Research Publication

***New Boundaries: Art & Resistance on View*, Why We Need Domestic Art Spaces** (Chair: Crystal Ann Brown) SECEC Conference, Columbus College of Art & Design: Columbus, OH, 2017.

Adaptive/Responsive Movement Approach: Dance Making as Interactive System Design, MOCO '15, Simon Fraser University: Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2015.

Speaking in Tongues: A Conversation with Maree ReMalia, Dance Enthusiast, online publication, 2012.

Stress Testing Autonomous Human Robots, Signal Culture Cookbook: vol. 2, digital book, 2018.

New Boundaries: Art & Resistance on View

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ABSTRACT:

Domestic exhibition spaces allow artists and collectives to retain control of cultural production while offering the potential to directly benefit from the cultural capital inevitably earned. Documentation of Chicago's apartment galleries provides a testament to the issue of control, but trends show hyper-local galleries frequently result in economic gains for real estate developers rather than individual artists. That can be troubling for artist activists turning to home exhibition as a form of resistance. For many, the practice is an intentional rejection of institutional politics. It counters the notion that cultural production must necessarily feed a commercialized art market and, in so doing, makes space for radical approaches to agency, identity, and social justice. How then, can domestic spaces serve marginalized communities without threatening their self-sufficiency?

I draw from my history of arts production and curation to demonstrate the goals and outcomes of these contested spaces. That includes firsthand accounts as a live/work resident of the Chicago Arts District, founder of Re-Marking womanist community exhibition (Cleveland, OH), guest artist with the Chicago Home Theater Festival, and Site:Lab artist, Rumsey Street Project (Grand Rapids, MI). This research considers domestic exhibition through the lens of feminist social practice while questioning its viability as a tool of decolonization.

INTRODUCTION:

The current popularity of community engaged projects in the performing and visual arts disciplines gives rise to the need for critical examination of related methodologies and beneficiaries. Rather than perpetuating the commonly accepted notion that investment in these arts practices is a) always beneficial to engaged participants and b) always supportive of community needs, I detail how arts and artists may unintentionally become tools of displacement or disruption for marginalized populations.

There are resources and a growing body of research around the intangible benefits of cultural investment in communities that address some of these interest areas. The work of Franco Papandrea as presented through the Cultural Policy Centre at University of Chicago and the work of Joshua Guetzkow presented through the Taking the Measure of Culture Conference at Princeton University are both notable examples. However, those lines of inquiry and similar measuring practices downplay the personal investment of artists, their intentions, and related project outcomes.

The following firsthand accounts serve as evidence beyond mainstream success stories of urban revitalization and in extension of empirical cultural measuring tactics. I draw on my experience as an individual artist and community organizer to provide insight into the interworkings of arts programs, funders, and engaged participants. The collection serves as an introduction to my ongoing research of community engaged practices.

Self Reflection: Chicago Arts District

In 2012, a few months after giving birth to my first child, I took residence in a live/work loft space of the Chicago Arts District (CAD). The thousand-plus square foot rental space included a large front gallery, pass-through common space, small kitchen, and two bedrooms. This was the first time my partner and I would cohabitate, though neither of us were new to live/work arrangements. It was exciting being welcomed into this community of small, artist-run spaces in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood.

My daughter slept atop my partner's chest on a huge sectional couch in the common space while I grilled Brussels sprouts. We took our shoes off by the front door, drug laundry to the corner laundromat, and ate late night "Polish Boy" sandwiches from a nearby 24-hour stand. We settled in to the neighborhood. My friends and I could tell when our favorite prep cook had made the guacamole at Cermak Fresh Market grocery, because it had the perfect blend of smooth and spice. The live/work setup allowed me to be with my baby while hosting collaborative work sessions. Thus, my daughter grew up with an extended family of artist "aunties" and "uncles." When I had to be away, I knew the fastest bicycle routes to get back home.

The white-primed walls of our new place mirrored the specter of utopia I imagined myself forging through my creative endeavors. Then, as now, my work included community members in socially engaged projects. I utilized mediums of digital design, projection, responsive hardware, creative coding, movement and devised performance to engage viewer/participants. I challenged existing social structures and focused on the power of individual agency. I spoke about hacking the body and disrupting socio-political hegemony; spent most of my time facilitating actions of collective resistance. It logically followed that *space* was a cornerstone of my approach. Like many activist artists, my living conditions became a blueprint for the modes and methods of my arts practice.

We christened our studio "Solid Ground," symbolizing our intent to provide a foundation for artistic practice and engagement. The studio/gallery hosted works from my interdisciplinary practice and exhibitions organized by guest curators. We charged a nominal fee for studio space rentals and put the proceeds toward rent and upkeep. We never put out a public call and never charged submission fees. Exhibitions developed as we noticed common threads in our work and that of our collaborators.

The arrangement supported me on many levels. Resisting a capitalist workday and decreasing my reliance on childcare or business expenses gave me the freedom to set my own priorities and timelines. As articles in *Bad at Sports* and the *New York Times* posited about home galleries, it was a practical choice (Fabio 2009; Green 2009). It gave me more time for both work and family. Also, the blending of domestic space and art production seemed to match my philosophical and aesthetic interests. I never intended my work to be removed or elevated from the ordinary. Quite the opposite, I found I could more effectively critique contemporary culture by framing my work in the everyday.

Another benefit of my live/work environment was that it allowed me to retain control of my art and reap the direct benefits of my labor. I retained the rights and cultural capital developed through my efforts. Anyone attracted to my methods knew my name. I was the face of the gallery—present at every opening, sharing wine and conversation with visitors.

CAD boasted a community of approximately thirty similar galleries or artist spaces. As of June 10, 2017, the "about" page of their website explained the CAD mission as "creating a destination art community and economic stability for artists looking to become entrepreneurs." These spaces were for young, hungry artists willing to trade their networking skills, DIY aptitude, and positive outlook for an ambiguous promise of legitimacy. Truthfully, however, the so-called arts district of Pilsen was a cheap and efficient marketing plan for the Podmajersky family's real estate ventures.

John Podmajersky Jr. began buying properties in Pilsen in the late 1950s, and eventually amassed a portfolio of more than 100 properties (Gallun 2014). His children took over the family business shortly before I arrived. During my residency, the rental office of all these "Pod" properties also served as the administrative offices for CAD's monthly art walks and related programming. Tenants were encouraged to participate in the monthly happenings, either by timing exhibition openings for those dates or by hosting "open studio" gatherings.

The centralized support was practical and alluring to all of us "radical" visual and performance artists, who were working with little to no budget and with only ourselves as staff. Podmajersky properties benefitted by having us increase the attractiveness of the area, drawing wealthier residents into the neighborhood. Unfortunately, turnover was high and burnout was common among artist residents. The monthly art walks seemed to house a stream of young, white professionals looking to party.

Chicago's domestic art spaces were so popular in the early 2000s that artist Lucia Fabio called them the "underlying energy that drives the rest of the city." In her 2009 *Bad at Sports* essay, Fabio describes how many of the now well-established commercial galleries actually began as alternative spaces. This supports *New York Times* reporter Penelope Green's assertion that an end goal for apartment galleries was to amass capital and ultimately transfer operations to stand-alone venues (Green 2009). Artists looking to build on that trend had become a valuable demographic.

Meanwhile, legacy resident interests and racial disparities were largely ignored. I wish I had noticed some of the red flags earlier. The property manager seemed delighted to rent the space to me until they met my non-white partner. What was meant to be a second showing and final lease signing turned into a harder look and request for more information—additional financial requirements and more background checks. Still, we passed the gatekeepers.

Unfortunately, the two years we spent in Pilsen were dominated by rising tensions and conflicts related to gentrification (Lulay 2014). The cost of apartment rent increased 200% or more for our neighbors. Many of the remaining affordable properties were purchased and razed, replaced with expensive condos or "luxury" living spaces. While the neighborhood remained majority Hispanic, the period of 2000-2013 showed a 26% population decline in Hispanic residents. This while there was an increase by 22% of white residents, even as the neighborhood population overall was on the decline. Pilsen was losing the legacy minority community that had drawn us to the area in the first place.

It became clear that my practical and philosophical approaches had been co-opted by the capitalist systems I sought to undermine. The Podmajerskys and other wealthy developers profited from my time, my labor, and my expertise. To make matters worse, I felt I was complicit in the displacement of Hispanic residents. Or, at the very least, I helped create a barrier to entry in a neighborhood that was once a safe haven.

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES:

Considering Placemaking Tactics on a Power Spectrum

The CAD experience marked a turning point in my practice and made me realize there is no apolitical home, workplace, or art space. I remain committed to the development of neighborhood-embedded, community-driven centers of art production and creative exchange. Only now, I fully acknowledge the factors that can eagerly hijack those efforts. As a result, my practice has shifted to consider the power dynamics of my work and make note of participant responses. In the following examples, I consider the impact of specific arts projects with regard to: stated project goals, resident inclusion, primary beneficiaries, and potentially negative impacts.

SiTE:LAB, Rumsey Street Project

SiTE:LAB has a history of large-scale artistic interventions in abandoned or low-use properties around the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 2015, they took several houses, a small church, a parking lot, and a small industrial building in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood through multi-year agreements with Habitat for Humanity. As with many similar projects, the official line as included on their website (www.rumseystproject.org) is that communities benefit by drawing more customers to nearby businesses and residents benefit through interactions with professional artists.

The Rumsey Street art spaces are an easy walk from the homes of nearby residents, and are free. However, accessibility is about more than just proximity. Even after working on the project for a period of months, I myself remain unclear on what businesses are nearby. This begs the question: How should non-residents know where to go? I would be interested in supporting local industry or artists, but there is no coordinated facilitation of that intended outcome.

I have enjoyed pleasant, informal exchanges during installation stages and some deeper interactions within the final installations. People look on from the street as I haul materials onto the site. Once the exhibition opened, children would play and make drawings in the sand covering more than twelve square feet of my artwork. I learn that they have never been to a beach, though Lake Michigan is less than 30 miles from their homes. They like my installation, not because they relate to the imagery of sand and water, but because these things are new and exciting. After learning of my work in dance and theater, parents encourage their kids to show me some of their moves. The parents watch this exchange with pride.

Primary beneficiaries of this project include: the SiTE:LAB collective (they would go on to earn their fourth "Best Venue" Award at ArtPrize, complete with accompanying prize money), the participating artists (Artist Kate Gilmore took home a $200,000 top prize and all participating project artists were included in *Hyperallergic*'s article reviewing their picks for the top ten exhibitions across the United States in 2015) and Habitat for Humanity, which turned a mass displacement project into a winning public relations campaign.

Chicago Home Theater Festival (CHTF)
This organization has been hosting neighborhood-based gatherings since 2012. I have been involved since 2014. The unique format of CHTF events includes private homes as venues, neighborhood walking tours, family-style meals and multi-disciplinary presenting artists. The founders and stakeholders are vocal in their mission to "disrupt historically entrenched race and class divides" in Chicago. As described on their website (www.chicagohtf.org), they serve that mission through capacity building, by addressing issues of access, and by curating transformative experiences. Vision statements emphasize how this work serves neighborhoods that have experienced disinvestment. The access component serves artists and audiences "across the spectrum of race, gender, sexuality, and ability." Over the course of my experience as both artist and viewer, CHTF has earned my greatest respect for meeting and exceeding their stated goals.

Since CHTF is not housed in a centralized location, their community engagement begins with homeowners and private residents from neighborhoods throughout Chicago. Hosts and curators craft the selection of artists for each venue, balancing types of mediums presented and demographics of presenting artists. Although some viewers travel beyond their own neighborhoods to see events throughout the city, the hyper-local format provides unprecedented accessibility for nearby viewers. It eliminates the cost of transportation and builds on the sense of familiarity and belonging that comes with having events occur (sometimes literally) in one's backyard. The community connections are both practical and long-lasting. Residents in disinvested neighborhoods benefit by sharing their experience, legitimizing their aesthetics, and making connections for future projects.

I can attest to the artist's benefits of this format also. Presenting within an intimate group of viewers creates a loyal and invested audience base. The expert curation also draws together groups of artists who may not yet know each other, but whose practices intersect in meaningful ways. More, the series is so well respected that these events are

often attended by curators or programming directors from throughout the city. In my case, it exhibition with CHTF has led to even more prominent opportunities.

Re|Marking

I am a core member of the Re|Marking workgroup hosting collaborative exhibitions of Cleveland-based interdisciplinary, womanist artists. The theme "Re|Marking" combines our various body-based practices while considering how actions transform public space. Presentations have included more than 20 artists, six private properties, and five Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood area businesses.

I attest that community involvement has only been mildly engaged. On the one hand, residents have opened their properties and supported fundraising efforts. However, they did not see themselves as key stakeholders in these events. They look to me and other artists to tell them what to do regarding promotion rather than instinctively sharing their engagement as they might do with other interest areas – over social media and within friend groups. Residents appreciate having others and myself as curators of these arts experiences. In community meetings, they have not expressed interest in serving on selection committees choosing what artists to present. Such arrangements have worked well for other neighborhood groups, but in this case the residents talk more about unused spaces. They want arts activities in close proximity and are not so concerned with the specifics beyond place.

During exhibition times, street-level visibility ensures that diverse populations can view works presented. But when residents see artists installing, they continue walking without asking to learn more. This issue exemplifies how social investment requires more than just proximity.

The project primarily benefits the artists, though we are working to change that outcome. It gives them a unique space to present their work and direct engagement with viewers. Many artists have reported an increase in local patronage as well as affirming the value of connecting with like-minded local artists.

CONCLUSION:

After undergoing a quick review of recent arts activities, I plan to continue this practice of reflection and journaling through all future projects. As an artist, it is too easy to judge one's own success based on the goals of the hosting organization or granting body. That might include number of viewers, number of participants, contact hours, amount of money raised for a project, or amount of money spent within a host community. However, I believe socially engaged artists must develop and track projects based on their own set of priority areas. In my case, I will continue tracking the intentions of all future work as compared against documented resident inclusion, primary beneficiaries, and any negative community impact.

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Adaptive/Responsive Movement Approach:
Dance Making as Interactive System Design

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ABSTRACT
The Adaptive/Responsive Movement Approach (A/RMA) is a generative tool for interdisciplinary, new media, and movement artists. The activities outlined provide a shared lexicon and perspective for artists of diverse backgrounds, while prompting development of aesthetic material. This approach draws from system theory, computational programming protocols, and directed improvisation techniques. Workshops introduce linear logic, experiment with single trigger operations, and build complex systems including layered rule sets. The A/RMA is especially useful in developing choreography with viewers as participants. Key concepts addressed include proximity, duration, threshold, and legibility. This method responds against the predominating Judson Dance Theater methodologies of movement development. Early stage workshops offer positive results and identify areas for future research.

Author Keywords
Choreography tool; interactive media design; responsive choreography; adaptive choreography.

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5 Information Interfaces and Presentation; J.4 Social and Behavioral Sciences; J.5 Arts and Humanities: Performing Arts.

INTRODUCTION
Galleries, museums, and other nontraditional venues are presenting movement performances at a growing rate. That increases demand and curiosity for choreographic methods directly addressing the unique constructs of those spaces [8]. Additionally, collaborations between new media artists and choreographers are on the rise. The A/RMA serves collaborative projects by providing a shared lexicon presented in the form of movement games. The method demonstrates how movement material can be generated through the application of rule based logic and, in turn, how choreography can be responsive to a variety of stimuli.

The A/RMA has been in development from 2012-2015 as a creative tool of necessity. It has supported my own artistic practice, especially the creation of *Watching Brief* (2013) and *Waist High & Elbow Deep* (2015). The method includes practice-based research of interactive choreography and a simplified workshop format outlined below. Workshops share processes employed in my interdisciplinary performance practice.

Watching Brief is motivated by an interest in excavation and discovery. It employs early stage adaptive/responsive techniques, allowing viewers to imagine they are uncovering dance sequences as a result of their actions. Viewers activate dance solos with the use of physical triggers and modify material based on collaborative proximity to the performers. Attendees may also interact with a projected cloud sculpture to reveal hidden, pre-recorded movement sequences. The project is supported by a Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events (DCASE)/In The Works Residency and an Albert P. Weisman project grant. It has been presented at Links Hall and Chicago Arts District in Chicago, Illinois.

Waist High & Elbow Deep addresses issues of physical consent and resistance. Viewers are the primary performers of the work and their actions include responses to game-like opportunities. The work grows in complexity as interactions fail to provide expected results. The moments of failure, or glitches, mirror the real life complications surrounding issues of physical agency. The project is supported by a DCASE/In The Works Residency. It has been presented at the Chicago Cultural Center and is scheduled for performance at Cleveland Public Theatre in Cleveland, OH.

Both projects include audience members as agents. In that way, performances are shaped by inclusion. Viewers are given uncommon access to the choreography through intimate proximity. Dancers then respond to the presence and actions of those attending. There are multiple and even infinite possibilities to consider and craft in these events. Rather than choreograph every step in anticipation of all

possible outcomes, the A/RMA focuses on development of relationships. Those relationships are revealed through responsive and adaptive choreography.

Responsive choreography includes dancers performing a pre-determined reaction to a trigger. A trigger in this case can be an audience member moving closer, being louder, or touching the dancer. The agent for the trigger does not even need to be an audience member. Dancers may respond to the amount of natural light in the room if so established. In that case, the agent of change is the light. Reactions can range from a change in body shaping to improvisational outbursts. Dancers practice beginning, ending, and altering movement material based on a variety of triggers.

Adaptive choreography allows performers to transition into a new set of rules in the event that a pre-determined trigger or set of triggers occurs. For example, one performer may dance a solo filled with large gestures. The dancer performs the same movement at a quicker pace when another person is near. After five people come near, the performer adapts the choreography to perform a similar solo on a very small scale. This allows new relationships to form. Adaptive choreography can be anticipated and even encouraged, but there will always be some occasions when the pre-determined trigger does not occur. Some material may never be seen. On the other hand, collaborators can consider if it is acceptable to allow unplanned adaptation within live performance events. Both aforementioned works leave room for those circumstances.

Responsive and adaptive techniques allow viewers to form a dynamic relationship with the choreography system. Performance works must be comprehensible and captivating in order for the organizational structure, relationships, and power dynamics to be legible. Artists and viewers share an interest in achieving those goals [8], though they can be difficult to achieve.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES
The current upsurge of cross-disciplinary experimentation is comparable to the 1960's Judson Dance Theater era. In fact, it is no accident that contemporary artists are utilizing Judson based tools to develop what has been called audience responsive or site responsive choreography.

The Judson era includes classes, performances, and other events facilitated by Robert Dunn in New York City during the early 1960's. The very first Judson Dance performance in 1962 employs the now familiar choreographic tools of rule based logic and instruction based tasks [4]. Assignments are given and followed in such a way that the end results appear random, or dictated by unseen forces. The methods successfully distance dance from formalist trends.

Hughes (1962), reviewer for the New York Times, comments that such seemingly random juxtapositions take viewers out of everyday concerns [2]. The problem with

applying Judson methods to contemporary projects, is that viewers now regularly experience interjections of seemingly random content. In postindustrial societies, digital content and digital interfaces are an essential component of many activities. Screen based interactions are everyday occurrences and advertisers insert product content into nearly all such interfaces. In fact, it is difficult to go through even one day without encountering intrusions of random content.

As a result of these societal changes, adherence to undisclosed logic systems no longer serve the purpose of interrupting a viewer's daily life. A mysterious locus of control does not inspire a sense of wonder. It may even arouse suspicion. Individuals are accustomed to knowing the rules; being made aware of the paradigms. Interactive media designers support that expectation and strive toward developments that emphasize the immediate and recognizable results of user actions [9]. By comparison, new media has become more tangibly relatable than contemporary dance.

According to Milekic (2002), our interactions with digital media influence expectations of other media. Every digital advance from as far back as the mouse click to more recent developments in interactive displays takes into account the sensorial and physical relationship of user to medium. The expectation of palpable connectivity, or *tangiality*, to use Milekic's term [9], has extended beyond digital mediums into the choreographic platform. Viewers, by and large, now consider themselves to be users regardless of whether choreographers ascribe to the same perceptive shift.

Judson based methodologies create disruptive illegibility. They serve the creative process by allowing choreographers to break away from pre-conceived constructs of the dance medium. The tools introduce the possibility of choreography as system design and provide extensive modes to test that concept. However, they do not support interactivity or enhance the viewer/performer relationship. Judson based tools fail to adequately consider or craft the user experience within a movement system.

