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Conversation Between Katherine Araniello and Amanda Cachia

Amanda Cachia: Hi Katherine. Thanks for being here with me on Skype for our interview today for Cripping Cyberspace. So I'm going to start by asking you these questions, and the first is, well what do you think are the alternatives, constraints or possibilities for disabled people in cyberspace?

Katherine Araniello: Well, I think the possibilities are infinite. For example, in cyberspace, there are no physical barriers, and therefore representation of disability creates a new, refreshing discourse, i.e., a wheelchair can fly, and movement is different. Maybe disability has become obstinate in cyberspace, but can equally be explored further, and I feel the viewer will engage differently toward disability in a virtual world than possibly in reality, as the barriers and immediacy of the disability presence in the life experience are no longer there.

AC: Okay, that's great. And what do you think of, how are the barriers and possibilities in physical space different to that of cyberspace for disabled people?

KA: The difference in cyberspace is that there are no physical barriers, whereas in real life, there are many environmental barriers and access issues. I feel there is an equality in cyberspace, unprecedented in matter reality because we are all able to explore this space equally.

AC: So can you explain to me a little bit, so who is Sick Bitch Crip, or SBC?

KA: SBC is a developmental work over the past year, and the latest stage is that the concept of SBC has mutated into three digitally manipulated personas/avatars. Through continued development, I see SBC as epitomizing contemporary disability concerns and the work presents an altered narrative that restates disability in a creative way. SBC's existence in cyberspace is able to reach an able audience by there being no physical and financial restraints. A virtual space opens up possibilities and allows the artist to focus on their work, as opposed to overwhelming concerns of access and costs involved in making work outside of a virtual space.

AC: And how is cyberspace an important platform for SBC?

KA: It is an actual process for me to place subversive humour in my work, because in reality an irony of the issues surrounding disabled people is absurd. Once one takes the time to peel back the layers and look at the transparencies of – in relation to disability such as assisted suicide, I'm compelled to make work that will expose the irony.

AC: And what do you think are some of the outcomes of your online presence for disability politics? In other words, what are you hoping to achieve?

KA: My work is always about giving fresh, alternative perspectives on disability. It is important to me that the visual content is unique and has not been seen before, so in reference to SBC dance video, the characters are on one hand symbolic of disability, i.e., Sick is the universally recognizable wheelchair symbol that has been altered; Bitch is a walking disabled person, and Crip is in a wheelchair. All of the characters have multi-faceted components that relate to disability and contemporary culture, for example, Sick is made up of sickly colours, has a transparent funnel filled with baked beans and a tube running down the side is representative of peg feeding. The contradiction between the radical approach that would deem a gastric peg as an invasive medical intervention versus the social mindset that a peg feed sustains a disabled person's life, so the individual continues to function in society alongside their peers. Baked beans are a common and cheap Western food source and can be seen as comedic, such as flatulence. Part of my thinking process is a deconstruction of medical intervention in my SBC work. Crip is made up of fast food, and her body is the Queen of Hearts playing card, which is about how people's personal circumstances can sometimes be played to the utmost advantage. The politics behind my work is about not responding in a predictable way, creating new work, which will shift people's perspectives on contemporary issues of disability.

AC: So, how might your own personal ideas of access and ability evolve through your online presence with SBC?

KA: The future of SBC and its online presence is limitless. Online presence enables the work to travel globally.

AC: Right. So do you see that also as the directions for disability in cyberspace in the future?

KA: Should always be room for both. Art in cyberspace and reality. The difference in cyberspace would be that the art would be accessible to everyone who has access to the computer. Sorry, I didn't spend too much time on those ones.

AC: That's okay. Do you have anything else you wanted to add to the interview?

KA: I could probably go on forever about (*unintelligible*). Because they are interesting. Very interesting questions, and the more you look at them and think about them, the more you can analyze. I do think this is the way forward. Particularly for me, because traveling is quite difficult and problematic so I feel that I now have equal footing, and I just think that this is where we are now in society. It makes it possible for artists to engage through Skype and virtually, and isn't just happening – it's happening across the board. There are other artists, and I know one person is a contemporary dancer, and she's recently done a piece of work in which she was in a studio in Sweden and through Skype, then projected onto a screen in the gallery, and eight people were able to talk to her on Skype and then this was part of the work, so I think it's really a very progressive way, and I think in relation to disabled people, it's certainly opening up opportunities for everyone.

