

# MECHANICALLY YOURS

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I create participatory experiences for networked publics, bridging new media concepts and practices, and I couple artistic production with a writing practice as a mode of reflection and inquiry to fuel the creative process. I won't have time today to talk about my writing practice, and besides, it's more fun to show the visual work. I will focus this version of the lightning talk on my creative practice with crowd workers.

The screenshot shows the Amazon Mechanical Turk interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'Your Account', 'HITS', and 'Qualifications'. A search bar is visible with the text 'Find HITS containing that pay at least \$ 0.00'. Below the search bar, there are statistics: 'All HITS', '11-20 of 2021 Results', and 'Sort by: HITS Available (most first)'. The main content area displays a list of HITs. Each entry includes the requester's name, the HIT title, the expiration date, the time allowed, the reward, and the number of HITS available. For example, the first HIT is titled 'Find the official Twitter account of a given company' with a reward of \$0.03 and 5098 HITS available. The second HIT is 'Do you does the video clip satisfy our requirements' with a reward of \$0.02 and 2517 HITS available. The third HIT is 'LabelMe: roof-nearmap-hayak' with a reward of \$0.03 and 2471 HITS available. Each HIT entry also includes a description, keywords, and qualification requirements.

“Just about anyone possessing basic literacy can find something to do on Mechanical Turk” (Jeff Howe, 2007).

Crowd workers are like pieceworkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a networked version of outsourcing.



Mechanical Olympics is a crowdsourced version of the Olympic games where anyone with an Amazon account can sign up to work/play and anyone who presses the Like button on the YouTube channel can vote.



Mechanical Olympics Freestyle Swimmer; DIY, Glitchy



Mechanical Olympics Bobsled; Sometimes pets join in



Mechanical Games, Abandon Normal Devices Festival, Manchester, UK 2010

Mechanical Games is a version of the projects for Abandon Normal Devices in Manchester, England with senior communities around the time of the Olympic Games in London



I had an opportunity to review my collection of videos, hundreds of them from the past 8 years, when I presented this project at the DMA last August. I noticed Shamik Gosh's son has been participating since he was little. Here he is in the lower right corner, nearly a teenager. It's this human connection, easily lost on virtual platforms, that I have been trying to re-establish in current projects.



Two years ago I hired workers to do nothing. More explicitly, I paid them to sit for five minutes, then tell me what it was like to get paid to rest. It took me fifty hours to transcribe what they wrote about meditation on the floor of the project room at Grand Central Art Center in Santa Ana, California.





Mediations on Digital Labor, 2015

Viewers removed the workers' words, rendering their thoughts invisible as they entered the project space. On the headset they could watch an endless cycle of workers chanting "Om," another job for the workers that deviated from the usual type of labor they encounter of Amazon's platform. On the walls of the gallery were USB drives. Anyone who volunteered to rechalk the floor for half an hour would get a free drive with a random OM chant installed.



A Vigil For Some Bodies, 2016  
Close up view

When I moved here I paid workers to light a candle for someone they loved and lost on Halloween evening.



A Vigil For Some Bodies, 2016

There's more to this story, I don't have time for it now. But this became an installation made from recycled amazon boxes and LED candles purchased on Amazon.



This fall I'll be in residence with Sabrina Starnaman at the Center for Creative Connections at the Dallas Museum of Art conducting an interactive installation titled "The Laboring Self." We are grateful for project assistance by doctoral candidate Letícia Ferreira.



The Laboring Self (in process), burrough and Starnaman 2017

The Laboring Self draws parallels between unregulated labor and its effect on workers' bodies in the Industrial Revolution and "Digital Revolution" of the sharing economy. It is partially funded by a Community Project grant from Humanities Texas and a grant for pursuing civil and social justice through art from Puffin Foundation West, Ltd.