

2025 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, June 13, 2025

Ruth Estevez: [applause] Can I close this for a moment? [closes laptop on podium – a slide remains on display on the screen behind her]

So – that's for you. So in the fourth century before Christ, according to the Catholic schedules, of course, Johannes, the ancient Greek philosopher, also known as Diogenes the Cynic, invented [raising her right middle finger] the finger insult in Athens. According to the legend, he did so in response to Demosthenes, a prominent figure of ancient Western rhetoric. Diogenes gave them the middle finger, and said, 'It's for you.' The greatest demagogue of the Athenians. [lowers her finger]

In 1520, in nine – in 1529, the glorious Mexican emperor, Moctezuma, was killed as he addressed his people from the rooftop of the Palacio de Axayacatl, just in front of the Spanish genocider Hernán Cortés. According to some stories, Moctezuma was actually already dead, and was just making a gesture of complacency towards the captors, as he will be just a puppet.

The term sprezzatura was first used in the sixteenth century, by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*, a series of gestures performed by nobility to demonstrate their grace and disinterest in mundane matters. Conceal our art and make everything appear effortless and with a lack of thought. The ability of politicians at that time, according to others, to hide, to hid what is really thought, felt, and intent, behind a mask of apparent nonchalance.

The biomechanics of Russian r director Meyerhold was assistant developed in the early '20s in the Soviet Union, for actor training and theatrical production. The training emphasized physical control, precision, and expressive movement in order to prepare actors to be highly responsive and adaptable performers. In other words, how to physically train emotions. It was not a good fit for his friend Stanislavski; he preferred physic - psychological realism and internal experience.

Just a few years before being brutally murdered by the fascist regime of Francisco Franco, the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca gave a master lecture at the student residence in Madrid. It was a lecture on lullabies; above all, it was about a woman who sung them with love, yet surrounded by the loneliness of poverty and fear. It began as a murmur, which then became silent. They performed the works just by moving their lips, and just to offer [WORD UNCLEAR] in the dark.

And in medieval Japan, thousands of unhappy and homeless ghosts wander the countryside without descendants to care for them. According to some, the protagonist in Noh theater exists in multiple dimensions simultaneously: social and karmic. Gestures, in this context, were not merely communicating discourses about social situations, but add a sentence of a pathology of attachment as a dramatization of karma.

In an interview to Art21, artist Liz Magic Laser said, 'We are living in strange days, where performance itself has become the dominant instrument of power. The style of someone's delivery ends up foreclosing the real content.' In her work, Liz Magic Laser creates a museum of gesture. However, it's not ecstatic or symbolic museum – it seemed more, for me, like a repertoire, a new lexicon, the migration of movements, behaviors, and exchanges from one work to another. She plays with a very, very complex material, with the motions of the body, with the mask that envelops and constricts it, with a ventriloquist who sometimes dominates it, but also with the individual and collective impulse that creates life, and emotion that cannot be repressed. And in all of this, rehearsal, repetition, learning, or learning play an important role.

Spinoza, one of the most radical philosophers, of some centuries ago, used to say that we are nothing more than a collection of gesture that we have learned from others. We are who we are because other people have moved, talked, danced, smelled before us. And these movements have been passed on from generation to generation as an invisible collective inheritance. Yet, they are gestures that have been imposed, carefully crafted to dominate, to break, and to render the body powerless.

Liz emphasizes the unpoetical performativity of politics, especially when she works around the theatrical methodologies, and sometimes training methods, used by politicians to empower and engineer their performance. She analyzed the manner in which the discourse is delivered: the position, the gaze, the silence, the tone, the hands, the fingers, the turnaround. She performs the gestures, which are rehearsed in first person, followed by the media, followed by whoever is listening, and so on, and so on.

She also talks about the environments and platform that shape our behaviors, our capacity to move, and our ability to desire. From the solitary spaces that emerge through our screens and devices, to the places where historically serve as venues for public debate. Her theater-set installation and performances also explore other kinds of spaces, where institutions of power, such as hospitals and asylums, have eliminated gesture, thought, and fears, in order to preserve the needs of some over others.

So, she plays with the clichés associated with specific characters: the politician, the dictator, the journalist, the prisoner, the worker, the citizen, the son, the father, the daughter – Liz describes the semantic content of each gesture, the affect attached and the effect produced. As soon as the gesture has been analyzed, it moves onto other stages in which training and rehearsal act in two different ways, as a space for dominance but also as an act of liberation. In a subtle but very constant way, Liz's work emphasizes the need for awareness, so we can realize the importance of taking responsibility, to not perform as we were taught. She works with dancers, actors, therapists, and professional life coaches to uncover the story of our own frustrations, often by re-experiencing trauma and liberating ourselves from sometimes unhealthy behaviors.

So, what happens if we incorporate all these communication techniques and psychological methods appropriated by corporate and psychological cultures, and use them in a therapeutical potential? How can we reverse the situation, unlearn behaviors, and use

gestures not as a repetition of the puppet but as an organic accumulation of human gesture, as Spinoza used to say? Liz's work involves trying, rehearsing, repeating, failing, and starting over. And through that, we certainly keep moving somewhere better.

So, I am very happy to welcome our dear Liz, and I'm going to read very quickly her amazing, uh, or like little rockstar of the – or we can skip it, but I don't want to skip it.

So, Liz. Liz is a multimedia and video performance artist from New York City, and has been showing her work in many different venues: at the Smithsonian, the ICA in Boston, at the Kunsthall Charlottenborg, in Copenhagen, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the MUDAM in Luxembourg, the Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden, the Pompidou, the Whitney Museum, and so on, and all the galleries, also, like Various Small Fires in Los Angeles, Paula Cooper here in New York – here, sorry, [laughing] New York. So, uh – yeah, sorry.

Laser is the recipient of grants from Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation, the Southern Exposure Off-Site Graue Award, The New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and the Franklin Furnace Fund for Performance Art. Uh, the Sternberg Press has also published her book *Public Relations*, in conjunction with the solo exhibition, and that was in Germany, the Kuntsverein in Germany, and her work has been in many different publications, eh, um, in different magazines, and so on. So, thank you very much, Liz, and now, the stage is yours. [applause, cheering]

Liz Magic Laser: Thank you, so much, Ruth, for that deeply thought [slides briefly switch as she opens the podium laptop] and researched introduction. I'm gonna ask for that text; I maybe want to publish it. [laughter]

So, I'm gonna be moving through my work somewhat chronologically, but I'll also, for the first time, um, be trying to trace some ten, some motifs that have gone through many different projects over the years. Um, a kind of tension that runs throughout between tightly choreographed and erratic emotional modes of expression. My fixations have oscillated between these two poles. Um, uh, these kind of performances of self that are hyper controlled, and media optimized, and those that are visceral, inappropriate outbursts of emotion or anger.

