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Annual Reports

Ammerman Center for Arts and Technology

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2010

### Annual Report, 2009-2010

Ammerman Center, Connecticut College

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**ammerman center**  
**[arts & technology]**

## **Annual Report 2009-2010**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This year was a productive year for the Center. Highlights include the 12th Arts and Technology Symposium, our postdoctoral fellow Allison de Fren's activities, the New Creativity Grant and involvement in many public events on campus, in collaboration with departments, offices and the other centers.

### **STUDENTS**

This year we admitted 9 students. We currently have 17 students enrolled in the program. This year was a lean year and only three seniors were able to successfully complete the requirements of the program. The three, however, were exceptionally enthusiastic, responsible and hard working. Our graduation ceremony took place in the Chu Room.

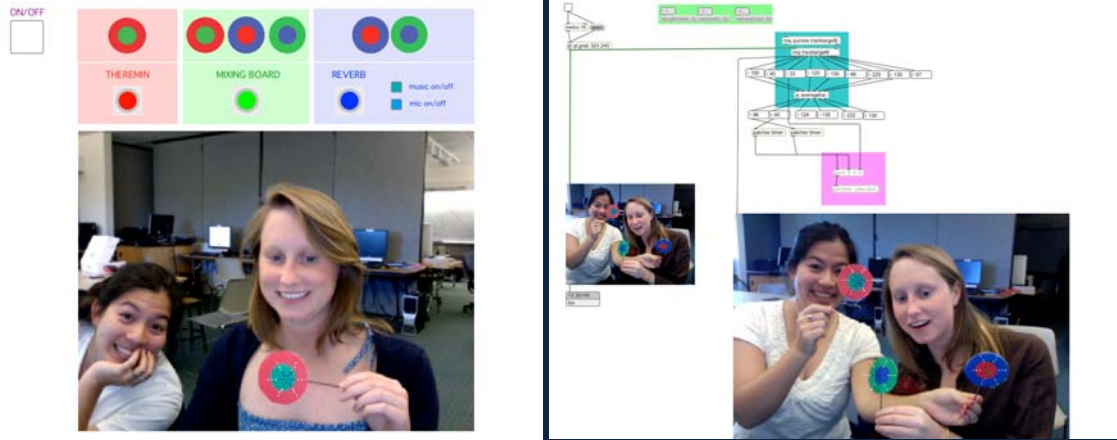


CAT senior projects are the culmination of many courses, individual studies, internships, colloquia, symposia, faculty advising, the senior seminar and students' extensive work on implementation. This year's students are introduced and their projects are summarized below.

#### **Phoebe Bakanas**

Phoebe completed a double major in Computer Science and Music and Technology. Her internship was at Virginia Tech where she worked on a research project developing uses of audio in education. She is the recipient of the Center's Smalley-Zahler Award for Excellence in Arts and Technology. Phoebe's project was entitled "Sonic Semaphores." She created an instrument that controls audio effects using gesture-tracking through video processing. Her goal was to create a musical tool that is simple enough to be used by people with no musical background, but also sophisticated enough to be utilized by experienced musicians. The tool was a means to explore the relationship between intuitive gestures and "musical shape" using various mappings from physical gesture to audio effects and synthesis. She developed her project within the MAX/MSP/Jitter framework. The gestures were tracked by following multiple colored targets through frame-based video processing. The specific targets allowed for the system to perform

well regardless of the color of clothes the users were wearing or even which colors were present in the background. Below are two images from her program showing the interface (left) and the program development environment (right). The dots on the targets in the figures below indicate that the targets are being tracked.



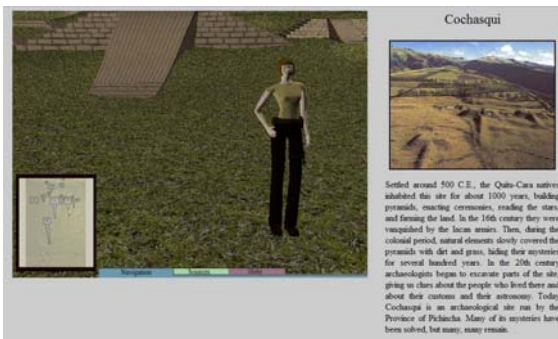
### Catherine Johnson

Catherine’s project was called “Evolving Sounds.” She created a user-guided sound generator to evolve sounds. Her majors were Music and Technology, and Economics. For her internship she worked at Audio Engine in NYC as an audio processing assistant. Her project utilized a sound synthesis method (granular synthesis) to generate several randomized sounds from which the user could choose. Based upon the user's choice, the program would then generate another set of sounds based on the chosen sound. Her computer program enables users to gradually evolve sounds based on their individual esthetic preferences and explore a sound space presented by the program. Below are two images from her program showing the user interface (left) and the program development environment (right).