AC: That's great. Actually, I do have a few more questions I just thought of. I was wondering if you found this process of being part of this exhibition challenging at all, and if you enjoyed being part of this exhibition.

KA: I totally enjoyed being part of it. Because I feel that when you actually involve all this you think about the work more and you try to, I really consider what it is I'm doing, and you know, I wouldn't have come up with this concept. Even the title itself, *Cripping Cyberspace*, is an interesting title that makes one think about what it is they're doing. And also I hadn't I guess

really gone through that process of thinking about my work, was actually now existing more in a virtual space than it was in reality, or I just think that the actual, this opportunity and the exhibition assist me as an artist to really look at my work and think about the direction that it's going in. And I like the term "virtual space;" it's not that these terms are unfamiliar, but I hadn't really considered it before.

AC: Right. I was thinking how you initially expressed some kind of nervousness about the idea of audio description, audio describing your work, so I was wondering if you could just talk about how as the curator I may have pushed you a little bit, challenged you in that direction.

KA: I felt that I was – I'm somebody that always has to do things correctly, so if I feel that I'm going to make a bad job of something, I tend to get very over-concerned if I feel that I can't give 100 percent. So I am aware of audio description and how professional it sounds, and my concern really was being able to work to that standard, to that level. But I think through the process of audio description was pretty interesting because it makes you think about your work again differently, and I actually found the process very stimulating, because having to write about your work is different if you're doing it as an access requirement than if you're writing about it conceptually. There's two differences. And I found that an interesting process.

AC: Okay, well I'm glad that I asked you to do that and that you ended up enjoying it.

KA: I did enjoy doing it. And I sort of worked out how to do it prior to you sending the notes, which I will look at.

AC: Good, yeah. But you've done a great job, and I saw that script that you sent and that was wonderful.

KA: Thank you.

AC: Now, I was going to close the interview, but was there anything else that you wanted to add? For instance, where are you going to go with SBC? What's the next iteration of SBC?

KA: Well, I want to continue with SBC. I've enjoyed the stop animation although it is a very time-consuming process. I'm always looking at other, I'm always thinking about ways to develop, and at the moment I would like to be able to do some more stop animation with the three characters. I'm not sure we have a distinctly (*unintelligible*) this continue to evolve and I can't say at the moment what – I generally work in a – I get stimulated by something, and then fit what I'm doing into that environment, so I can't be prescriptive where I'm going. I just know it was a lot of work to get the dance, it was quite intense.

AC: How did you actually do the stop animation? What software were you using?

KA: It was Final Cut Pro and Photoshop. And then they were created, the faces are actually real, but they've been treated so you wouldn't necessarily know that anymore. And then they were sort of cut into pieces, 'cause the more fragmented they are, the more beautiful. And then so they were taken out, they were printed out, and then with a camera on a tripod, moved, taken, the sort of standard method of stop animation. Had them on the back of a blue screen, just moved a little bit, took a picture. So it was very labourious. And then edited them to be on loops, et cetera.

AC: So can you explain to me a little bit why you made the choice to have a music video, and the SBC doing the dances. So what was the choice of that? Even your choice of song; I (unintelligible) that song that you have.

KA: Firstly, the dance, I had only ever done one of the stop animation, and so I wanted to do movement, because I felt it would fit into cyberspace really well, it's about movement and movement that was access-free, I guess. And I thought that would work better than a sketch for this first piece. And the music was really just a piece of music that I wrote, and then I made that in GarageBand, so it was already a piece of music in the distance on a free site and then I used other tracks to place them together on a soundtrack, and then I created the words. The words became part of the subtitling, so that rather than do the traditional subtitling underneath, I thought that I would incorporate the words into the music. It's a dance video so that it would just look better.

AC: Okay, that's great. Do you actually have a title for the piece that you've submitted to Cripping Cyberspace? I don't think I even asked you that.

KA: That's a good question.

AC: Maybe you'll come up with one. Because we know that it's SBC, but if you had any kind of specific title for that piece.

KA: I think there does need to be a title for it. And I will think about it. It might be the phrase SBC Dance, just keep it simple. I think that is it, SBC Dance. That's it.

AC: That's great. So that's actually a good way to end the interview. Thanks very much, you know I really enjoyed the work too. I think it's a really wonderful addition to the exhibition. So thanks again for also doing the interview.