In both theme and method, my work has explored this relationship between emotional excess and bodily restraint. How these modes of expression are shaped, expressed, and strategically deployed across different cultural and institutional contexts.

[switches slide] So, um – oop. [switches slide] [switches slide] I wanted to start with a few posters from my mother, Wendy Osserman's, dance company, because it's, uh, the context that I grew up in. [switches slide] So this, I grew up with dancers pretty much writhing on the floor of my living room. Uh, which doubled as my mother's rehearsal space. [00:10:05] And as I, you know, approached puberty, became more self-aware, I felt increasingly embarrassed by the intensity of this, um, physicality, and expression, that was happening in my home. And, uh, by my mother. And this kind of cringe factor loomed large,

and I completely rejected performance. [switches slide] Um, preferring to hide behind the camera.

However, that led me to become the resident dance photographer for my mom and her dancers as a teenager, until my mid-twenties. I think it was like fourteen to twenty-eight. [laughs] Um, and, and so some of her, many of her dancers became choreographers themselves, and they needed photos for posters, fliers, press, um, and so photographing dance, as a teenager, shaped my understanding of performance as something that's always already mediated, um, by these kind of communication efforts, to even get an audience there. And also, um, how it often exists after the fact. So, I saw the camera, um, pretty early on as, um, as an active participant, um, rather than a neutral observer. And, um, kind of constitutive force that, uh, that, uh, could instigate and direct moving bodies, or that, um, in this kind of recoil from being center stage, and, um, going to, behind the camera, there was still like a, a sort of empowerment that eventually happened with, um, [switches slide] doing directorial photography. This was the kind of work that I was doing, um, in my, um, early twenties. Um, these were my grandparents, um, [laughter] after one of the hurricanes in Florida. Um, but over and over – over time, I keep returning to representations of emotion, aggression, neediness, hysteria, and vulnerability. Um, the unruly body that once disturbed me, um, actually kind of planted this long-lasting fascination with how these performances of self across, uh, function. And I've become especially attuned to how performing arts techniques are deployed on the political stage, and in the corporate sphere, the corporate sphere and therapeutic culture.

[switches slide] Um, my earliest video and performance works, um, some of them centered on the architecture and atmosphere, um, of behavioral control, such as the ATM vestibule in the bank. Um, and that became a recurring set. This was something I did I think the first, my first year of grad school, um, so I became interested in how this, um, these kind of non-places, so to speak, um, are conditioned by elevator music, security cameras, and unspoken codes of decorum. Um, so I kind, I kept having this need to try to, um, rupture this kind of automaton-like equilibrium that exists there. And it's almost like a, a bat, a bank, I kind of associated with a gang bathroom, and I think it even just came out of going to the ATM once and saying 'Thank you' to it, and then like, took a few steps away, and then I cracked up, and then was like, I must seem like a crazy person. Um, and that was something that [laughing] kind of perpetuated all of this work. Um, so, in this, um, in this video, where I tried to perform, um, I enacted an archetype of a frustrat – of a frustrated, hysterical woman, a la, I guess, *Sex in the City*. And, um, in this case the ATM stood in for, uh, a kind of apathetic lover, who was unresponsive, and I performed a one-sided argument that was angry, pleading, irrational, and when the machine failed to give me what I wanted, I think I wanted money in fives, or something, uh, I erupted, and scornfully gave all the money back, and had to deposit it.

[switches slide] The following year, I, uh, inserted prosciutto into the bank deposit slot of an ATM, and the machine was disabled, um, and, you know, people would come in and threat, say, 'I'm gonna call security,' but it was at night, and, um, they were, it was clearly, it was clear that me bringing a subjective camera into that space was perceived as a threat right away. And I expected to be, um, fined. I would get a bank bill, and I would think,

oh, is this gonna be a notice? Um, but none of that happened, and, um, besides, you know, people being suspicious and threat, a few threats, um, the institution never responded.

[switches slide] So, I was therefore somewhat emboldened to, um, to go further with this, and the following year, in 2009, I re-staged an early play by Bertold Brecht called *Man Equals Man*. Um, in many different ATM vestibules across New York, um, in Brooklyn, and it is a play that has nine actors, who perform separately to the camera, um, so we would go to their, to branches of their bank – most people belonged to Chase, but a few to WAMU, which was, uh, being absorbed by Bank of America, and that acutally played well into the script. Um, because it was a lot about, uh, loss of identity, and brainwashing, and being trans, man being transformed like a machine. Um, so, so basically I would go around, for maybe it took two months, and we would go, work through all that character's lines in the script, um, and they would end up speaking to, when I montaged it back together in the edit, which I worked on on and off for a year, they eventually, um, speak to each other – the players speak to each other through these mechanical and human conduits. [switches slide] I'll play you a little clip from it. Um, and again, uh, the place, the play centers on a local simpleton in colonial India, who is brainwashed into becoming, um, he happens to be of Irish extraction, we don't know how he ended up there, and he, uh, ends up being brainwashed into becoming a British soldier, uh, because they lose one guy from their, um, from their squad, and they need to just replace him. Um, otherwise they're gonna be, uh, in trouble for war crimes for breaking into a temple. Um, so there's a lot of themes in the play of domination, war, money, um, he talks about man being as exchangeable as, as a currency. Um, so it kind of, uh, unearthed, it made, it was both absurd, but also made sense with the context. [video plays 00:17:27 – 00:19:35]

So, at the time, um, it was soon after the 2008 financial crisis, and the, uh, the Iraq War was still in its final, uh, spurts, and so a lot of the language made perfect sense with that, as military war crimes were being committed, and there was a lot of frustration with, with the banks. [00:20:00] Um, so it made, um, Brecht's language feel eerily current, um, and so I ended up doing [switches slide] some documentary research, [switches slide] in an archive, um, there was a Brecht archive in Berlin, and it turned out that was the only place you could see Brec, um, a version of Brecht's performance that he had done in 1933. There was a film of it; you could only see it in person at the archive - I finally got there, and I sat down and was surprised to see that it was, um, that the film was one frame per second. [switches slide] And I was just like, [switches slide] what's going on here? And even the, um, I got a hold of the head of the archive, and it was like, was the head of the Brecht and Benjamin archive, and he didn't know either. And eventually, um, an art historian friend of mine, Tom Williams, found this essay that explained how Brecht and his comrades were all quite, um, preoccupied with scientific management films, and kind of vocational testing, to decide what, um, what occupation you should have, and, um, they were really interested in this kind of method. Also he would have his actors, and there's this, something he talks about having an actress he worked with often wash her face repeatedly in these, and refine, make every movement refined to maximum efficiency, maximum efficiency.

So, in case you're not familiar, these scientific management films were, uh, basically for hired people who could do Muybridge's style technique, to, um, to film workers in the

factory and really streamline their movement, so it was as efficient as humanly possible, so it would be like, oh, don't recoil the hammer that far, you're wasting energy; you can just do it this far and then you can get ten more hammers per minute.