## Erin Okabe-Jawdat

Erin's project was called "Virtual Archaeology." She created a 3D Interactive Tour of a historical site, Cochasqui, in Ecuador. She majored in Computer Science and Architecture. Erin completed her internship at Sonalysts Studios where she worked as an animation and 3D modeling intern. She was awarded the 2009 - 2010 Dean of the Faculty's Harold Juli Memorial Award for Student Research for this project (Prof. Juli's widow attended the Honors and Awards Ceremony and the CAT senior presentations. She was fascinated with Erin's project and especially pleased that the Dean of Faculty prize was given for work in archeology). Erin is also the recipient of the Center's Bridget Baird Award for Excellence in Research. The project began with an initial field visit to Ecuador over the summer as part of her Keck project, and then using the research she completed there she recreated the site virtually. An avatar was programmed so that a user could navigate the virtual site with a better sense of scale. The work will be posted as a web site and users will be able to explore the 3D environment, corresponding location-based data (photos, text, etc.) and various theories proposed by historians. Erin is currently working with College Relations to improve the architectural drawings of the student dorm floor plans that are available on the web. The images below show various snapshots from her program and web interface. The photograph at the bottom left depicts the process of digitizing 3D objects by photographing the object from many angles.



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## INTERNSHIPS

This year our students were placed in highly competitive internships. The following table shows the list of internship placements and the source of their funding. All three of our internships were funded either through the employer or Keck, which are non-CELS sources. We worked in conjunction with CELS throughout the students' internship searches.

CAT Student	Location	Type of work	CELS	Employer
Ajjen Joshi	Connecticut College	Motion Capture Research – Keck Scholarship		\$3000 (Keck)
James Jackson	Sonalysts	Programming		\$3000 (Sonalysts)
Owen Stowe	Sonalysts	Animation and Design		\$3000 (Sonalysts)
TOTAL				\$9000.

## THE ANIMATION WORKSHOP

The Maya Workshop was held during the week before the second semester classes: Jan. 18-22, 2010. 10 students attended the workshop. This year we replaced Gerardo Orioli, our long time animation instructor from Sonalysts due to his relocation from the area. We hired Jane Kernan, who teaches animation for Rhode Island School of Design and she taught our course for the entire week while staying in residence at the College. The workshop ran really well and the students learned a great deal from the full week's experience, ending with a Friday afternoon showing.

## THE NEW CREATIVITY PROJECT 2010

Following on the heels of our successful New Creativity Project, the Center received a second round of funding (\$25,000) from The Kitchings Foundation for the New Creativity 2010 Project. The full-length project title is "The 2010 New Creativity Project at Connecticut College: Thinking and Acting Creatively through Common Use Technology." This community project focuses on specific ways to explore the ways in which students can use common technologies to foster artistic expression by using new media forms. It aims to promote self-awareness in participating middle and high school-aged students who do not typically envision themselves as being engaged in an artistic exercise when they are actively using common technology. The project channels the use of current technology, by encouraging young people to be creative artists and critical thinkers. The activities of the project took place during the end of 2009 and the

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first quarter of 2010. The project brought together 32 teachers from 19 local middle and high schools for a planning meeting (Dec. 10) and a one-day technical workshop (Jan. 9) for the teachers. During the workshop, we held sessions on Web 2.0 technologies, social networking and hands-on work for recording and editing videos. Alla Kovgan, principal artist from Kinodance (Boston, MA) spoke to the teachers on the challenges of making short films and working with school groups. Ms Kovgan's involvement in the New Creativity grant was funded in collaboration with OnStage, Rob Richter and the Dayton Residency. At the workshop, the schools were provided iPods for their students to use for this project.

Between the workshop and the symposium, the teachers worked with their students to produce one-minute films, attended performances by Kinodance, and some were able to bring their students to meet the commissioned artists and to hear them describe their own work. To showcase the short films produced by the student groups, I developed an interactive web site that can be accessed at <http://cat.conncoll.edu/newcreativity2010/community.html> (password: 'newcre2010--' two dashes at the end; enter/return not required). Bridget Baird and I presented the work at the Arts and Technology Symposium and described the project and its outcomes with several of the teachers in attendance who answered questions from the audience.

## **PUBLIC EVENTS**

### **Fall Weekend Events**

Fall Weekend at Connecticut College was held October 23-25, 2009. Last year's theme was "Staying Connected" with a special focus on how technology and innovation are changing the way we live, learn and communicate. In recognition of this theme we developed computer programs on two separate topics. Our event was called "Many Camels, One Community: An Arts & Technology Project."

Bridget Baird, with help from her students, developed an interactive Word Cloud application which incorporated answers from parents, alumni and students and generated four summary Word Clouds (seen on the right below). The four word clouds contained responses to the following questions: 1) What you like about Connecticut College (blue), 2) Your passions (red), 3) If you are a CC student, words to describe you; if you are a family member or friend, words to describe your CC student (green), 4) Major challenges facing the world (yellow).

I developed a computer program to create a photographic mosaic of faculty, staff, parents, alumni and students visiting our installations (seen on the left below with President Higdon in center). The mosaic represented the Connecticut College Community at large by showing photographs of the visitors tiled on the College's mascot. It was personalized such that the most recent photograph was displayed at the center and then it moved to the sides as new photographs



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## **Film Showing by Allison de Fren**

Allison de Fren, the Mellon Fellow for the Ammerman Center, showed her full-length film "The Mechanical Bride" on April 30, 2010, which she had produced and directed. The film is an homage to Marshall McLuhan and explores the Pygmalionesque fantasy of creating the perfect female artificially, particularly as it is represented within science fiction film, television, and literature, and the ways in which the fantasy both informs and conflicts with the current-day attempt to create robotic companions. The screening was followed by a lively question and answer session.

## **3DSOM Workshop**

On November 17, 2009 Bridget Baird and CAT senior, Erin Okabe-Jawdat ran a workshop on creating three-dimensional models from real objects. They showed how the 3DSOM software could be used to construct 3D computer models from photographs of the real object taken from different angles. Students, staff and faculty from various departments participated in this workshop.

## **SYMPOSIUM**

The Twelfth Biennial Symposium on Arts and Technology was a great success! The theme of this year's symposium was "Revolution: Technology as Change" and it took place on campus March 4 through 6, 2010. The symposium featured three commissioned works, two gallery installations, about thirty paper presentations and two audio/video screenings. Three full-length multi-media concerts comprised live and interactive performances, including a dance performance by Kinodance, a Boston based dance company in Palmer Auditorium in conjunction with the Dayton Residency and a full evening performance by the Da Capo Chamber Players. Details of the events can be found at <http://cat.conncoll.edu/sym2010/schedule.html> on our symposium web site. Art Kreiger and Andrea Wollensak co-directed the symposium. Libby Friedman organized the event and coordinated the many components that are impossible to count.

Our symposium keynote speaker was Pattie Maes who is a professor at the MIT Media Lab in the Program for Media Arts and Sciences. Her talk was entitled "Fluid Interfaces: Blending the Physical & Digital Worlds" and was very well attended by the public. She spoke about a series of experiments underway in her research group at the MIT Media Laboratory that try to rethink human-computer interaction. The lecture attracted audience from all over the campus which led to a lively discussion afterwards.



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The commissions were awarded to three very interesting and diverse groups. The first commission was a dance performance called “The Persistence of Vision.” It was a collaborative work by Jamie Jewett (Lostwax Productions), Luke DuBois (Brooklyn Experimental Media Center) and Tim Cryan (Long Island University), and included Connecticut College dance students in the final performance. The second commission was called “Paraguay.” It utilized a configurable device named “The Liminal Surface” which was an interactive table-top environment for hybridized music - theater performance. Its creators were David Bithell (Univ. of North Texas) and Ali Momeni (Univ. of Minnesota) who also performed their piece during one of the evening concerts. The third commission was an installation/workshop called “The Scrapyard Challenge” in which participants built simple electronic projects out of found or discarded "junk" (locally collected old electronics, toys, clothing, furniture, outdated computer equipment, appliances, turntables, monitors, gadgets, etc.) The produced work was displayed during the opening reception of the symposium. This event was lead by Jonah Brucker-Cohen (Steinhardt, NYU) and Katherine Moriwaki (Parsons, New School for Design).

We had two ongoing installations during the symposium. “Audio Graffiti” was a location based audio-tagging and remixing environment installed in the Manwaring Gallery in Cummings. The work was created by Zach Settel and Mike Wozniowski (Univ. of Montreal). The second interactive installation was called “Entanglement Witness”, created by Todd Winkler (Brown University). Winkler’s installation involved motion sensing technology and three projection screens to create an immersive video and sonic environment for the visitors. CAT students assisted in the set-up of several of the installations and galleries, giving them hands-on experience with the concepts and technology of the works.



Settel and Wozniowski put final touches on their installation "Audio Graffiti".



"Distance Dances" performed by Susan Honer and Gina T'ai,



Multi-media dance piece, "Persistence of Vision," by Jamie Jewett, Luke Dubois and Tim Cryan.



An immersive installation, "Entanglement Witness," by Todd Winkler.

Our seniors also presented their projects to symposium participants who gave them feedback and advice.

## CENTER STAFF

The second year of the Mellon Postdoc Grant was a great success for the Ammerman Center. Our Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Allison de Fren had a very productive year and continued to contribute to the Center's activities. This was the final year of this position which required her to conduct a job search for the upcoming year. After her search, she accepted a tenure-track position in the Film & Media Program of the Art History and Visual Arts Department at Occidental College, Los Angeles. This year she taught 2 courses for CAT and supervised the CAT senior seminar.

Art Kreiger and Andrea Wollensak served as co-directors of events. I continued to serve as the Associate Director for Technology. We hired Jane Kernan (RISD) to teach the one-week animation workshop.

Libby Friedman is the Center's Assistant Director. She very ably continues to run the day-to-day operations of the center. She brings a wealth of personal knowledge to the job and her ever-growing contacts on and off campus continue to benefit the center in numerous ways. Her ability to network and make connections also extend to our students, fellows, alums, internship companies and other departments on campus such as College Relations, Advancement, Admission and other Center administrators. In addition, she meets with our students individually and advises them on their course planning, projects and the Center's requirements. She served on the Staff Council, the Visual Identity Advisory Board and the Centennial Committee this year. As an alum, she also served on her 30<sup>th</sup> reunion planning committee.

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## THE MELLON POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW'S ACTIVITIES

### Teaching

Allison de Fren taught AT401 - the Senior Seminar in Arts & Tech and AT110 - Introduction to New Media and Digital Art for a second time in the Fall semester of 2009. In the spring, she continued to teach the senior seminar (AT402) and offered the course AT/FLM216 - Autobiographical Documentary: The Theory and Practice of First Person Media. All of her courses ran very well, and she received highly positive evaluations from the students.

### Scholarship

Allison published the following articles during this academic year:

“The Anatomical Gaze in Tomorrow’s Eve (L’Eve future).” *Science Fiction Studies Journal* 36.2 (July 2009): 235-65. \*\*Winner, 2009 Schachterle Essay Prize (best essay from an untenured scholar in literature, science, and the arts) from The Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts. \*\*Winner, 2010 Pioneer Award (best critical essay-length work of the year in SF) from the Science Fiction Research Association.

“Technofetishism and the Uncanny Desires of A.S.F.R. (alt.sex.fetish.robots).” *Science Fiction Studies Journal* 36.3 (November 2009): 404-440.

“Disarticulating the Artificial Woman.” *Proceedings of 2009 Digital Arts and Culture*, Irvine, CA: UC Irvine, 2009.

She also locked picture on her feature-length documentary: *The Mechanical Bride*. A preliminary version of film was screened on campus April, 2010.

Paper accepted to Gender, Bodies, and Technology Conference, hosted by Virginia Tech Women and Gender Studies Program, Roanoke, April 22-24, 2010.

Paper accepted to 2010 Film & History Conference: Representations of Love in Film and Television, Milwaukee, November 11-14, 2010

### Conferences

Allison attended the following conferences:

Presented at Visible Evidence XVI, International Documentary Conference, hosted by the University of Southern California, August 12-15, 2009.

Attended *The Internet as Playground and Factory: A Conference on Digital Labor*, Eugene Lang College, The New School, New York, NY, Nov. 12-14, 2009.

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Presented at RE:LIVE Third International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology, Melbourne, Australia, Nov. 26-29, 2009.

Presented at Digital Arts and Culture International Conference: After Media, Embodiment in Context, UC Irvine, Irvine, CA, Dec. 12-15, 2009.

Moderated panel, "Interpretive Variations: New Technology Art Inspired by the work of Dziga Vertov, John Whitney, and Adam Beckett" at Revolution: Technology as Change, The 12th Biennial Symposium on Arts & Technology, held by the Ammerman Center for Arts & Technology, Connecticut College, March 4-6, 2010.

Co-chaired the panel, The Artificial Life of Film: Dolls, Puppets, Automata, and Cyborgs in Cinema at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Los Angeles, March 16-21, 2010.

### **Professional Development**

Allison served as member of the Organizing Committee for the Mellon-Visiting Faculty Teaching Seminar. She also was discussant for the Talking Teaching session "Teaching Effectively with Technologies: Moodle" and Camp Teach and Learn session "Jaron Lanier's book, You Are Not a Gadget."

### **GRANTS, FUNDRAISING AND BUDGET**

The \$25,000 awarded by the Kitchings Foundation enabled us to run our community outreach project "The 2010 New Creativity Project at Connecticut College: Thinking and Acting Creatively through Common Use Technology."

Steele Blackall's endowed fund assisted us with the MAYA workshops.

This year Sonalysts continued their corporate sponsorship with \$5000 and two internships for \$7000. This was wonderful as it demonstrates Sonalysts' long-running commitment as a corporate sponsor of the Center. I met with the new president and other Sonalysts executives to discuss long-range options for collaborations with the Center.

In agreement with our proposed 09-10 budget, this year ended in a small surplus, which will be rolled over to be used next year.

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## **PUBLICITY AND MEDIA PLACEMENTS**

Judith Ammerman '60 was awarded the College Medal at Reunion 2010 (June 5). The College Medal is the highest degree that Connecticut College can confer.

Two CAT students, Erin Okabe-Jawdat and Owen Stowe, were featured in the Current News section of the Connecticut College Web Site.

All news regarding the public activities of the center were published through the Center's web site, The Day, FaceBook, Twitter and the College's publications: The Voice, Source and the Calendar.

We held an open house for prospective students on October 5, 2009. The Center participated with a CAT student (Andrew Nathanson '13) in two panels held for admitted students on April 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

In an effort led by the Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts, the Ammerman Center participated in the organization of the events for Connecticut College's response to the Haiti earthquake and the associated fundraiser. A common hour was dedicated to discussing Haiti's history, geography and politics on Feb. 19. On April 12 an entire day was dedicated to talks given by people involved in relief efforts. As a result of a week-long fundraiser \$7,636 was sent to the International Alliance for the Advancement of Children (IAAC) to be used for relief and education of children in Haiti.

## **NEXT YEAR'S OUTLOOK AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In my second year as the director of the Center I am happy with the Center's accomplishments. The Center's role at the College continues to remain significant mainly because it helps distinguish Connecticut College from other Liberal Arts schools. Its programs and the work ensuing from these efforts are receiving much attention both on and off campus and benefitting the Center in a multitude of ways. From the symposium to its community outreach and from interdisciplinary research to student projects, the Center demonstrates a wide spectrum of activities with an active group of interested faculty and students. I am confident that the Center's activities add extensively to the students' undergraduate experience as well as to the faculty involved. There is, of course, room for expansion of these programs, and within the current resources of the Center and potential funding I plan to investigate opportunities to further these programs. Specifically, my plans are to explore funding possibilities to increase faculty involvement, especially from the Arts, and to start new faculty-student research programs. Overall, we are hoping that the state of the economy will remain favorable in the coming years and that our budget will not be drastically affected by last year's economic downturn.

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With the completion of the Mellon postdoc grant, starting next academic year, the center will resume its previous schedule of teaching and seminar staffing. The New Media course that we started teaching with Allison de Fren's hire has been a valuable addition to the Center's curriculum. In the future, we need to maintain our efforts to continue offering the New Media course either by hiring an adjunct instructor or by organizing it into a team-taught course.

I am looking forward to another productive year full of interesting activities and projects.

Ozgur Izmirli

Judith Ammerman '60 Director, Ammerman Center for Arts and Technology  
Associate Professor of Computer Science