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Comb Machine: The Regulation of Hair

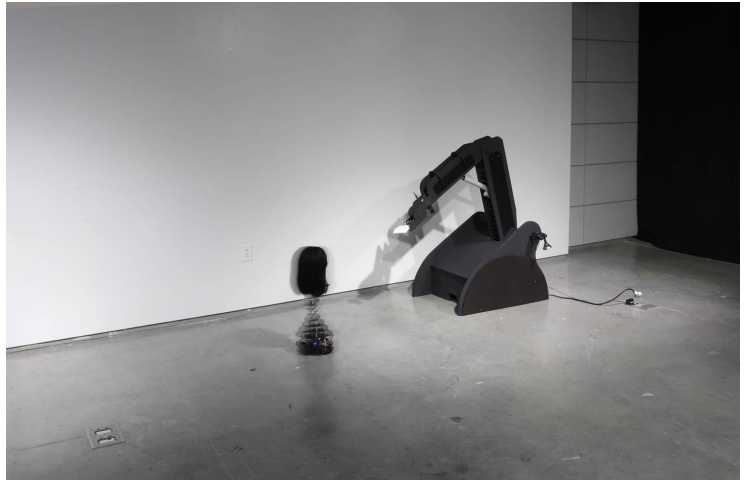
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She, the hair entity with wheels, is offered a certain degree of freedom. She wanders around as she wants and remains free, until summoned by the comb machine. The artist displays an installation to demonstrate an institutional system. The institutional system shows an interactive relationship between two parties, in which a ruled party has a certain degree of freedom in a power relation, if she obeys the principles formulated by the ruling party. In the installation, the ruling party is a comb machine, whereas the ruled party is a hair entity with wheels. The hair entity with wheels can wander around till the comb machine rings the bell for the sake of regulating her behaviors. However, the conduct of combing is not necessarily for the aim of tidying her hair, thus she may leave with messy hair. After all, she gets her freedom till the next bell ringing.

Description

The behavior of combing symbolizes the regulation of hair, trying to make the hair compliant. The combing machine regulates the wig robots at a certain time by combing their wigs. Most of the time the wigs remain “free” and they wonder around. The installation tells a story that the wig robot has to conform to the combing machine, but they still have “freedom”. The thesis project tries to discuss the relationship between freedom and regulation within an institutional system.

Fig. 1. Installation view.



Regulation

Regulation is defined as “A rule or directive made and maintained by an authority.”¹ By regulation, I mean making things in order. In a societal context, it will be putting people in order, or establishing rules. Combing, for me, is a behavior that tries to put the hair in order and making them conform. I am trying to depict an image that an authority figure (the combing machine) is trying to regulate the non-authority figure (the wig robots). The authority is not only limitedly referring to schools, but also the other institution that has a voice of certainty. For example, the doctors in hospitals, the patients take pills whatever the doctors give for the patients’ “own good”. I intend to sympathize the audience by having these robots to be combed and make them think about the moment that they were “combed”.

1. English Oxford Living Dictionary, s.v. “regulation”, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/regulation>.

Freedom

Moreover, the fullest realization of our freedom requires us to recognize not only that this different form of relation, which is cooperative rather than controlling, exists but also that it is constitutive of, rather than in opposition to, our freedom. (Bredlau 2020)

There is a lot of art that talk about freedom. Heri Dono's sculpture *Born and Freedom* (2004) depicted an ironic image of human and animal, having four humanoid birds that are chained by four dog-like figures. All the figures have similar smile on their faces. The artist discusses the freedom in the context of the relation between human and animal. *WeiweiCam*, a project conducted by Ai Weiwei, is a self-surveillance website streaming his home in order to comment on his detention at Beijing Airport. Ai Weiwei intends to comment on freedom in the context of government surveillance.

In my project, I intend to discuss freedom within institutions. There is always freedom once you follow the rules. As the bell rings, the freedom that the wig robots have will be paused. They have to follow the rules, i.e., to be combed, in order to acquire the next period of freedom. We all have this kind of freedom. Freedom is defined as “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without restraint”,² but in reality, you have to sacrificed something to exchange the freedom to some extent. The project has two paradoxical circumstance, as we have in reality, one is that the wig robots have the freedom to wander around, the other is that the wig robots have to be combed once the bell rings. So, do the wig robots have freedom or not? This is a question that I propose to ask the audience.

2. “English Oxford Living Dictionary”, s.v. “freedom”, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/freedom>.

The installation includes a combing machine, a hair entity and a bell. The combing machine, which is a big robotic arm with a comb as its hand, is installed beside a wall. The hair entity, which is a robot with wheels wearing a wig, wanders around within a predefined area (see fig. 2). The bell is installed on the comb machine (see fig. 3) and rings every 10 minutes. Once the bell rings, the hair entity will come to the combing machine and be combed as figure 5 shows.

The hair entity's movement refers to automatic obstacle avoidance car kit. They detect the obstacles in front of them and change direction in advance. The obstacles include the audience. The interaction between the audience and the hair entity is showed as figure 5.

Fig. 2. Installation view when the hair entity wanders around.



Fig. 3. Installation view when the bell rings.



Fig. 4. Interaction between the audience and the hair entity. Nov. 30, 2020.

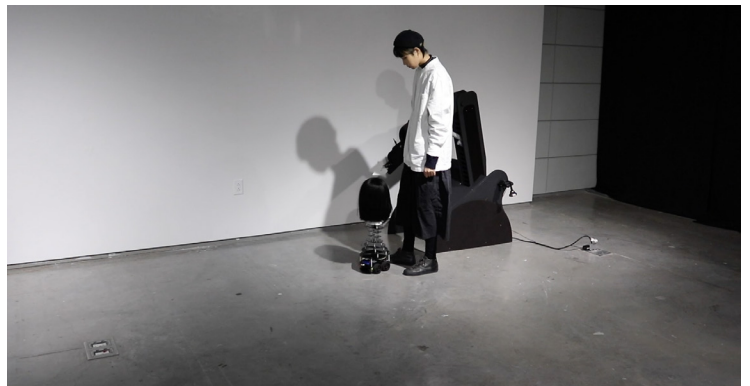


Fig. 5. Installation view when combing.



Preview of the video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/488766766>

References

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