Um, so this [switches slide] became, uh, quite important to me in terms of looking at how these principles of scientific management, um, get applied to the performing arts, but rather than it being, uh, used by artists, it's often used, um, by politicians and business leaders to really kinda do market research, and apply, um, these fined, this fine-toothed comb to every gesture and word a politician will say.

Oh, just sidenote, I also found [switches slide] different photos in this archive of this, um, this fake elephant that is a major, um, you know, is kinda like the Trojan horse in this play, and [switches slide] these were my, uh, artificial elephants. [switches slide] And then this was a play within the play, where we turned that into a costume.

[switches slide] So, um, this exploration of our relationship to money, um, and debit cards, uh, and cash, and our IDs, these objects that we clutch, sometimes, as if they're an extension of ourselves, um, kinda continued, around the same time, or, I guess it was simultaneous. So I worked with a surgeon to direct the Da Vinci Surgical System Robot to perform a robotic operation on my purse. Uh, the video shows these, um, robotic arms probing, cutting, defacing the contents, um, make-up, keys, money, transforming them into a kind of sculptural assemblage. I figured, since it's called the Da Vinci, um, it should make artwork. Uh, here, I'll play you a little bit of that. [video plays 00:23:55 – 00:24:59] And so it's, um, the video interface, you know, the surgeon sits at a kind of VR kiosk, uh, this was in, from 2009, as well, and it's a live feed kind of basic VR stereoscope set-up. Um, and it was actually my uncle who snuck me into the hospital, and did this whenever a resident didn't need his help with their patients. [laughter] And, um, he did not think – when I sent him my kinda script of what I wanted this robot to do, he was like, 'No, it's not gonna happen.' So he was even surprised that it was, I think we spent all night at the hospital.

Um, and so it has, it has no soundtrack, but in one case, um, I, I did, um, basically I'm recalling now that I, I was interested in doing something with purses, and our overattachment to these kind of belongings when I was here, in 2008, um, and I started collecting stories from people about purse snatchings, and car jackings, and, um, situations where, um, people end up risking their lives to protect their wallet, or purse, in this just kind of automatic response. Um, I wonder if it would be the same nowadays cause everything's on our phone, but, um, yeah, there's this, um, kind of re, overreaction, or overattachment, as I see it, where people react as if it's their offspring, or their last morsel of food, um, when, in retrospect, it wasn't worth it. So in one case I did a live voiceover where I recited five of these stories, and so at first it seemed like they were my own memories, but eventually, it could not be one person's. Um, and so sometimes I show them with those stories.

[switches slide] Um, in 2009, I, right after leaving Skowhegan, I very last minute ended up teaching, um, photo art history at SVA. At School of Visual Art, in New York. And I was totally unprepared, uh, and I'm not an art historian, and I did it for maybe three or four

years, in the end, uh, and [laughs] yeah, I felt like total, you know, imposter syndrome, cause I was. And, [laughing] um, but I came across, it was a full-year course, so only nineteenth century in the fall, and I came across a lot of research that really informed work for years to come. So, um, this is a photo from Jean Martin Charcot's first medical study, it was, it's deemed the first medical study that used photography instead of drawing. Um, and of his hysteria patients, and, so this, I chose to write about this, um, climactic, this climax of the hysterical attack in this photo that's titled *The Cry*. And basically attack, attacked the, um, foremost, um, art historian, Didi-Huberman, who had written about these, um, these photographs. Um, I was at a conference at University of Toronto, and no one would believe that I was just an artist and not an art historian, so I still got grilled like the rest of the scholars. But so basically I pushed back against, um, his, his, um, historical framing that the hysteria patient's behavior was, uh, theatrical, and he would use like drama, theatricality, performing for the camera, uh, women performing for the, uh, male gaze of the, of the, uh, doctors, uh, in this insinuation that these performances were fraudulent. And I was like, this is using a very reactionary – even at that time, a very reactionary idea, or traditional idea of what theater and acting is.

Um, and so, I, um [switches slide] proposed, I ended up drawing on Ar, um, Artaud's theater of cruelty and argued that the convulsive body pictured in these photographs, um, was engaged in a pathological but deeply embodied form of performance. Um, so rather than mimicking emotion, for the sake of attention, or seeking a kind of spectacle, um, I wanted to re-think as a, the body enacting trauma with such intensity, um, that it was an expression of resistance, that, um, comes about in many different times and places when the body is literally or figuratively incarcerated.

Um, so [switches slide] this, um, paper became the foundation for several works that followed, um, the first of which was *Breakdown*, which I, um, and also one of my most recent projects, *Convulsive States*. And *Breakdown* was a collaboration with Simone Leigh, and singer Alicia Hall Moran, who's an opera and jazz singer. And, [switches slide] um, we, I think it took nine months, [laughs] and Alicia kept being like, is this – this baby has to get born. Um, and it wasn't for a particular venue or anything, um, it was something where I shared the essay, we'd known each other for years, and I had participated in some events that she was, that she was staging, um, and did, staged a few performances for them, and then she was like, 'Let's do something together.' So, I sent her this essay, she sent me back *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a feminist short story from the late nineteenth century, and Amiri Baraka's *The Dutchman*, and we kinda then continued to collect, um, a number of different gendered and racialized portrayals of nervous breakdowns, in literature, film, and television. [00:30:16] And we drew on things like the soap opera *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, and the reality show *Intervention* that was popular at the time, and basically created this script that was composed of utterances that track the voice devolving from a, from a normative behavioral state to this kind of visceral eruption. [switches slide]

Uh, okay – and we ended up filming, it was strange, cause we were always trying to avoid the direct reference of, uh, church shouting; however, in the end we decided to film this, um, at a church, where Simone's mother was a congregant. So I'll play you a little. [video plays 00:30:56 – 00:32:43]

So, um, basically, I think much of my work, in retrospect, has, um, started by selecting a specific institutional or quasi-public site, like the bank, a prison, a hospital, or a museum, uh, where behavior is, um, shaped by these kind of regulated spatial codes. Um, I'm gonna kind of skip over this one, but this was something I did in a prison in Belgium, [switches slide] with a dancer. Where the warden collected prison movie posters, and had them all over the place.

Um, so, um, I think that often I look for a text, or a scenario, that will produce a kind of generative friction with the place. And try to introduce scripted material, or misbehavior, um, and it's – yeah. It has been a lot about kind of making rules visible, or maybe they're semi-conscious codes of conduct, but making them more visible by crossing their boundaries.

