The Emancipated Trait: Characteristics Beyond Character in Online Surveillance

Emily Rosamond
Griffin Art Projects Talk, July 6, 2019

Keynote: Emily Rosamond *(Artist, Researcher, and Lecturer in Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK) considers the performed tensions between the singularity of 'character' and the fungibility of traits that travel across border security software systems, social media algorithms, and other apparatuses.*

Abstract:

How is it possible to give an account of online surveillance, without relying on overdetermined and ill-fitting conceptual frames such as privacy and subjecthood? This talk argues for shifting the frame away from privacy and subject, and toward characteristic and 'character': a long-contested concept through which the relationships between ideas of singularity, self-similarity, tendency, and futurity are negotiated. Online surveillance performs tensions between the singularity of character and the fungibility of traits that travel across border security software systems, social media platforms, credit scoring algorithms, and many other apparatuses. Recognized tendencies and traits become 'emancipated' from the characters from which they are seen to emanate; they are then recombined to derive new data, which in turn reshape how a person's 'character' might be interpreted in the first place. This emancipation of traits has anything but emancipatory effects. Nonetheless, reorienting discussions of online surveillance toward the contested terrain of the characteristic opens up new means to frame discussions of the politics of data beyond privacy and subjecthood, drawing attention instead to the social logic of the *derived* and the *derivative*, fundamental to the financial underpinnings of data analysis.

Bio:

Emily Rosamond is a Canadian writer, artist and educator based in London, UK. Her current research stems from an interest in how historically situated performances of selfhood, character and reputation are intertwined with financial and surveillant infrastructures. Emily completed her PhD as a Commonwealth Scholar in Art at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2016. Following lectureships at the University of Kent and Arts University Bournemouth, she joined the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths in 2017, as Lecturer and Joint Programme Leader, BA Fine Art and History of Art. Emily has guest lectured widely, at venues including ICA, London; F.A.C.T., Liverpool; Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam; and Kunstgebaude, Stuttgart. Her recent publications have appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, Paragrana, Finance and Society, International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media, Moneylab Reader* (Institute of Network Cultures) and *Are We All Addicts Now?* (Liverpool University Press). Recent exhibitions include A.P.T. Gallery, London; Leu Gallery, Belmont University, Nashville; Karst, Plymouth; ASC Gallery, London; and Tenderpixel, London. Her upcoming two-person exhibition at SixtyEight Art Institute, Copenhagen (2020) explores narratologies of prediction through a 1941 patent filed by an actress and composer, which influenced the development of frequency hopping in wifi networks.