Title: Invisible Lives

Year: 2021

Material: Robotic Installation (plastic, silicon, thermal printer, and customized hardware)

Dimensions: 15 x 15 x 15 inches

Short Abstract

Invisible Lives is a robotic installation using the Twitter data and customized robot fingers to evoke understanding and spark a discussion about racism and the recent social movements Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. While Invisible Lives represents sensitive social issues, it also reveals the lack of conversation.

Long Description

Invisible Lives uses a computational system to evoke understanding and spark a discussion about racism and the recent social movements Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. It explores how racial biases are often freely expressed on online platforms where authors can hide behind anonymity. While we are connected online, we are also divided by biases. Biases separate people by gender, race, language, culture, and appearance. Online we are simultaneously connected and disconnected. Invisible Lives not only represents sensitive social issues but also voices the feelings of the targeted groups and reveals the lack of conversation about these issues.

Invisible Lives receives data including ID, date, time, sentences, and hashtags from Twitter in real-time, filters by keywords of Stop Asian Hate and Black Lives Matter using Python, and prints sentences on paper from a thermal printer. The process is implemented with Raspberry PI, Arduino microcontroller, stepper motors, and motor drivers. As sentences are printed, robotic hands with silicon fingers cut the thermal paper, leaving a pile of printouts on ground. As the fallen papers piled higher and higher, the audience can pick up the papers to read, take, or throw away. Amongst the pile of diverse messages, one may find examples that seek to share positive messages from the movements.

The aim of Invisible Lives is to raise awareness and start discussions, not for the audience to remain in frustration. By confronting the audience with a live stream of the on-going social movements of Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, the installation poses controversial questions about the origins, function, transmission, and lineage of prejudice. Since these robots resemble parts of the human body, yet are controlled by computational and mechanical systems, Invisible Lives reveals the different meaningful and reflective layers between human and machine.

Artist Bio

Hye Yeon Nam is a digital media artist and HCI designer exploring how technology can improve our interactions with other agents - humans, robots, or nature. She foregrounds the complexity of social relationships by making the familiar strange and interpreting everyday behaviors in performative ways. Hye Yeon has participated in exhibitions, festivals, and showcases at ARS Electronica Center, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Asia Society Texas Center, Japanese American National Museum, Times Square, Eyebeam, Conflux festival, D.U.M.B.O. Festival, Festival Internacional de Linguagem Eletronica (FILE), SIGGRAPH, CHI (Computer-Human Interaction), Tangible, Embedded and Embodied Interaction (TEI), International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA), Creativity & Cognition (C&C), and several venues in China, Istanbul, Ireland, the UK, Germany, Australia, Denmark, and Switzerland. Her work has been broadcast on *the Discovery Channel* and published in *Leonardo Journal* and featured in *Wired*, *We Make Money Not Art*, *Makezine*, *Business Insider*,*Slashdot*, *Engadget* among other publications.

Zak Berkowitz is a musician and systems administrator who is passionate about enabling creativity, research, and learning through technology. His career has spanned classical and popular music performance, experimental electronic sound and video art, and IT and systems administration. He holds degrees in music performance and technology from New Mexico State University, Georgia Southern University, and Louisiana State University.