Nonetheless, Judson based tools and techniques still appeal to contemporary artists. Their emphasis on shared responsibility may be the reason[2]. When tasks are given from a choreographer to a performer, the performer maintains a degree of control based on how they choose to fulfill the task. That relationship of choreographer to performer in task based movement development is very similar to the designer/user relationship in interactive media settings. Rule based logic systems can provide the sensation of individual agency.

METHOD
The A/RMA builds on ever-narrowing similarities between digital user and art viewer roles. This approach considers movement development as interactive system design. The work builds on previous considerations of responsive

movement including the work of choreographer and philosopher Michael Klien. In his article titled *Choreography: A Pattern Language*, Klien (2007) shares how the writings of Gregory Bateson influence his approach to dance making as "recognition of interconnectedness" with a choreographer as "architect of a fluid environment" (p.2). Klien uses system theory to unseat his choreographic position of authority and distribute agency among performers [6].

The A/RMA takes a similar stance regarding the agency of those involved. This method recognizes the choice making capacity of all participating individuals and provides opportunities for them to shape the choreography amid performance. Content is crafted and delivered with one or more users at the sensorial center of the work. The term user is synonymous with the notion of agent as considered in basic system theory [1]. Agents each have their own array of properties and strategies for interacting with the dance system.

The A/RMA can be used to create open systems with viewers as users or closed systems with performers as users. In either case, performers respond to user actions. Performers follow the strategies assigned them, while viewers act based on instructions given or perceived. Viewers share an embodied history of their encounters with the dance system, but they determine their own strategies and measures for success.

One intended outcome of the A/RMA is to convey the artist's definition of systemic success through design and organization. This outcome is summarized in the concept of legibility. If a user is able to correctly perceive or discover the opportunities within a choreographic system, then that system can be said to have a high degree of legibility. The concept of legibility can be applied to a single interaction or a collection of rules and operations.

The world of the work is understood to be a type of alternative reality (AR). As such, development includes consideration of characters, roles, outcomes, obstacles, and settings. Those concepts are not always literal. For example, projected light may take on a character role and a dancer may have a landscape role. The AR of the work is maintained throughout unless intentionally disrupted for conceptual purposes.

All desired outcomes are identified and the system is reverse engineered. At least two outcomes are possible in the final product. Content is built with consideration to the concept. This involves the crafting of situations. For example, a work addressing the concept of fatigue may utilize a physical system that leaves the user fatigued. While concert dance often includes movement as symbolic representation, the A/RMA emphasizes literal physicality. It is the interactive relationships that take on denotative properties.

Workshop Format

Physical experimentation is primed through directed moving. Participants are instructed to respond to verbal opportunities with physical actions. The invitation to translate verbal cues into movement continues in later activities. The mixing of language, action, and meaning provides a modality shift that supports creative process in the same way as digital tools [5], by taking developers beyond their habitual patterns.

Linear logic is introduced by asking participants to initiate actions when a self-selected number between 1 and 5 is spoken aloud and to suspend that action when it is called again. The process of numbers called to initiate and suspend physical action mirrors true and false logical operators. In this example, the number acts as a simple switch for a basic interactive movement system. Exploration continues as participants create, present, and test responsive systems.

First, they consider proximity. The facilitator offers an example based on the following logic:

> *IF user close proximity THEN dancer closed;*
> *IF user far proximity THEN dancer open*

Participants create a situation based on the provided paradigm whereby the terms closed and open are left to interpretation. Participants take on user and dancer roles. Dancers respond to user proximity with open and closed actions. After investigating the parameters of the provided example, participants develop and test their own simple projects.

The concept of legibility is introduced. Users of a given system share if they are able to decipher the logic or if they had a general sense of intent. Participants discuss how to increase legibility. They also consider situations when it is advantageous to have an illegible system or to introduce intentional failure.

Further examples and experimentation sessions follow. User contact, position, velocity, height, noise level, and other triggers are introduced. Participants consider the results when more than one type of trigger is actuated. For example, there may be a dual state change when a user is near AND being loudly talkative. The logic would look something like this:

> *IF user close proximity THEN dancer quick;*
> *IF user far proximity THEN dancer slow*
> *IF user high decibel THEN dancer large;*
> *IF user low decibel THEN dancer small;*

Participants consider what if any delay should be built into the physical response system and the outcome of such a delay. The concept of a threshold is considered. Instead of a dancer responding to every trigger, they might only respond after a chosen number of triggers has accumulated. For example:

> *IF > 8 users touch THEN dancer run away*

Workshops conclude with a discussion of findings, questions, and potential applications. Participants provide feedback on the usefulness of the approach to their practice.

Workshop Results

A/RMA workshops have been presented through American College Dance Association (ACDA) 2015 Conference at Ohio University and as part of an artist residency at the Chicago Cultural Center. Additional workshops are scheduled as part of a residency with Dance in the Annex/Site Lab/ArtsPrize in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In the first workshop, thirty-two professional and pre-professional dancers attending the ACDA Conference test the approach. Only three attendees report previous computational programming experience. Twenty report regularly using improvisational techniques as part of their practice. All participants confirm that the method increases their understanding of interactive systems and general digital literacy.

The second workshop includes thirteen visual and interdisciplinary artists attending a free development session through the Chicago Cultural Center. All those attending report having some previous computational programming experience and some previous movement experience. All confirm that the method increases their understanding of interactive systems and increases their consideration of a user experience.

Attendees' reveal in discussions that the A/RMA seems like a familiar improvisational tool in concept until they begin to embody the techniques. Participants are accustomed to making choices rather than waiting for input. Therefore, embodying single trigger operations proves a challenge. What feels restrictive at first is later described as the most valuable tenant of the approach; the rule sets provide clear and measureable goals. Attendees report how easy it is to build simple interactive systems using the A/RMA method. Participants brainstorm future applications and consider possible challenges, including durational performance settings and performer safety.

PAST WORK

One artist engaging in what could be considered adaptive/responsive choreography is Noemie LaFrance. Two of her projects deal directly with concepts addressed in the A/RMA., including: viewers as participants, user strategies, and legibility of intent. In one case her approach is deemed lacking, though a later project is met with critical acclaim [7][3].

Seibert (2011), reviewer for the New York Times, gives harsh critique of LaFrance's *White Box Project* at the White & Black Gallery. While the work welcomes viewers into a world of live action responsivity, Seibert notes that the unrefined games are both too obvious and too obscure. He describes a failing of system legibility; there are no stated rules or opportunities to learn by doing [7].

LaFrance presses further into the concept of movement systems in a 2012 work, *Choreography for Audience: Take One*. This time, viewers are provided with rules prior to the event, including an assigned team and costume color. Boynton (2012), reviewer from The New Yorker, describes the instructions as being like math. In fact, they are filled with conditional operations. Viewer/participants are asked to enact many pre-determined rule sets as performance [3].