[switches slide] Um, so this was this my first large-scale live performance, commissioned by Performa, in 2011. And, um, it took the form of a live feed movie that was performed, filmed, and edited, um, in, in real time in the movie theater, in front of the live audience, who then became the extras in the film. And it was a kind of romcom romantic drama, with dialogue that was, um, entirely culled and adapted from political interviews. Um, and [switches slide] um it was, it ended up being a series of fourteen scenes, so it's feature length, and footage from three cinematographers was projected onto the movie theater screen. [switches slide] [switches slide]

So the piece also drew on research, um, into, uh, these living newspaper productions from Soviet Russia. And there were also Depression Era ones, where that idea was imported, in the 1930s, to the US. And those ones incorporated a kind of, uh, these live voiceovers, pantomime fighting scenes, and a mute commentary by a clown. All elements that I incorporated into this. [video plays 00:35:09 – 00:37:53] And, uh, the interviews being adapted were announced by intertitles, and in a Playbill publication, so I'm all about the kinda TMI. Making it clear. This is Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin, meeting for the first time.

So, at the time, it was really the rise of the Tea Party, and, um, John Boehner was Speaker of the House, and was frequently on the news in tears. And would have these kind of tearful appeals, um, that framed conservative policies as these kind of emotional necessities for the future of our children, so it was like, cut social services, and money for education. For the future of our children! Um. And around the same time, this kind of caught on, in Hillary Clinton, in her first bid for the White House, um, also gave, you know, gave it a try, this public crying on the campaign trail, which was then called, um, uh, Hillary's trail of tears, Hillary's trail of tears, by the news media. Uh, so I became very fascinated with how politicians were starting to appropriate these modes of, um, the confessional, from reality TV, and really turning that, um, those kind of staging, these supposed emotional ruptures, as a kind of tool of public persuasion.

[switches slide] Oh, these are from, uh, the, the archival research into the Depression Era living newspapers. [switches slide] Um, [switches slide] which had a, a tramp style clown, but I worked with a red nose female clown named Audrey Crabtree.

[switches slide] Um, this was a, the kind of promo image, which, uh, I took at a real screening of *Contagion*. Um, which also became that kind of moment of people being like, what, you're bringing a camera into this space as previews are starting to play, and got some people riled up.

Um, so this, this piece kind of marked the beginning of a deeper long-term inquiry into how these acting techniques are being used and often mis-used to secure political power. Um, and my work has really continued to trace, um, how, how these, um, tools from, also from psychotherapy, and spirituality, are, um, then kind of appropriated and used to regulate and optimize, uh, public behavior, or employees' behavior and working methods. [00:40:28]

[switches slide] So, uh, after that, I was so focused on, on, uh, the rhetoric, and the kind of lovers' discourse being staged between the journalist and the politician that was either, you know, uh, new love, or a marital spat, in that kind of scornful way. Then my attention went to the body language of politicians, and, uh, Obama was in office, and I think it was maybe his first State of the Union address, in 2012, um, I noticed, I couldn't help but notice what a fantastic performer he was. And how, um, how there were kinda, there was body language that seemed to come from so many different sources, it was like, he would do a Clinton or a Reagan move, uh, he would do what we called, Cori Kresge, who's a dancer who was in my mom's dance company, has become a long-time collaborator of mine, and will come here to do some workshops together, she's the one on the right, and then Alan Good is on the left, they're both Cunningham dancers, Alan just passed away last week, sadly, and, um – where was I. Oh, so yeah, he would do what we would call, Cori and I would call this the Jesus, cause he was like, oh, don't do a finger point that's too, uh, straight, you have to have a slight bend, and a little turn, so that you're not, uh, dictatorial.

Uh, and we ended up kind of analyzing these diff, the references. It'd be like a shoulder pop, and he was incredibly virtuosic, and so I was like, lemme look, I want to compare his, um, performance, as like the fine-tuned, maximum efficiency one, with the previous Presidents' performance. So I started looking back. And I was like, oh, probably I'll compare with Reagan, cause that's, he was the actor president. And I was surprised to see that Reagan didn't move his hands at all during his official addresses. I would start to go further back, and basically none of the Presidents seemed to gesticulate at all during official addresses, like inaugural ones, and State of the Unions. They did gesticulate some in debates, but not in these kinds of official addresses. Because, they had a script! And they didn't wanna – they didn't wanna bring attention to it. I also kind of surmise that they maybe were told by early, you know, media strategists that this was, um, distracting, and that this was for a preacher. Um, but then, um, but then, uh, when H.W. Bush came into office, again, no one seems to have written about it before, um, that I could tell, I asked political strategists that I met for years about this, but when H.W. Bush came into office, he brings, uh, gesture into his speeches. And, uh, I think that's probably because he was seen

as being elderly, and feeble, and coming, um, after, um, Reagan, who was more slick, uh, and, and I think this kind of would give him some flare. However, in, and he was a great comparison [switches slide] for, um, to Obama, because he still, you know, coughed, or took a sip of water, whereas nowadays, they don't, there's like no, uh, human error that is, is shown, or, well, until now. Um. [laughter]

[switches slide] But, um, I, again, gotta, gotta keep making note of my, uh, nerdiness, and background research. Um, so I ended up, um, I remembered, when I started working on this project, and first kind of had the idea, that I had audited a silent cinema class in grad school, and that the teacher had mentioned there was a manual, a nineteenth century manual, that, um, codified the meaning of every gesture, and that it ended up being used, um, in Hollywood's, uh, Hollywood, uh, early silent film. Um, and so I, you know, I asked her what it was, and I made note of it, and then I was like, I finally dug it up from a notebook, and it was François Delsarte, who created the system of oratory, and he was someone who taught statesmen, actors, preachers, um, the, um, the meaning of, um, every hand gesture and arm movement. Uh, and so he had [switches slide] this idea that you, um, imagine there's an invisible cube in front of you, and that touching different sides of the cube convey different meanings. So that it was like [steps away from mic briefly] – oh, so, [returning toward mic, making her hands visible] underhand was like [drifting from mic] I will take, [returning to be more audible] I will care of you. And over was, uh, I have control over the situation. Uh, [switches slide] and again, I kind of referenced back to this, uh, this scientific management film, and you'll see, um, in the first rendition of this – oh yeah, the name of it is *The Digital Face*, and that was like, [wiggling her fingers] not digital as we think about it, but the digits being the fingers. And being as expressive or more than the face.

Uh, so in the first rendition of this, um, in a gallery, and I think subsequent ones too, I use, I ended up, I thought I was gonna document the performance this way, [video plays 00:45:59 – 00:46:43] but in the – oh, how - okay, perfect. Um, at one frame per second, but in the end I ended, I used it, I had two cameras with these intervalometers going at one frame per second, and I was like, this is the metronome for the piece! And so I put the microphone right up, as close as I could to the camera shutter, clicking, and, um, I got kind of excited, I suppose, after this experience of repurposing the stuff, the paraphernalia in the bank, I was like, this is repurposing the tools of a political speech. Uh, so you see that water. Water drink.

