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Biography

I am a researcher, artist, and creative technologist based out of Toronto, Canada. My work explores ideas around the agency of objects and systems using tools like physical computing, artificial intelligence, and the internet of things. I have experience writing about and explaining different technical processes, and can clearly communicate about project goals and needs across designers, developers and researchers. My overall approach and process leverages a range of practical experience with technical platforms, research methodologies, and the application of critical theory to digital media.

Work

Creative Technologist and New Media Artist
Independent Contractor
2014 – Ongoing

During my new media arts career I have worked within creative tech and independent games communities as an installation artist, and a developer where I focused on making wireless peripherals and custom game controllers. My work has been shown both locally and internationally at events and festivals such as FITC and Indiecade.

- Fabrication of custom controllers using traditional methods and rapid fabrication methods.
- Setup, tear down, and troubleshooting of physical game installations.
- Developing prototypes using kinect, bluetooth open hardware boards, Unity, Python, Arduino, Raspberry Pis, and different open source sensors.
- Transportation logistics for hardware and support for software.
- Setting up and designing full room based installations.
- Writing and contributing to grants for different levels of project funding.
- Explorations into open source hardware, cloud platforms, and AI Art
- Consulting on projects that focus on peripherals, installations, and voice interfaces.

Key Projects: SAD Home, The Interstellar Selfie Station (installation), Punk Prism Power, Fortune Tasker.

Research Assistant

During my time at the OCADU I contributed to different research initiatives across different departments, revolving around emerging technologies such as AI, Installation work, and AR. I was able to apply my skills in both development and writing to papers, reports, and prototypes.

Adaptive Contextual Environment Lab
OCAD University
January 2018 – April 2020

- Lead author on a paper about identifying archetypes for AI personality development and developing the groundwork for a personality classification system.
- Contributed as a writer and editor on papers about AR, XR, and Artificial Intelligence.
- Wrote reports and compiled desk research, literature reviews, contextual reviews, and bibliographies.
- Did comparisons of different SAAS platforms for projects.

- Developed and built proof of concept prototypes.
- Helped source lab hardware, and set up the lab's different equipment and networks.

Visual Analytics Lab
OCAD University
September 2016–February 2017

- Setup, support, testing, and tear down of the VAL's CBC News Holodeck Installation.
- Streamlining setup and tear down of different physical installations.
- Compiling literature reviews.

Teaching Assistant
OCAD University
January 2017 – March 2018

- Worked in both the Strategic Foresight and Innovation and Digital Futures programs.
- Focused on marking support and general class support.
- Duties included giving useful feedback when doing marking, and offering answers to course questions.

Web Designer and Developer
Independent Contractor
January 2009 – 2014

I ran my own business doing web development and design for different clients and companies including Oni Press, The Toronto Comic Arts Festival, BBDO, Corus, BNMI, and many small business owners.

- System design, information architecture, CMS implementation.
- UI design, asset creation, front end development.
- Project management for medium sized websites and portals.
- Developed a standardized contract and first meeting strategy document for independent clients.
- Managed multiple client projects at once.

Corus Entertainment
March 2006 – May 2009

- Primary designer for the online gaming portal The Big Rip.
- Information Architecture and content planning for different portal sites.
- Asset design, graphics, and front end page design for both portal sites and individual show sites.
- Clear communication about design deliverables with producers and developers.
- Worked across many different properties including Treehouse, YTV, CMT, and Movie Central.

Skills

I have a wide range of practical and critical thinking skills from my years of having my own new media arts practice, and my unique background of client work.

- Programming: Python, Arduino, VUIs
- Writing, editing, and contributing to academic papers
- Comfortable in a terminal window
- Working knowledge of natural language processing
- Organizing research materials
- Digital lab support and setup
- Familiar with different forms of fabrication (sewing, laser cutting, wood working)
- Technical comparisons of products and platforms

- Writing lab reports for possible paper directions
- Literature and contextual reviews
- Research methodologies such as: digital ethnography, surveys, user interviews, speculative prototyping and research creation activities

Community Work

I've worked with many different communities in and around the greater Toronto area organizing workshops, mentoring, and volunteering. Currently I also help manage a tenants rights forum, where I spend time answering questions, looking up housing legislation, and working remotely with a team of moderators to do community management.