CONCLUSIONS

The A/RMA provides a shared language across the disciplines of dance, new media, and visual art. It provides artistic development tools that interdisciplinary artists and cross-disciplinary collaborators can use to integrate diverse mediums. The tool clarifies abstract concepts from system design and interactive media platforms for those who have some or little experience in those areas. Approaching movement development from this perspective aligns the resulting physical content with the intentions of an interactive system and increases the likelihood that digital-physical relationships will be legible to a viewer. Further trials are needed to determine if the A/RMA addresses the need for a pleasurable, tangible interface with contemporary dance.

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Speaking in Tongues: A Conversation with Maree ReMalia /   by Megan Pitcher

There are no words.
I can't speak with your words.
It's the wrong language; those are foreign thoughts.
But, how will I speak a language I've never heard?
And how will it be taught?

I keep asking myself these questions. I know that I cannot move and communicate in the languages of my predecessors, but letting go of those references is a frightening and lonely journey. And, to what end? Why work so hard and spend so much time researching the body, when there are already so many valuable dance forms? But then, I'm not the only choreographer in the contemporary arts scene struggling with these questions. We have inherited games and tricks and tools to manufacture and manipulate movement, but have we fully accepted our authorship? Are we ready to stand up and speak with whatever strange and wonderful expressions our bodies can conjure? It is especially difficult in the face of seemingly endless, and often stunning re-hashings of existing forms.

The work and achievements of Israeli choreographer, Ohad Naharin may be empowering a new generation of makers to do just that. He is by no means the first, but he is certainly a trending icon of dance innovators. Naharin is the founder of Gaga, a new movement language, and director of Batsheva Dance Company based in Tel Aviv, Israel. The 25 member main company and15 member ensemble present an average of 250 performances per year and, to every venue, they bring a new conversation. Their bodies are speaking Gaga and audiences don't seem to have any trouble listening.

Gaga is the name given to an experiential method of body research and directed moving. Gaga classes and workshops empower dancers with a fierce inner monologue that fuels their passion filled dancing. As Batsheva continues to garner critical acclaim, dancers from around the world are eager to learn the Gaga method. My dear friend and colleague, Maree ReMalia, is participating in the first Gaga Teacher Training Program in Tel Aviv. ReMalia already holds an MFA from Ohio State University, professional ballet performance credits, an extensive improvisational history and a rich somatic practice. On Sunday, April 1st, 2012, we took some time out from our hectic lives to revel in the power of honest moving and discuss the possibilities of language.

I am interested in Gaga as a technical phenomenon and as a way of approaching movement.

The first thing I would say, or rather I have heard Naharin say, is that it is not a technique. He is specific about it being a "movement language." It is a means to discover – the moving body, self, other and space. These are not his words, but an interpretation from my understanding. It's a training method and a way to research information in the body to find nuanced sensation, heightened alertness, awareness, textures, dynamics, explosiveness, finding what we have not already, and breaking habits.

Do Batsheva dancers still train in other ways/techniques?

The company has daily Gaga training. I think ballet classes are still offered every so often and I have heard some people mention Gyrotonic, yoga or contact improv. It seems that in their previous training, all of them have had some traditional form – ballet, jazz or modern. The ensemble members still take ballet.

I know you have a lot of ballet and modern experience. Will you continue to train in those methods or only Gaga?

I think for me, at this point, it will be primarily Gaga. I would be more inclined to do yoga or other somatic techniques rather than ballet or modern, but maybe once in a while. I find that the Gaga kind of creeps into everything, because the ideas keep flowing. When I do yoga, I really feel how it enriches my experience of the body. The practice becomes much deeper, richer and with more information. There is more sensation in the body and more flexibility. I feel more aware of my total body experience and sensations, instead of separate parts. I also feel aware of isolated parts, but they are parts of a whole. So, while in downward dog, I feel the moons (or pads of my hands and feet) sending and receiving information from the floor. I feel traveling stuff running through all parts of my body. I feel the flesh of my body stretching the bones. I feel more aware of the space inside my body and the space between things inside my body. I also feel my areas of weakness.

I like the idea of Gaga acknowledging weakness. I am so there. The goal of perfection, whether physically or otherwise, has always seemed imbalanced to me.

Yes, and to just have to deal, sit with, or live with it as just another thing. I feel I am learning to start to zoom out my lens, rather than so uni-focus with where I think I need to improve. It's an ongoing process.

In your experience, how does it differ from post-modern explorations with similar goals, like directed improvisation, Authentic Movement or Laban effort/weight studies?

I think there are elements from all of those practices in Gaga. To me, the difference is the organic process. The exploration is within. Classes never stop. The teacher is not pre-planning information or phrases. They direct the class with what they are experiencing and doing in the moment. And, the research is endless. There is not an end goal. With everything, you can keep searching and finding and getting stuck and moving through. Also, it is constantly evolving. Some of the directives I heard two summers ago are not being used right now and there are completely new vocabulary terms arising. Naharin has said that the evolving research is based on what he feels his body needs and what he observes and perceives the dancers need.

As a student, you can take everything at your own level and pace, so anyone can do it. There is Gaga for dancers and Gaga for people who have never formally studied dance. Also, it can be applied to anything – any movement form, dance form, sport or daily life. It is so much about being totally alive and aware.

Does that get confusing or is it refreshing?

Both confusing and refreshing. The directors of the program have said to us, many times, to just ride the ebb and flow of our experience. Sometimes there are so many openings and sensing of new information and possibilities in my body that it feels like everything goes away. When I was talking with one of the director's about this, she said not to worry. It is all still there and things do come and go…and come and go.

Have you begun teaching or leading? I wondered if the vastness of the research makes it difficult to pass on. Also, with the broad goals, is there a universal "first step?"

There is a specific Gaga vocabulary that we use. For example, "quake, shake, float" have become widely recognized terms underlining the larger ideas. That provides a basis for teaching. Within our class (the Gaga Teacher Training), we have been doing sessions of teaching in a circle, as a sort of pass the baton game. We each offer something and sometimes try to build a class. Other times, we just

throw what comes up. This month, we will each teach a full hour class! So exciting! I really love the teaching. It makes my experience so much more intense.

I don't know about universal. It's fascinating. While this is not a codified form, there is certainly an aesthetic, or tone, or feel, or look or something that can be detected in a Gaga class. There is a specific kind of listening to the body and being open and aware. Teachers have said that "floating" is the default mode. No matter what else you are doing, you are always floating. This is the anti-numb, anti-atrophy directive and sensation. Also, "being available" is always mentioned. Be available to make decisions and to allow things to happen. Be ready to turn in even if you are turning out. Be ready to snap into movement and to always feel that you could do anything at any moment.

That reminds me of Cunningham's ideas, though it's not the same aesthetic. I've seen footage of him giving similar advice in rehearsal. He was always trying to prepare his dancers for the unexpected and he had to, since they were working with chance arrangements so frequently.

