

# Wednesday

September 27th

**11:30am to 1:00pm**

**Experience Design & Digital Interfaces**

**Location: RM 1302, Calder Art Center, Allendale Campus**

This session explores the creation of audience-centered experiences in digital spaces.

**3:00pm to 4:15pm**

**Ethics of Digital Culture**

**Location: Seidman House, Allendale Campus**

This session investigates the ethical concepts emerging alongside digital innovation.

**7:00 pm+**

**Feeling Technology Lecture**

**Location: Eberhard Center, Pew Campus**

**Reception to follow lecture event**

From custom made apps to global social media platforms, artists Ben Grosser and Lauren Lee McCarthy's artworks examine, reveal, and reimagine the psychological and felt implications of technology in contemporary culture.

Lauren Lee McCarthy (she/they) is an artist having social relationships in the midst of automation, surveillance, and algorithmic living. She has received grants and residencies from Creative Capital, United States Artists, LACMA, Sundance, Eyebeam, Pioneer Works, Autodesk, and Ars Electronica. Her work *SOMEONE* was awarded the Ars Electronica Golden Nica and the Japan Media Arts Social Impact Award, and her work *LAUREN* was awarded the IDFA DocLab Award for Immersive Non-Fiction. Lauren's work has been exhibited internationally, at places such as the Barbican Centre, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Haus der elektronischen Künste, Seoul Museum of Art, Chronus Art Center, SIGGRAPH, Onassis Cultural Center, IDFA DocLab, Science Gallery Dublin, and the Japan Media Arts Festival.

Lauren is also the creator of *p5.js*, an open-source art and education platform that prioritizes access and diversity in learning to code, with over 10 million users. She expanded on this work in her role from 2015–21 on the Board of Directors for the Processing Foundation, whose mission is to serve those who have historically not had access to the fields of technology, code, and art in learning software and visual literacy. Lauren is a Professor at UCLA Design Media Arts. She holds an MFA from UCLA and a BS Computer Science and BS Art and Design from MIT.



Image: A Chinese-American woman with short dark hair standing in front of device sculptures. Photo by Gabriel Noguez.



*SOMEONE*  
New York, NY  
2020

For a two month period, four homes around the country were installed with a human Alexa system, while visitors controlled the homes from a gallery in NYC.



*Minus*  
social network  
2021-present

But what if social media wasn't engineered to serve capitalism's need for growth? How might online collective communication be different if our time and attention were treated as the limited and precious resources that they are? *Minus* is an experiment to ask these questions, a finite social network where users get only 100 posts—for life.

Artist Ben Grosser focuses on the cultural, social, and political effects of software. How is an interface that foregrounds our friend count changing conceptions of friendship? Who benefits when a software system can intuit how we feel? What changes in democracy and society when platforms designed for growth and engagement become our primary window to the wider world? To examine questions like these, he constructs interactive experiences, machines, and systems that make the familiar unfamiliar, revealing the ways that software prescribes our behavior and thus, how it changes who we are.

Grosser is Professor of New Media in the School of Art & Design, co-founder of the Critical Technology Studies Lab at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), and a faculty affiliate in the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory and the School of Information Sciences, all at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA.



Image: Self Portrait (2009), from the Flexible Pixels project

# Thursday

September 28th

**9:15am to 10:45am**

**Collaboration & Practice**

**Location: RM 154, Lake Superior Hall, Allendale Campus**

Working globally in and outside of art contexts, Ben Grosser & Lauren Lee McCarthy discuss their professional experiences & career trajectories.

**3:00pm – 4:30pm**

**Screening with Ben Grosser & Lauren Lee McCarthy**

**Location: Black Box Theater, Haas Center for Performing Arts, Allendale Campus**

View and discuss selected video-based works with Ben Grosser & Lauren Lee McCarthy.

Background Image: *Unlearning Language* by Lauren Lee McCarthy  
What does language mean to us? An interactive installation that uses machine learning to find new understandings of language, undetectable to algorithms.  
Yamaguchi, Japan, 2022  
Photo Credit: Shintaro Yamanaka (Qsyum!)

## Feeling Technology with Ben Grosser & Lauren Lee McCarthy

Writing By Chelsea Thompto

We tend to think of technology as “over there”, something separate from more human or hand made objects. Technology is held up as something other than or apart from the human and yet, technology is composed of layers upon layers of human reasoning and decision making. Rather than being inhuman then, technology is perhaps instead hyper-human. This hyper-humanity is an abstracting force, making it challenging for us to comprehend what technologies are doing and why. But rather than being the result of being too separate from humanity, it may be that contemporary technology’s complex interwoven layers of human choice (and bias, and failure, and, and, and...) are what give technological platforms their incomprehensible and alien air.