- Current: Community moderator for Ontario Tenant Alliance's tenant's rights forum
- 2017–2020: Organizing Team, *Stupid Shit No One Needs And Bad Ideas Hackathon*
- 2017 – Organizing Team, *Different Games Toronto*
- 2016 – Volunteer at SteamLabs
- 2015 – Lead Mentor, *FITC Women's Make n' Mix*

Education

Master Of Design
OCAD University

I hold an MDes from Digital Futures at OCAD University where I developed several installations using personal voice assistants and the internet of things to examine how humans relate to devices that display a heightened level of autonomy. My research ethics board submission was used as a guide for future incoming students who need to submit to the board to do user testing, and my work has been noted by institutions like NeurIPS and ML x Art by The Google Arts And Culture Lab.

- Analysis of different voice platforms through a creative lens.
- Development and deployment of a custom network setup for installations
- Programming and deploying routines to control IoT based devices.
- Working with natural language processing.
- Critical theory analysis of IoT systems.
- Contextual reviews, writing, and editing.
- Public speaking and presentations.
- Adaptations of methodologies such as creation and reflection, random control, and diaries.

Advanced Conversational Design Certificate
Voice Tech Global

I completed a professional course through Voice Tech Global where I researched SoundCloud.

- Analysis of the platform using methods such as secondary research, digital ethnography, and surveys.
- Technical comparisons of different voice platforms and how they interact with current music platforms.
- Comparisons of SoundCloud against other music platforms.
- Uncovered useful information about the differences in SoundCloud's current strategy and smaller artist's perception and expectations of the platform.
- Presentation about possible directions SoundCloud could go in when developing a voice based application based on what was found.

Accredited Design Diploma
OCAD University

I did my undergrad in graphic and print design with a focus on editorial layout and type design.

Publications

2020 – Lessio N. and Morris A. – *Toward Design Archetypes for Conversational Agent Personality*, 2020 IEEE International Conference on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics (SMC), Toronto, ON, 2020, pp. 3221-3228

2020 – Lessio, N. – Virtual Creativity, Volume 10, Number 1, 1 April 2020, pp. 59-71(13) – *Making SAD Home: An Exploration Into Developing an Alexa With Depression*

2019 – Shao, Lessio, Morris – Procedia Computer Science, Volume 155, 2019, Pages 433-440 – *IoT Avatars: Mixed Reality Hybrid Objects for CoRe Ambient Intelligent Environments*

2018 – Morris, Lessio – MPS '18 Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop on Multimedia Privacy and Security – *Deriving Privacy and Security Considerations for CORE: An Indoor IoT Adaptive Context Environment*

2018 – Lessio,N – OCADU Open Research – *Working With Useless Machines: A look at our shifting relationship with ubiquity through personal assistants*

Recent Speaking Sessions

- October 2020 – SMC 2020: *Toward Design Archetypes for Conversational Agent Personalities*
- October 2020 – ISEA 2020: *Making SAD Home*
- April 2019 – FITC Toronto: *Working With Useless Machines*
- November 2018 – PyCon Canada: *Working With Useless Machines*
- October 2018 – Different Games: *Playing With Personal Assistants IRL*

Recent Exhibitions

As part of my media arts practice my work is routinely shown at different events and conferences. This includes installing actual devices that people interact with or documentation of work.

- *SAD Home (Depressed Alexa 1.0): Meaningful Code* – Mississauga Living Arts Centre, October 2019 - January 2020
- *SAD Home (Depressed Alexa 1.0): NeurIPS* – Vancouver BC – December 2019
- *Working With Useless Machines:* Art-AI Festival – Leicester UK, May 2019

Awards

- 2019 – Mary E. Hofstetter Legacy Scholarship, Banff New Media Institute
- 2018 – Digital Futures, Best Creative Project
- 2017 – CGS-M Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship