From the start of life, the body is the vehicle we use to learn about the world. As we use our senses, we gather knowledge about our surrounding environment. This process is a vital part of our development as human beings and continues throughout our lives, whether we are learning to drive, dance, cook a meal, speak a new language, or travel in a foreign land. Our physical bodies provide us the information we need to fully experience life.

As innovations in technology and computing have expanded our ability to share information and easily communicate to all parts of the globe, it has also limited how we are physically perceived and how we physically interact with others. Computing devices can be taken almost anywhere and allow us instant access to a cyber world. But, our bodies are invisible to this world. Eyes, fingers and thumbs are often the only body parts used to navigate this seemingly infinite flow of information and ideas. Our subsequent and temporary disconnect from our physical selves as we sit and stare into small boxes of light and circuitry suggests that in some ways computers have restricted our experience of the world. We have not learned to interact with them in a way that is natural and inclusive to our entire being.
As electronic communication becomes more important to the function of our everyday lives, should we continue to be limited in how we are to interact with them? Or should we explore further this concept of "interface" and how the dialogue between man and machine should occur?

In Camille Utterback’s work, the use of computers and technology is not constrained by individual body parts. Utterback writes and develops her own software and works with electronics to produce interfaces that seem almost invisible to the user. Her installations generate new possibilities of experience. She creates art that responds to movement of the human body.

Utterback has created an elegant tool to investigate imagery, symbolism and reality without a cumbersome computer interface inserting itself into the experience. When interacting with Text Rain, the interface is in the form of a camera hidden in the wall, and is not an obvious part of the system. A button does not have to be pushed in order for a viewer to engage. He must simply step inside marked boundaries and reach out to catch falling letters.

In Text Rain, colored letters softly pour down on a projected black and white mirror image of the viewer. The letters respond and collect onto an outstretched arm, leg or a cupped hand; they come to rest on top of any solid surface in the projected image. They can be pushed around to change their path or gathered in a bunch and dropped in a torrent. For those who are willing to be patient, the letters reveal that they are not random. Individual words and snatches of a poem can be perceived as they line up along the still, outline of a silhouette. When lined up from beginning to end, they form the words and phrases of a poem, "Talk, You" by Evan Zimroth.

For a moment what seems like random symbols falling on the body becomes words and phrases that are imbued with meaning if allowed to collect long enough. Words are symbols that represent a reality. Projected onto a screen, they are fleeting and ephemeral, but, the desire to change their behavior through an onscreen representative by pushing or collecting them is real. Notions of imagery, symbolism and truth are available for exploration without the computer interface interfering with the immediacy of the moment.

In Liquid Time, a video projection of changing New York scenes is shown, with pedestrians moving in and out of the field of vision. The movement and time for these scenes become disturbed as a viewer steps in front of the projection and creates a fracture in the time continuum. A vertical sliver of viewing space appears that is approximately the same size of the viewer and freezes on screen. As the viewer moves forward, the time within that sliver starts to move backwards. When the viewer moves on to another part of the screen, the process repeats itself, but the starting point is returned to its normal momentum. Time heals itself like settling ripples in a body of water. Having several people within the boundary or an individual moving quickly across the screen creates several fractures, allowing for different moments in time of the same space to be represented at once.

The physical impact of an individual on a specific moment in time and space carries implications far beyond the marked boundaries of a gallery floor. They are a reminder of the possibility of multiple viewpoints within every situation. Nothing can be truly understood from a single perspective. Utterback’s computer program and video tracking interface serves to remind us of this without imposing its own presence. Liquid Time is both a path of self-reflection and physical poetry.

The third piece presented at CAC, Untitled 5, presents itself as an abstract painting, but is in actuality a projected video image that viewers "repaint" and recombine with their bodies as they move across the gallery floor. Movement is tracked and converted to smudges, stains and strokes that resemble traditional painting and drawing media. The rules that govern the creation of marks and swaths of color are not readily apparent, only experimentation will allow for their discovery. A trail of gray marks is created as the marked playing field is traversed. New marks appear as the original trail is intersected, moved and tries to return to its original spot. As the image changes and evolves, Untitled 5 is revealed as a work of collaboration between the artist and the viewer.

Utterback’s art creates an opportunity for viewers to become very present in the moment, to open up to curiosity and contemplation in order to discover the secrets of each piece. The interplay between computer interface and human intention is almost seamless. Although the user may not immediately perceive it, the video tracking interface provides a pathway to a transcendent moment where thought and corporeal presence are in sync. The entire computer system moves beyond its function as a tool and becomes a pathway to connect with art, the artist and our own bodies.

Camille Utterback received her B.A. from Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts and her Master’s degree from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University. She has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants and is a Rockefeller Foundation New Media Fellow. Her work has been exhibited at Milwaukee Art Museum; MassMoCA; Art Interactive, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York. She is the founder Creative Nerve, an organization that allows corporate, retail and museum environments access to her interactive installations through subscription. More information about this artist can be found at camilleutterback.com and creativenerve.com.

-Heather Hakimzadeh, associate curator

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