[switches slide] Um, then it was also staged in this geodesic dome that was at PS 1 for a while, which was great, too, because, uh, it felt like this sort of campaign rally space. Um, so I'm also kind of all about, I'm not very rigid in the conditions for installations or performances, I've got of gotten a lot of mileage out of, uh, uh, being quite flexible, and kind of reconfiguring things for different spaces. [switches slide]

[switches slide] So, um, after that, I did a kind of international version, that, uh, went on tour to three places, called *Stand Behind Me*, and I also became interested in how politicians were increasingly ha, getting, or their handlers were getting the, their audience, their constituents, to stand behind them, which makes no sense when someone's speaking. Um, but I saw it as this kind of staging a liberty leading the people image. And I think this

kind of would be some of the early signs of, uh, our most powerful politicians claiming this like rebellious citizens position, and aesthetic representation.

Uh, so, we, um, for this, it was all speeches that were given in the two months leading up to the performance, and they were, um, all speeches that took place, um, in, where we were, um, in the countries where we were, uh, performing, or rehearsing. And I basically, um, [switches slide] again – oh, the teleprompter was partially what eventually freed up the hands of the politicians to get more into, um, fine-tuning and emphasizing gesture. Um, so I also used it to force, to kinda - not force, but encourage the art audience, who maybe is camera shy, or, uh, doesn't wanna, you know, might not participate when there are a lot of people there, um, but it was sort of like, they had to be in the image if they wanted to know who was speaking when. So, um, here's a little of that. [video plays 00:48:48 – 00:49:35] And it was I think the same month, the chancellor rhombus was a term coined, where Angela Merkel, um, invented her own, somewhat unnatural gesture that was, um, and when she was asked what it meant, it was sort of that it was, um, strength. Unity. Symmetry. And then, um, one of the places we performed, this was at Lisson Gallery, in London, then it was at Wiels in Belgium, um, as well as, um, the National Palace of Culture in Bulgaria [switches slide] for a festival there. Um, and there, there was an assassination attempt, uh, during a speech, um, at the same place, at the National Palace of Culture, uh, so that was one moment where she kind of falls off of her plinth. Uh, because of that, and so that was a fascinating experience, cause I was on the, uh, state radio there to talk about it, and there were a lot of, um, rules about what I could and couldn't say. [00:50:00]

Um [switches slide] so then, you know, after this deep dive into focusing into the performance of politicians, I started to track these TED Talks – basically, [switches slide] TED Talks started to, uh, people were sending them around to each other constantly, and I would hear stories about, like, oh, a friend of a friend who's an MIT scientist, uh, worked for a year to, on his performance on the TED Talk, because it was, because a ton of funding opportunities, uh, were gonna be based on his performance! And I was like, wow, people from many different fields now, uh, are being kind of pressured into becoming persuasive performers. Um, with, by telling these kind of, um, personal stories, uh, that express vulnerability, and, uh, relatability; it's all about, kind of, identification, again, kind of, uh, old school, Dostoev – not Dostoevsky, um, uh, Stanislavski style method acting, um, really, is, I think it what is primarily being deployed here. Um, where it's like, you go to an emotional memory, and then get yourself to cry, or get enraged by, you know, remembering when your dog died, or when you were angry at your mom.

Um, so in this case, I was al, I was also really interested in how it was mostly entrepreneurs, you know, or just like, or everything had an entrepreneurial edge to it. And, um, but like, it was about vulnerable disclosure, supposedly, and there was kind of an underlying message that, uh, if you pursue you, uh, entrepreneurship, and your gain, to the best of your ability, you're gonna end up benefitting all of society, and all of the world. Um, which is, you know, I guess, very suspicious to me. Um, so I wanted to find a script, and I went through many different ideas that would kind of unearth this, and I ended up landing on Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground*, which is, uh, his critique of, uh, this, uh, idea

of enlightened self-interest that was on the rise in this kind of proto-Soviet, um, era, that if you pursue, uh, your, you know, your best as an individual, and, that you will end up benefitting society. But that was kind of the communist ver, the proto-Communist version, and this is our kind of capitalist version. So the, um, language I culled from this, uh, seemed to apply well to, um, TED, and I were, I asked, I worked with a ten year old, uh, actor. Also as this kind of, uh, emblem of, uh, the future, and innocence, and positivity, but then who would spew, uh, cynicism, and an indictment of this self-optimization.

Uh, we ended up filming in Kickstarter's theater space, um [switches slide] so, oh, and I imitated the red rug, uh, from TED, and put parentheses around, or brackets around [switches slide] the performer. [video plays 00:53:26 – 00:55:16] [laughter] Yeah, I was, [switches slide] got kinda caught up in the kind of, um, affir, affirmational tendency in, uh, both these, uh, the speaker's crafting of these stories and in the, this, showing the audience as just very, uh, wide-eyed, and lovin' it. Uh, and so this was how it was initially shown, with, uh, one bank of, uh, theater seating, and the rug in front of it.

[switches slide] So, uh, I guess then, from TED, I moved on to, uh, therapy. Another kind of, in a way it's like, I've noticed that I've often looked at, uh, interview scenarios, cause it's, therapy is an interview, uh, this was TED, was more of a testimony, um, but, and then there were the political interviews, and that kind of keeps coming back as a form, and it's something I wrote a short essay about some years back as well. Um, as kind of the, also the beginnings, in the 19th century, of the politician or leader becoming more down to earth, and allowing, uh, a normal person, an everyday person, a commoner, uh, to, to be in dialogue, and ask them questions. Um, so, uh, for this next project, called *Primal*, uh, *Primal Speech*, I sought out a primal scream therapist. Um, and so this was, uh, in 2016, in the lead-up to the, uh, election, when Trump was first elected, um, so I think it was a cast, this, basically, [switches slide] I cast my own therapy group with amateur actors, and I put out a casting call for real believers, of, you know, pro-Trump, anti-Trump; the Brexit vote was coming up, so it was pro-Brexit, anti-Brexit, uh, and I knew I would show it in France, so I also enlisted, uh, a French person, who was caught up in the, who wanted France to secede from the European Union too. Um, so basically, I, I found a – primal therapy was largely not being practiced anymore, it was something that, uh [switches slide] quite popular in the 1970s out of the kind of New Left movement, uh, most famously John Lennon and Yoko Ono got really into it, and made these recordings of themselves screaming. And the primary idea – and it really, I think, even though it's been cancelled, for the most part, um, for a number of reasons, um, it is a script that is now, um, playing into a lot of these somatic therapies, and I think, you know, they, it's been improved, and updated, but, um, it was strange, cause i guess in 2016 it was sort of right before, or right at the beginnings of this, um, body-oriented therapy rise, uh, in popularity.