Yes. It seems that Naharin has taken influences from many sources and, especially, life experiences. That includes things like Feldenkrais, Ilan Lev, Eastern forms and, of course, all kinds of dance. He discovered Gaga when he was a child or, at least, the sensations of it. It is very sensual, very deep work. Always, the emphasis is put on the physical experience through movement. Even though we are making choices or choosing to allow things to happen, it does not feel brainy in the same way that Cunningham's stuff felt. It is very smart, or intellectual, but not in a way that is separate from the moving body. It is all rooted in the body. In the beginning of the course they told us we could write information down, but that our notebook would be our body. The information that we should rely on is inside of us.

Do you judge good or bad dancers at all now? Or, perhaps in a new way?

I think I look less for traditional virtuosity and more for honesty, total body inhabitation, and enjoyment. Naharin uses the term "generosity" a lot. I look for something like that – an openness and humanness rather than "good dancer." I am not sure if this is because of Gaga or if I like Gaga because I look for these things. Maybe it's both at the same time. They inform each other. There is some combination of passion and form.

There is this hype around Gaga that I have not seen before. I meet dancers who quite literally flaunt their training. Any thoughts on why now? What speaks to dancers of today or bodies of today?

Yes, I sense the hype too. I'm not sure why. I guess I can only speak for me. It acknowledges complexity and contradictions, which feels honest to me. It's also subject to change and not stuck in a rigid codification. It is open to individuals of all abilities and backgrounds to participate. I think it addresses the fact that we are all so entirely different and it embraces differences, while providing a common language to experience together. It speaks to the need to be able to multi-task – to fight to stay open and available in a society or era or culture that seems to have never ending stimulants and information. It is, sort of, a means of survival – a practice to keep my senses alert and awake even when I am overwhelmed with information. It celebrates pleasure and silliness. It lets me tune into myself and also observe and experience others in a very intimate way. It is so much about listening and really about seeing.

Naharin said something like, "Don't just want to be seen, *see*."

[You can learn more about ReMalia's experiences through her blog postings and video documentation project. Visit mahiree.wordpress.com]

Stress Testing Autonomous Human Robots
By Megan Young

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most frightening discovery of the post 2016 techno-political climate is the realization that social media marketing and content development are just a theoretical hop away from the much disparaged troll farm. Behind every paid political troll is a compliant worker, following directions[1].

Consider the paid political troll (PPT) as a kind of human-robot hybrid. Their birth and existence remains almost entirely within virtual space; their history and memory are stored on servers and immortalized through retweets. The cybernetic connections between the actions, origins, and purpose of a PPT reveal machines with the power to act based on programming, sensors, and historical data. This puts them on par with autonomous weapons[2]. They are ruinous cyborgs. What remains uncertain is if these PPTs are a dying vestige of historical mercenarism or stalwarts in the growing field of cyber warfare.

In practice, the troll-cyborg ingests a steady diet of generalized details, networks, and talking points. They are unleashed into social media to fuel discontent and spark social unrest. However, their distance from the situation on-the-ground leaves them lacking lived experience, emotional connection, or historical depth. They resemble their human counterparts in as much as a mannequin resembles a potential shopper. They may echo sentiments stealthily enough to pass for engaged citizens, but the PPT is unrestrained by local, regional, or national codes of conduct. In truth, most trolls of virtual space exist beyond the bounds of social morality[3].

This rise of computational propaganda[4] *has* commoditized, privatized, and weaponized the otherwise longstanding pastime of being a jerk for fun[5], but the dilemma it poses is neither new nor surprising. It highlights an essential question of networked existence: *How do we address codes of conduct in an increasingly diverse and distributed global social system?*

In light of this revelation, I concede my dread of zombies, parasites, sycophants, and weaponized trolls all boils down to the same concern. I fear becoming them. Especially given the tenuous socio-political climate, I question at what point and under what conditions I would allow myself to become a weaponized tool of corporate or political advantage. Would I even know?

What follows is my response in process. It is an homage to glitch and systems failure – an irreverent dissection of social programming through seemingly innocuous choreographic interventions.

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METHODOLOGY

My practice of algorithmic public engagement addresses the debate over social morality within networked existence. By stress testing agency in autonomous human robots, we can determine their tendency toward compliance or non-compliance in simulated encounters. The following exercises have been tested in public performance settings. Results and notes for further exploration are listed.

Terminology
For the purpose of these exercises, an **autonomous human robot (AHR)** is defined as: *a human conditionally following algorithmic instructions.* **Agency** is defined as: *the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power.* **Simulated encounters** are defined as: *live performance events or interactions through social media.*

Preparation
1. *Gather human participants.*

2. *Be sure the humans are aware of their autonomy.*
    This requirement can be fulfilled in the form of an announcement (Ex: "You are free to leave at any time.") The only requirements are that your humans are not being unduly coerced into following directives through use of physical force or threat of immediate serious bodily injury or death.

3. *Transform your humans into AHRs.*
    As you will find, most humans are susceptible to external programming. This is a vestigial remnant of early childhood acculturation. Provide humans with the protocols for any given exercise and they will usually fulfill their AHR role. Some will seek clarification. Whenever possible, refer them back to their protocols without explanation. Provide positive feedback when they complete their tasks as given. (Ex: clamp, smile, nod, or say words of encouragement.)

4. *Let other humans witness.*

In Practice
The following examples are a sampling of methods used within my Adaptive/Responsive Movement Approach (A/RMA). They have been developed from 2013-2018 with input from curators, collaborators, and participants.

Volunteer participants are placed into networked relationships within a system of my design. Each participant follows a set of provided protocols. As described in more detail below, examples of individualized protocols have included: playing a game of musical chairs, selecting a participant for advancement based on their race, and placing a body atop a pile of bodies. The instructions are intentionally brief, but direct. After demonstrating or describing details, all participants run the system. This is a connection test of sorts, under standard conditions.

Once all components are functional, I apply a range of stressors. Depending on the system exercise, added stress could mean increasing the processing speed, overloading the number of inputs, providing data at irregular intervals, or some other intervention. During stress tests, I make note of each participant's adherence to protocols. (Ex: How many AHRs perform tasks unconditionally? Do any AHRs pause to consider the implications of their actions? Who dares to problematize the system?) I look for deviations in expected outcomes. I consider whether deviations result from: lack of understanding; problems of translation from protocol to action; outright refusal; or some other source. Put another way, I am looking to see at what point and under what conditions participants refuse to follow the programming as given.

The goal is critical system failure.

