators?”

Keywords: conference; collaboration; cross-discipline

Last week, I attended the 6th iteration of the International Conference on Motion and Computing (MOCO), hosted by Arizona State University. Overall the conference was a compelling example of both the need for and benefits of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship. Scholars came together from across the globe to address the prompt of ‘Movement Imaginaries’ through paper presentations, panels, posters, performances, workshops and demonstrations. With less than one hundred attendees, the conference felt very communal and cooperative, with most inquiries coming from places of curiosity and support. All keynotes and paper presentations took place within a single space, made warm and inviting through the distribution of vases full of fairy lights. The choice to arrange the room as a series of tables added to the sense of community by positioning attendees to see and interact with one another.

The three keynote speeches give a demonstration of the breadth of the conference: somaesthetics in design, the effect of interactions with technology on the imagination, and movement’s effect on the brain.

The opening speaker, Kristina Höök discussed her work designing for 'the whole body, or the soma.' She began by drawing on her experience in Feldenkrais to cue the conference attendees to participate in a body scan, guiding her audience through a series of prompts designed to heighten awareness of all sensations. She was engaging, humorous and did an excellent job positioning her work in relation to broader concerns regarding movement and computing. Early in her speech she noted Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's critique of the way the term embodiment, in defining something as *of the body*, by default suggests there can be a time when something is not of the body. By prompting us to consider how even a term that attempts to demonstrate support for the contributions of the body relies on Cartesian ideology, Höök framed the conference as a place to question that ideology and the ways that it has coopted our use of language.

In line with the conference's theme, the second keynote speaker, Maaïke Bleeker began with a discussion of technogenesis, and her support of the idea that humans and technologies coevolve. She drew on N. Katherine Hayles, Gilles Deleuze and Mark Hanson to position technology not as other, but as a central part of ourselves. Bleeker then shared several examples of artistry that supported this notion. Her detailed description of the Dutch National Ballet's 1979 'Live', which utilised live video as an experimental new technology, focused on the way the response to the performance has changed as people have become acclimatised to this technology. Bleeker noted that the 2003 performance, which she showed footage from, featured the original cameraman who continues to perform his role to this day, still using the large camera with cable that the choreography was built around. The dancer, however, has changed. Bleeker did not dwell on this point, but in consideration of her original conjecture that humans and technology evolve together, I am curious what sort of evolution is taking place when a performer is replaceable but the technology is not?

Sylvain Moreno, the final keynote speaker focused on brain plasticity, asserting that brains can be changed throughout life, not just in youth and that to change the brain at the cognitive level requires sensory and motor engagement. Moreno went through the details of several studies that he conducted leading up to these results, but the details did not appear to have been curated towards a generalist audience.

I was particularly grateful, in a space that brings together so many varying perspectives, for the panel hosted by Jessica Rajko, John MacCallum and Teoma Naccarato titled 'Generative tension in cross-disciplinary collaboration.' Rajko – the only host able to be physically present – served as master of ceremony. She noted that the idea for the panel developed out of conversations from MOCO 2018, and in particular, a question about what escapes computation. Having asked for provocations via email about a month prior to the conference, Rajko, MacCallum and Naccarato assembled a panel of respondents to answer the question: 'What aspects of your practice/research are invisible to your collaborators?'

The panelists began by each speaking for a few minutes, introducing themselves and their field of research. I will not go into detail here as both the biographies of the panelists and their initial responses can be read on the [provocation's website](#). After introductory statements the panelists began discussing the challenges of collaboration such as the need for openness versus boundaries, noting that boundaries are often imposed based on the institutional framework that a person works within. One panelist offered the suggestion that for many projects to be accomplished, tasks should be distributed, and that this distribution requires an acknowledgement of skill sets of participants and an assignment of tasks accordingly. The more complicated question of who within a group is in charge of acknowledging/assigning and what to do if there is not an agreement on these answers was left unaddressed. While I am sure it was not the panelist's intent, this comment led me to think about the many arguments that have been made to suggest that certain people are inclined towards certain skill sets, such as the traditional distribution of labor between home and work within a marriage. While this statement on acknowledging and assigning tasks suggested a simplistic distribution of labor, when another panelist asked the audience to identify themselves, the group resisted assigning themselves labels based solely on their art or academic occupation. These started with 'I am on the south side of the room' and ended with 'I am ready to graduate'.

Near the close of the panel, Rajko prompted the panelists once again, asking them to address what has not been said and that they want to have said. My own response to this question would be a desire to return to the question Dr. Hannah

Klosstrin asked when introducing her use of Laban tools as a dance historian. Klosstrin noted that she has had to reconcile the ways that her seeing techniques have been limited by the biases of her tools and asks others to consider: ‘How do the ways we critique our tools affect our work in parallel or divergent ways from the manner(s) in which we use them?’¹ Klosstrin’s question about the critique of specific tools and the need to name the ways our awareness of them influences how we choose to use them seems an excellent position from which to draw a greater level of detail into the conversation, perhaps coupled with panelist Lauren Marks request for small group dialogues.

As a whole, the panel felt fruitful in its attempt to start conversations and make space for people to ask questions. Most people responded to the questions not in defense but in a generative more curious and supportive way. Rajko noted that the call for responses is still open, in case anyone else would like to extend the conversation.

After three packed days, I am excited to return to MOCO in the future. In particular, I am curious how future conference organisers will create a schedule that gives room for participants to move their bodies throughout the day, perhaps by shifting the timing of workshops and performances to intersperse them between paper panels or through concurrent scheduling.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Author Information

Kelly Bowker is a Ph.D. candidate in Critical Dance Studies at the University of California, Riverside. Her research uses critical race studies to examine the way that technology is represented and utilized in live and mediated dance. Bowker has received grants from Zellerbach Foundation in San Francisco and the DCASE in Chicago for the development of her choreography.

¹ Hannah Klosstrin. www.moco19.provocations.online.

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