Um, so, um, basically, I found a therapist who was still practicing this who had some background as a singer and actor in her twenties, and she, uh, and she, we, um, set up a few, I think it was only two sessions, with each actor, where I, they were in on it, I, I was basically kind of mixing what I had learned about reality television producers kind of trying to psychologically manipulate and cajole people into doing things, um, so I was like, this is gonna be reality show meets therapy. And I am asking you to, uh, conflate your personal

traumas with your political frustrations that, in this moment. And, um, so the interview, the casting interview also was this kind of criteria that someone had to have, um, a trauma that they wanted to work through. [switches slide] So, um, and then I brought them all together for the film, and filmed with each person individually, and brought them all together for a session. Um, and it also, this kind of therapy was also done in padded rooms, or with a lot of padding, and stuff – at the beginning, you’re asked to go out and buy a stuffed animal, um, that you’re gonna hit, you know, hit, and embrace, and unleash on. Um [switches slide] I’ll just - [switches slide] play you a little bit of it. If it works. [video plays 00:59:59 – 01:02:52]

So, uh, that gives you a little sense of it. And, um, I ended up making these, um, stuffed animals based on political party logos, and, uh, and, um, and getting every place that’s been shown, for the most part, I found a local, um, therapist, uh, to, to do workshops with members of the public. So sometimes I think, like, the donkey’s head was ripped off, and had to be sewn back on, and things like this. [switches slide] Um, [switches slide] [switches slide] let’s see. [switches slide]

And so, I ended up showing a version of this, um, in France, and starting to talk to a cur, uh, two curators, one, who were organizing a performance show at the Pompidou, and we started to talk about well, what’s a kind of, uh, what would be the, uh, dance-based version of this, that was, um, uh, that was, sort of, could communicate to people in many different languages, in a way. [switches slide] Um, so I, so I ended up, it was right in the lobby of the Pompidou, which, strangely, it was my only big project in a museum, um, and it strangely brought me back to the ATM vestibule, cause it felt like, it’s more like a kind of common space, people are there with laptops, and it’s very casual, and not, um, not, um, intimidating at all, so it was actually a perfect place to enlist participation.

Um, and oh, I forgot to say about primal therapy, my mom had done in the 70s and told me about it, and I think at first I asked, I, then she became friends with that therapist, so I knew him, and I asked him about it, and he was not into it anymore, but he had become, um, an executive coach, and that ended up, you know, leading me to the next, this project, where I started to look at, um, basically how therapists, and, um, uh, also this kind of personality testing that is akin to astrology was being used in the workplace.

[switches slide] Um, and so, um, actually, Carissa [?] was in this, and I didn’t know that she was gonna be here. So this is amazing. Um, and there was a development process, where, um, we worked with two very different types of dance therapists, one who had her background in anthropology, France Schott Billmann, and then another who was in, uh, into mind body centering, and, um, we, I introduced [switches slide] this kind of cosmology of archetypes based on, um, this cognitive linguist named George Lakoff’s kind of poli sci book from the ‘90s, uh, and it was called *How, um, Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. And so basically, uh, he talked about, um, different models of parenting, and kind of different family values, and that people will, um, will continually vote against their own interests because they believe so strongly in certain, uh, models of disciplinary parenting, or nurturing parenting. Uh, obey, you know, want obedient children, or kind of rebellious children. Uh, and so conservatives, he argues, um, think that, uh, really what’s, that even if it’s someone, uh, who would benefit from social services, they will vote for the person who

will cut them, because they agree with this, um, with this premise that, uh, that, uh, spoiling people, or giving them too much, is not gonna raise them right, or, and then, simul, and then on the other hand, liberals will vote for the person who raises taxes, even if they will try to wiggle out of it when tax season comes around.

Um, so basically we, I did a personality test that was riffing on a handshake, a famous handshake that had happened between Macron and Trump the previous year, where neither, it was really this, like, quintessential businessman's thing of like showing your dominance, and neither of them would let go, so they ended up, you know, holding hands for a long time. [laughter] And so that's what we, that was our personality test. And we kind of brought in, um, some of Cori's knowledge about a specific kind of body work, and assessment of touch, um, to, for our diagnostics, so what would happen is, um, we basically, uh, uh, the dancer/um, uh, movement therapist, diagnoser, would come and try to catch someone right as they entered the museum, after they got through the metal detector, and would try to shake hands, and not let go, and bring them over to our stage. And in the end, we did analyze four hundred four visitors, over the course of three weeks, and, um, basically a month before this was staged, it was staged in June, 2018, uh, the Cambridge Analytica scandal broke, which was, it, and so suddenly, this project that seemed quite absurdist was, um, actually much more topical, and relevant, and not far-fetched, cause we saw that – oh yeah [switches slide] [switches slide] ah - [switches slide] [switches slide] yeah, Cambridge Analytica.

[switches slide] And um, [switches slide] I, this was one of the, uh, personality tests used by Microsoft, it was a firm that Microsoft hired for many years, um, they had a very simple one that was a great reference point for me, uh, where you have [switches slide] these different types, and you, um, after the, there's only four types, and after you're diagnosed, uh, you're given this kind of block to put on your desk that announces your type, so it's like – and my favorite one is 'Be Brief, Be Bright, Be Gone.' Which is basically, the asshole type. But again in this kind of, um, appropriation of new age thinking, it's like, but nobody's an asshole, you just have to embrace your, um, inner, inner self, and, you, and, uh, uh, manifest and realize it to the best of your ability.

[switches slide] [switches slide] Um, okay – oh yeah, so, because of that scandal, then that's why we collected the data and would update it on this Jumbotron [switches slide] [switches slide] every few days. [switches slide] [switches slide] So this was, maybe I'm gonna [video plays 01:09:34 – 01:10:35] so it's starting with the disciplinary parent here, and then it's gonna move on to rebellious child. And there was also a video vers, a more streamlined studio version that was also installed in the lower level at the same time, where people could learn the routines. And so it was also actually informed by this TED Talk by a woman named Amy Cutty, who proposed power posing, that it's like – and I forgot to do it before this! Where you're supposed to [raising hands in a V over her head] go like this before you give a talk, or an important presentation, like you won a race, and that way you can be a winner. [lowers hands] And she like shows monkeys going like that, and, uh, Olympic runners doing that.

[switches slides] [switches slides] Um, so then the next project, um, was something that came out of a very specific invitation to propose, uh, a project about the future of work. Uh, at a place called FACT, in Liverpool. And, uh, so I think it's like they commissioned eight artists to propose something, and, uh, and so it was one of the more effortless ideas, cause I didn't think it was gonna be done. [laughs] And then I, mine was chosen by a committee, and, um, basically, I had used, tried using, um, a service called Fiverr, where you anonymously hire someone, and it's kind of corporate aesthetics, and something that I think has really, uh, kind of promoted the, again, this kind of anyone can be an entrepreneur, and you can get, just for, at a rate of five dollars per unit of time, you can get a website made, or a, um, a logo, or, uh, present as being larger than you are.