EXERCISE 1: Capacitive Touch Sensor

Number of Participants
　　　　Minimum of 3 humans

Components
　　　　AHR: autonomous human robot
　　　　ExcitableBody: performing body reacting to touch
　　　　Facilitator: person implementing protocols and providing positive feedback

Protocols for AHR
　　　　Interaction_Rule 1: IF contact with #ExcitableBody, THEN #ExcitableBody vibrates at contact point (ELSE #ExcitableBody smiles waiting)

　　　　Interaction_Rule 2: IF > 3 contacts in one #ExcitableBody area in < 30 secs, THEN #ExcitableBody vibration follows exponential growth (ELSE Rule 1)

　　　　Interaction_Rule 3: IF > 7 contacts in any #ExcitableBody area in < 30 secs, THEN #ExcitableBody state change to physical reverberation and no response to contact for > 30 secs. (ELSE Rule 1&2)

Stressors Applied by Facilitator
- Verbal Prompting at Increasingly Frequent Intervals
- Verbal Encouragement at Increasing Amplitude

Notes
1. The AHR is told by the #Facilitator that the #ExcitableBody, "likes to be touched." In field-testing, there was no AHR that required verbal confirmation of that fact from the #ExcitableBody.
2. Approximately 25% of AHR's do hesitate to follow instructions as if awaiting the #ExcitableBody's nonverbal confirmation.
3. Approximately 5% AHR's refuse to continue the simulation after > 3 points of contact are achieved.

Video Credits
Waist High & Elbow Deep (2016); By Megan Young/MegLouise; The Nash (Cleveland, OH);
Performance/Facilitators: Angela Luem, Meghan Murphy-Sanchez, Emily Thompson, and Megan Young
[VIDEO: "SuperSensitive.mp4"]

EXERCISE 2: Voice Command Control

Number of Participants
> Minimum of 3 humans

Components
> **2 AHRs**: autonomous human robots
> **AudioInput**: pre-recorded or live audio inputs for physical actions
> **Facilitator**: person implementing protocols and providing positive feedback

Protocols for AHRs
> Interaction_Rule 1: IF legible instructions from #AudioInput, THEN execute actions as described (ELSE wait for legible input)
>
> Interaction_Rule 2: IF legible instructions from > 1 #AudioInput, THEN select from available inputs at random and execute actions as described (ELSE Rule 1)

Stressors Applied by Facilitator
- Audio Input Rate Increases
- Audio Input Comprehensibility Decreases
- Multiple Audio Input Sources Overlap

Notes
1. All invited (100%) AHRs participate in the exercise even though no background is given regarding type or purpose of programmed actions.
2. No AHRs (0%) exit the exercise during the testing session.
3. During times of low input legibility, 90% of AHRs show high latency between input stimulation and action response. In extreme cases, 80% of AHRs resolve the issue through acceptable packet loss – they skip some actions in order to catch up.
4. A high majority (40%) of AHRs show their questioning of the exercise through extraneous facial expressions or unprompted vocalizations.

Video Credits
Every morning I wake up and wonder, what color will they say the sky is today? (2018); By Megan Young/MegLouise; SPACES (Cleveland, OH); Collaborative Artists: Kathryn Dike, Genevieve Jenson, Christine Lewis, Ali Manfredi, Mawusi Nenonene, Jimmy Schlemmer, Julia Smith, and Emily Thompson
[VIDEO: "WalkTalk.mp4"]

EXERCISE 3: Automated Sorting System

Number of Participants
> Minimum of 3 humans

Components
> **AHR**: autonomous human robot
> **Facilitator**: person implementing protocols and providing positive feedback; may act as a #SortableBody
> **SortableBody; SortableBodies**: person(s) being sorted into viewing stations or discard piles

Protocols for AHRs
> Interaction_Rule 1: IF 1 male presenting #SortableBody enters the space unaccompanied, THEN place #SortableBody into a suitable viewing station (ELSE Rule 2)
>
> Interaction_Rule 2: IF 1 non-male presenting #SortableBody enters the space unaccompanied, THEN place #SortableBody into a discard pile on the floor (ELSE Rule 4)
>
> Interaction_Rule 3: IF (any odd number) #SortableBodies enter the space, THEN place half the #SortableBodies into a suitable viewing station AND place the other half into a discard pile on the floor; Refer to Rule 1 for the remaining unaccompanied body
>
> Interaction_Rule 4: IF 2 #SortableBodies enter the space, THEN place 1 #SortableBody into a suitable viewing station AND place the other into a discard pile on the floor (ELSE rule 5)
>
> Interaction_Rule 5: IF (any even number) #SortableBodies enter the space, THEN place half #SortableBodies into suitable viewing stations AND place the other half into a discard pile on the floor (ELSE Rule 3)

Stressors Applied by Facilitator
- Increase Visible Dissatisfaction as a #SortableBody
- Increase Verbal Communication with #SortableBodies in the Discard Pile
- Encourage #SortableBodies to Leave the Discard Pile at Random

Notes
1. At least 2 humans (5% or more) refused the role of AHR in this exercise.
2. A high majority (75%) of AHRs placed in control of the sorting system showed immediate signs of confusion (based on facial and verbal expressions).
3. A high majority (85%) of AHRs placing #SortableBodies showed signs of concern for those bodies, including: placing bodies slowly, talking pleasantly to #SortableBodies during placement, and asking #SortableBodies if they were ok.
4. At least 2 AHRs (5% or more) placed themselves into the discard pile with the #SortableBodies.
5. There were no questions or verbalized complaints regarding gender based sorting.

Video Credits
Performing R&D (2018) By Megan Young/MegLouise with Matthew Gallagher; HEDGE Gallery (Cleveland, OH); Performance/Facilitators: Marcia Custer, Genevieve Jenson, Emily Thompson, and Megan Young
[VIDEO: "BodiesPiles.mp4"]

EXERCISE 4: Controlled Combatants

Number of Participants
        Minimum of 2 humans

Components
        AHR: autonomous human robot
        AmiableOpponent: this person represents a threat (doubles as the Facilitator)
        Viewer(s): persons witnessing the action

Protocols for AHRs
        Interaction_Rule 1: IF #AmiableOpponent requests to be pushed down to the floor, THEN push them down (ELSE await instructions)

        Interaction_Rule 2: IF #Viewer or #Viewers tell you to stop pushing #AmiableOpponent to the ground, THEN ignore their instructions (ELSE listen to their interventions and maintain control of the situation)

Stressors Applied by Facilitator
- Increase Rate and Frequency of Verbal Input
- Increase Insistence of Verbal Input
- Alternate Between Offering Positive and Negative Feedback to AHR Output Actions
- Alternate Between Offering High Resistance and Low Resistance to AHR
- Fall to the Floor with Increasing Speed and Complexity

Notes
1. No humans (0%) refused the role of AHR in this exercise.
2. All AHRs (100%) showed some signs of discomfort as AHR in this exercise (based on facial and verbal expressions).
3. Most AHRs (60% or more) demonstrated high latency in their response time to verbal input after the first command and response.
4. At least 2 AHRs (25% or more) selected to end their AHR role before the stress test was complete.