So, when we are confronted by technology that feels inhuman or cold, it may be a revelatory or radical act to turn away from trying to rationalize or reason with it and to instead try to feel it. This is often not how technology companies or software engineers in general want their products to be interacted with, they would rather their products provoke or illicit feelings in the user rather than being felt in return. But it may be the only way to make sense of the otherwise senseless choices and options we often find ourselves confronted with when engaging with contemporary technology. Technology, and in particular social technologies, elicit very deep and real feelings, to understand why, how, or to what end, it might be most effective to feel our way through the interwoven layers of our hyper-human world.

Artists have always engaged, in both critical and uncritical ways, with emerging technologies. It is often through artist’s intentional misuse of technology that they are able to reframe our perspectives on the technology itself and perhaps open a space for feeling and not just using, a space for understanding the technology integrated into our daily lives. Lauren Lee McCarthy & Ben Grosser are two such artists. Both artists both use contemporary technology in their work while also remaining critical of the technology, and the people and politics that make it possible. While their practices vary widely, both are deeply committed to exploring how we relate to software and algorithms and how they shape our behaviors and values.



*Platform Sweet Talk, by Ben Grosser*  
Platform Sweet Talk examines a primary tactic Silicon Valley employs to seduce its users into a one-sided relationship: notifications. Based on longitudinal research into a major platform’s notification strategy, this work presents their extensive notification language in a depersonalized form, revealing how notifications operate to encourage, manipulate, and woo users into maximal platform engagement.  
Photo Credit: courtesy of the artist

*Follower, by Lauren Lee McCarthy*  
Follower is a custom software app and performance that provides a real life follower for one day. Worldwide, 2016–Ongoing  
Photo Credit: David Leonard

Guest parking in Lot H2 & H4 is available for this event. Please note, metered parking spaces will be enforced & GVSU Students/Staff/Faculty should use the lots designated by their permits.

**GVSU ARTS CELEBRATION**



## FEELING TECHNOLOGY with Ben Grosser & Lauren Lee McCarthy September 27th & 28th, 2023

From custom made apps to global social media platforms, artists Ben Grosser and Lauren Lee McCarthy’s artworks examine, reveal, and reimagine the psychological and felt implications of technology in contemporary culture.

Works like McCarthy’s Follower (2016) and Social Turkers (2013) use the real human labor that often undergirds our digital experiences to create strangely literal manifestations of our digitally mediated relationship to social platforms and surveillance. Throughout these works, McCarthy is both posing questions and attempting to answer them with a mixture of social practice, software design, and performance. Questions like “What if we could receive real-time feedback on our social interactions?”<sup>1</sup> or “What is the relationship between attention and surveillance?”<sup>2</sup>. These questions both shape the work and help place the viewer in a space that feels simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. In Follower, this takes the form of an app that hires a person to literally follow the user, unsettling our relationship to the concept. In Social Turkers, remote workers paid to analyze data are injected into real time social interactions. It is in this space of the unfamiliar familiar that perhaps technology and its impacts can be felt rather than reasoned with or managed.

In Grosser’s ORDER OF MAGNITUDE (2019) and DEFICIT OF LESS (2021), a paired set of supercut video works, the focus is on a single person and how their mindset has had an outsized impact on our digital lives. In these works, Grosser compiles the recorded speeches of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, first creating a supercut of all the times he uttered his most used words “more” and “grow”, along with his use of metrics (ORDER OF MAGNITUDE), and followed this up with a video of all the times he uttered the word “less”(DEFICIT OF LESS). The videos at normal speed would be roughly 46 minutes different in length so, in an attempt “what might the world look like if Mark had thought about less as much as he had about more?”<sup>3</sup> Grosser slowed down the “less” video until it stretched on for as long as the “more” video. The result is a slow moving and choppy slideshow with sound stretched out into an ambient chorus that is both haunting and fascinating. Individually or paired, these videos help us feel what Zuckerberg’s obsessions and blindspots are and perhaps help us make sense of how we got to where we are in our relation with social technologies.

These artists help us see the humans that make up the machine, the layers of human labor, values, and choice that comprise our digital experiences in hyper-human digital space. Through their work and artists like them, perhaps we can feel our ways towards new relationships to technology and social life online.

<sup>1</sup> Lauren Lee McCarthy Social Turkers <https://lauren-mccarthy.com/social-turkers>  
<sup>2</sup> Lauren Lee McCarthy Follower <https://lauren-mccarthy.com/follower>  
<sup>3</sup> Ben Grosser DEFICIT OF LESS <https://bengrosser.com/projects/deficit-of-less/>