Uh, so, so basically, um, what I, what I proposed to do was do my own version of a kind of *Queer Eye* show, but it's a much jankier version. Um, where I was gonna sel, where I planned to, um, cast people from Fiverr, and Upwork, and PeoplePerHour, which is the popular one in the UK, and, uh, which was, ended up being quite challenging, cause they don't want you to actually have contact with one another, cause then you're gonna cut them out of the profit. Which is what we did. Um, so, it took quite a while, and, um, and also it was, what was bizarre is this was 2019, and I produced the whole thing via Zoom – and then the following – so I spent a lot of time in 2019 on Zoom, and, uh, had taken only a few months off, uh, before coming back to it when the pandemic hit. Uh [switches slides] so we worked with a biohacking life coach named Louise Papadopoulos, who had gotten trained by the kind of Bulletproof brand, uh, so it's kind of – she's not a tech bro at all, she's wonderful, but the life coaching, uh, school she went to is, uh, this real tech bro, uh, brand of, uh, where there's a lot of reliance on Fitbits, and different kind of life hacks.

Um, and so, these kind of ottoman seating arrangements were based on the intake forms we gave the five contestants, uh, called the wheel of life, where you rate your level of satisfaction in these different areas of life. [switches slides] Uh, I'm gonna play a little clip from it, so I can make sure I get to the last projects. [switches slides] Is it gonna play? [video plays 01:13:32 – 01:15:38]

So, so it's five, uh, twenty-two minute episodes, and they are installed in this kind of binge watching scenario, um, and it was kind of working with this, uh, mirroring of the compulsive workaholism, and the compulsive binge watching, I guess and kind of both in work and leisure, um, that I feel like is being perpetuated in our, uh, in our current conditions. [switches slides]

[switches slides] I'm gonna, I won't dwell too long on that one, since I want to show you the – how are you holding up? Are you okay? [audience affirms] Yeah? I, I really packed it in here, and I'll admit, I tried to script myself for the first time in many years, so that I could, so that I would be efficient, and not trail off too much, but it doesn't work! That's the whole point.

I was like, I forgot to say, with that first bank, um, experiment where I performed, that was what got me working with actors, cause I was like, I am a shitty performer, and [laughter] um, that I've then gotten a lot out of, kind of mileage of embracing that, um,

performance anxiety, and eventually transcending it, for the most part. Um, so, this next project happened about a year ago, um, and it's, uh, was at a gallery called Luxembourg + Co, and, um, basically, it was a perform – an eight-hour play that installed the exhibition at this kind of fancy secondary market gallery. [switches slides] And we did a proper Playbill, we ended up, uh, getting sponsorship from Crozier Fine Arts, who gave, uh, two additional, um, art handlers as like kind of support, supporting cast. Um, and so it was, um, a group of professional art handlers, the gallery staff, and the two living exhibiting artists, which is just myself and my friend Esperanza Mayobre, who is really the, uh, muse of this project. And she's not a performer, she's, um, a fantastic artist, and she has, um, done art handling for years, and is now, um, the kind of conservator at, uh, the Rauschenberg Foundation. And we, we, uh, it was tricky, but we got Rausch, the Rauschenberg Foundation to offer a piece, and I hung their work, uh, on opposing walls, so that it could really be in dialogue.

And so it was works by Claes Oldenberg, Rauschenberg, Lygia Clark, um, Gino De Dominicis, uh, this kind of, this Italian sort of Joseph Beuys motorcycle jacket-toting, um, interesting figure. [switches slides] Um, and I, you know, offered to do, I think there's an Instagram account for, an *Art Handling* magazine, an Instagram account, and I was like, do you want to post an ad? So, I'll just [switches slides] [switches slides] what else [switches slides] did I need to say about this? [switches through slides] Eh, I'll just [switches slides] – but yeah, so again, this was a project that, um, emerged from many conversations, over the course of many years, with Esperanza, who I met at a residency I think in 2010, at Smack Mellon. And, and she would tell me stories then, and we've been spending a lot of time together the last few years, and, um, one story she told me, repeated, like, more than once, um, was about, after being at Skowhegan, ending up working, um, at, in the studio of one of the faculty here, and she produced, she was producing the art works for her, making sculptures. And then she switched to her first job art handling, at the Guggenheim, and one of the first things she did was install, I think it was a few weeks in, she installed a sculpture that she had made, with her hands, um, and had to put rubber gloves, and there was all this pomp and circumstance to it, where she was just like, my hand oils are all over this! [01:20:07] Um, [laughs] but I have to, you know, do, go through the ritual, and you know, there's insurance, and, um, I really wanted to kind of unearth these, um, there's a, almost like a religious ritual dimension to this, the kind of careful handling of the art work is really, uh, serves to endow it with value. Um, so this was probably the most fun I've had ever doing a project, and, uh, took a big leap of faith, cause basically, we did like a one-day hammy reality show, doing versions of ourselves, um, and ev, basically, uh, each act, uh, every hour, a new art work would be installed, and the metronome was, uh, this egomaniacal laughter track that Dino De Dominicis, um, had made as an audio piece, and like, the lights would go out and this evil laughter would play.

Um, yeah, so I wanted to kind of really work with this highly – basically, the art world is highly stratis – stratified, and classed, and, um, everybody, you know, sees these, if you're, when you're in it, the, this sort of hierarchical system is evident, but we all kind of don't mention it that often, or you oh, only behind closed doors, um, so I wanted to bring this conversation out into the open. [video plays 01:21:36 – 01:22:35] Um, oh wait, oh this was – ah - I ended up documenting it, live feed, and then it remained through the surveillance camera system. Um, oh, and we left, we ended up, deci, we took a vote, right

before the opening, with all the audience, people trickled in and out throughout the day, and we were like, I called for a vote, where I was just like, should we install the vinyl text, or leave it? That says – we ended up leaving it. Um, and so, and so it was – oh here, maybe I'll, I'll play a shorter one. But um, so the two main actors were Esperanza and, uh, Sophie Becker, who I've known for some years, and has gotten really into ventriloquy, and so, uh, one of the primary things I wanted her to do was, uh, ventriloquize a Lygia Clark sculpture, cause this was one of the conversations that perpetuated this idea too, of like – yeah. [pauses video] Basically how, um, these, um, works that were radical in their time, and were all about having the audience manhandle an artwork, these, her *Bichos*, which is the name, means critters, and it's like, they need to be handled to be an artwork! Um, but, you know, then they get like sanctified, and it's precious, like holy water. Um, and it's also, it, in a way, it both preserves, for posterity, but also does a disservice to the original intent of the artwork, and the artist.