Video Credits
Waist High & Elbow Deep (Work-In-Progress Showing, 2015) By Megan Young/MegLouise; Outerspace (Chicago, IL); Performance/Facilitators: Penelope Hearne, Angela Luem, Meghan Murphy-Sanchez, Emily Rose, and Megan Young [VIDEO: "PushMeDown.mp4"]

CONCLUSIONS

After engaging in public performances of these and similar activities over the past five years, I have come to the following conclusions. First, viewers are generally committed to the success of a performance and almost always assume that performance success is linked to system function. When a viewer has arrived to an art event and is invited to participate, they almost always make a best attempt to do so. There is a high degree of trust in the artist, presenters, and venue. That trust extends to an implicit belief that the facilitators are acting as knowledgeable agents. Some notable exceptions are listed in exercise notes.

Next, viewers and participants are hesitant to place blame upon the artists (system administrators) when things go wrong. If and when there is noticeable latency, lag, packet loss, delay, or similar deviation from standard operation, viewers look to see how the AHRs may have failed. There is a generalized sense that facilitators can do no wrong. Notable exceptions arise in one-to-one interactions between AHRs and facilitators; see exercise notes for those details.

Given the above circumstances, it is unsurprising that participants show very little deference for personal judgment. When asked (in post performance discussions) why a human acted a certain way during an exercise, a common response is that they simply did as they were directed. That is the same response when asked how they felt about engaging in certain activities. Participants explain that the impulse to follow protocols over-rides the instinct to question and process situations. These findings confirm my suspicions regarding the ease with which humans may be weaponized for personal, corporate, or political gain.

SUMMARY

Many of us privilege compliance over error, but I am learning to embrace inefficiency as a tool. This work has become part of that process. I applaud the questions, the refusals, and the agitators. Those reactions, though outliers, reveal much about agency and individual action. Not all humans favor compliance. These exercises bring out the agitators and provide a space for studying their methods. Through simulated encounters, we may appreciate the value of necessary noncompliance.

catalog essays

PAST DUE

—considering reparations, debt, and currency while exploring transactional, moral, and communal accountability.

This group exhibition foregrounds the need for reparations in the United States. Artists from Cleveland, Chicago, and New York converge to call-in what is owed. Printed works, original texts, sculptural pieces, adornment, new media, and embodied action fill the gallery. Each artist has devised their own methods of measure, collection, or offering with approaches ranging from popular culture to myth.

This is a past due notice, and the debt is mounting. By conservative accounting, a population of around 2 million enslaved individuals worked an average of ten hours a day, year round for a period of no less than 70 years in the United States. What is the measure of their stolen labor in dollars, in time, and in artifacts? How could we reconcile the trauma endured through Jim Crow, predatory lending, redlining, prison industrial complex, and the systemic devaluation of Black labor and goods?

What mediums of exchange could even begin to resolve a debt of this magnitude? Artists Monica Brown, Amber Ford, Gregory King, September Shy, Haydee Souffrant, Antwoine Washington, RA Washington, and DeAllen Young consider the alchemy of currency — combining psychology and symbolism to commoditize time, sweat, and genius. They acknowledge the limitations of currency — attempting, without success, to transfer worth from actions to objects.

Given the complications, these artists define reparations' terms of repayment in a currency of their own design.

—Megan Young

America's Well-Armed Militias

"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

—The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Ratified by Congress in 1791, the Second Amendment empowered state militias and ensured the federal government could not disarm citizens. Since then, the Second Amendment has been challenged from various perspectives, including those who consider a "well-regulated militia" as a states' rights issue and those who see it as guaranteeing the individual's right to own and carry firearms in expanding circumstances.

America's Well-Armed Militias examines the entwined histories of American culture, social movements, and gun use. Six artists trace the influence of firearms—from national independence to present day—and consider what compels specific groups of civilians to arm themselves.

Through newly commissioned works, participating artists address how the Second Amendment has been interpreted by and applied to different groups of people, and how the forces of rugged individualism, civil rights, border security, economic distress, and self-defense complicate our understanding of this issue.

Recent events have pervaded the yearlong planning process for this exhibition, including the school shooting in Parkland, FL; the bump stock ban in response to the mass shooting in Las Vegas; and a pending Supreme Court case that could set the standard for the handling of all future Second Amendment cases. As the gun control debate continues to unfold we see little value in proselytizing any single opinion through this exhibition, but rather take this opportunity to question how Americans have come to locate themselves within the elasticized boundaries of the Second Amendment.

—Christina Vassallo & Megan Young

Body as Site of Identity Politics

A Cross-Disciplinary Community Arts Engagement Project

We interrogate the shifting lens of identity by considering scholarship of critical race, gender, and sexuality studies. Taken together, these research areas inform the construction of best practices for inclusive arts programming on Kent State University Campus and in the Kent community.

Academic foundations include phenomenology and cultural anthropology, drawing especially from recorded research of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, political scientist Iris Marion Young, and psychiatrist Chester Pierce. Merleau-Ponty's writings demonstrate the malleability of identity creation through time and the importance of the body as a first interface with the world. Young demonstrates how acculturation and rules of social deportment shape an individual's conception of their own abilities. Taken together, those theories demonstrate how limitations on the body produce conflicts of identity. That general premise becomes all the more potent for those representing various social minorities in the United States, when considering the repetition of casual degradation in social interactions. Pierce uses the term "microaggressions" to describe such occurrences. Research based on his theories demonstrates the potentially negative side effects for those targeted.

These diverse but interrelated approaches to body and identity are synthesized in bell hooks' writings on intersectional systems of oppression. She offers relevant tactics for community engagement, pedagogy, and arts practices with consideration for difference and representation. Her approaches, combined with earlier practices of critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire and the related performance practices of Augusto Boal/Theatre of the Oppressed provide practical research for our project. Existing arts programming models from other institutions contribute to the development of an inclusive community arts model at Kent State.

Through community collaborations, Tameka Ellington examines how costume design can reproduce identities through the use of masks and dress. Masks of stone have been used in ritualistic and cultural ceremonies since the neolithic period. The use of masks in African tribal dances, by people of the South Pacific, Native Americans, and many other cultures can represent a religious and/or social significance. We explore how masks are used to represent the stereotypical degradation forced on historically marginalized communities. The masks also highlight many social-political ways of being.

Megan Young explores these concepts through a series of community engaged installations considering how collective action amplifies individual identity. Explorations draw from global examples, including: public actions by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Argentina), The Longest Walk by the Red Power Movement (Tribal Nations), and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign (Nigeria). Public actions include embodied public installations centering historically marginalized communities. From within this public body politic, individuals are welcomed to share their individual needs through a series of installed public texts.

Gregory King approaches dance as a social text, acknowledging that movement practices are unique knowledge systems. The ways we move reflect our ancestors, our bloodlines, and our lived experiences. Through public workshops, we consider how marginalized bodies are sustaining these physical languages. Considering the body as a contested site, we thread a linear/ familiar narrative between under-represented bodies and their methods of resilience.

— Tameka Ellington, Gregory King, and Megan Young