[video plays 01:23:13 – 01:25:31] I'll play you the – yeah, so that was Mimi Chiahemen, um, who, she had, um worked for me, with me on a project maybe a decade ago, and then we, um, she left the art world, came back to it, now works for Performa in kind of med, the media, PR type of realm, and so I asked her also to step in, uh, in that kind of role, for the play. And, um, as well, she is a yoga instructor, and reiki, uh, practitioner and so I asked her – a lot of this was about kind of the ritual surrounding the handling of art work, so I was both making fun of it, and then also wanted to kind of go for it, as well, and, um, heal the art work. And have, and the gallery, a lot of the, the gallerist told me that, uh, when they, during the pandemic, they would do yoga together over Zoom, she hired an instructor, and so I kind of pulled from the stories that everyone told me, and, um, worked with everyone to have a kind of confessional or two to the surveillance camera system.

[switches slides] So, um, this is a, a project called *Convulsive States*, it's probably the most research-intensive project I've done, um, that, um, the premise was exploring psychosomatic shaking as both a symptom and potential cure for psychic distress. [switches slides] And so, uh, it does hinge also on that photograph that I wrote about back in 2009, um, and it was something where, um, I knew I was doing this, the premise of this show, that I just stated, about shaking as healing, as both shaking and healing, and I found myself in Paris a few years ago, and was like, why have I never just gone to the hospital where this happened? Cause I actually, um, I have some family there, I go there from time to time, and so I just look, I had one afternoon to myself, and I looked up, um, on Google Maps, Salpêtrière Hospital, where Charcot had been the director, and I went there, and basically felt like I was, um, uh, sneaking into a haunted house, and found strange things that I wanted to know more about. Um, and, uh, oh I'd worked with a French journalist as an editor on the reality, the, uh, tech reality show project, named Laura Geiswiller, and she had moved back to Paris, and was now working for the equivalent of *60 Minutes* there, doing investigative reports, and so at the end of that day, I met up with her, and I was just like, 'Can we get in there, and interview the doctors?' Like, I want to find the pe, the present day Charcot roles. Um, people in those roles, and I'm like, maybe it would be the person who deals with epileptic patients, cause presumably they would have to distinguish between, um, the psychosomatic cases and the brain-based cases.

Um, and so, over the course of my interest in this topic, the, the, uh, the, uh, medical terminology for present-day hysteria has shifted. So when I wrote the paper, it was pseudo-seizure, now, um, it is, uh, uh, non-epileptic, uh – what is it! Now I’m already forgetting it! PINES was the acronym for it. Uh, psychosomatic non-epileptic seizure. Uh, because these terms were affecting outcomes, cause if you’re told you have fake, pseudo-seizures, fake seizures, that, uh, ends up having quite a negative impact on how your family and friends treat you, and how you regard yourself, cause you’re just like, I don’t think I’m faking this, this is quite real. Uh, for me! And it’s also much more difficult to discern between, uh, the brain-based and psychosomatic cases than one would think, cause it takes, often takes drilling a hole into someone’s skull, and, uh, having the E, the EEG connected for a week, and then a pret, you know, someone looking at the results of that, for two weeks to analyze it.

Anyhow. [switches slides] So this is the head of epilepsy, who I interviewed, and, um, [switches slides] and so I was able to go into the room where [switches slides] he monitored – where, um, it kind of looks like the control room, where they’re monitoring all of the patients who are, uh, potentially epileptic. [01:30:06] And, um, so it ended up being a doc, a, my own kind of hallucinatory version of an investigative report, uh, where I became, I became a stand-in for the reporter, for the journalist, and probably, I guess it feels full circle, you know, being way out of the frame, the picture frame, and then, um, re-inserting myself, because it was somewhat of a personal essay about, um, my fixation [video plays 01:30:40 – 01:30:42] on this theme.

Um, so we interviewed neurologists, um, head of psychiatry, who actually, David Cohen is his name, and he’s the closest to a present-day Charcot, cause he’s an artist, too, and he’s head of the adolescent and child psychiatry, uh, there, at the hospital, and does a lot of art therapy, and now, I think in a week or two, he has now planned a, uh, an exhibition in the famous church on the hospital premises, and so the project will, will be shown there, in his, uh, this exhibition, for I think the two hundredth anniversary of Charcot’s birthday. Uh, and so I also interviewed the priest, at the, about, um, at the, um, church, about, uh, whether patient, neurology patients or psychiatry patients had come to him for exorcisms ever, and so we talked. They had, and we, he, uh, told me about the rituals he does with them. Uh, and had quite fascinating things to say about this kind of – yeah, we were able to have this conversation about basically industrialization, and how, you know, before we called it evil spirits, but now, then it was, Pasteur came along, and it was germs, and, you know, what is, um, really the substantial difference, um, there, and how we treat it, and in the end – yeah, anyway, I’ll play a little bit of it for you. Cause I could talk about this forever, and it’s getting late. [video plays 01:32:13 – 01:32:15] Oh yeah, so I’ll play just the first few, few minute of the film, which is fifty-three minutes. [video plays 01:32:21 – 01:36:09]

So then it does go into a number of interviews. [switches slides] Um, a companion piece that was part of this exhibition was a hall of fitness mirrors, based on this one that was, uh, [switches slides] kind of a failed enormous Fitbit, where you are, see – it’s a two-way mirror, in front of a, uh, a monitor, and you can, you know, the prerecorded, it’s basically like a Peloton, but it’s, you know, aerobics, and yoga, and so on, uh, where you’re

superimposed onto the person. [switches slides] So basically, um, this was, you know, so there was the exploration of, um, the, um, the shaking that expresses, um, psychic pain and oppression. And, um, symptom of kind of social ills, as manifest, uh, through individual bodies, and, um, then I also worked with a number of different healers, or therapists, who, um, use shaking in, in their practice, and they're the ones on this kind of movement chorus, demonstrating movement so you could, my hope was that it would be really like an emotional gym, that you could learn all these different, um, somatic practices, from gyrokinesis, to qi gong, kundalini yoga, I had my doula, um, showing like birthing movements, how do you, um, how do you pop the baby out? What are the spiraling movements and shaking for that? Um, my mom was also in it, uh, doing authentic movement, so, at first I kind of thought it was gonna be a typology of, um, shaking movement, maybe the Shakers would be in it, and so on, but in the end I decided that I was gonna limit it to all practices that I, um, was doing, or had at least tried a few times.

[switches slides] And so, um, it did have this infinity mirror effect, where, um, the videos [switches slides] reflected one another, um [switches slides] and I think I forgot to put in the video of the installation, but basically, um, there was this sound that supposed, purports to be healing vibrations, so you look at a different number of hertz, and you, supposedly, it purports to, you know, help with cellular regeneration, and others for sleep, others for energy, so I worked with, uh, these frequencies with a composer sound designer, and different ones came out of each monitor.

[switches slides] Um, and then the film was like in the inner sanctum, and so you would hear the cries and like background, um, drone vibrational sounds, uh, became the kind of atmospheric noise for the main film. Such that it was almost like the sile, it then becomes the sounds of the asylum, in some ways. And I had these li, these like comfy cushions on the ground, and people really watched the whole thing. The fitness, the emotional gym thing didn't take off the way I had hoped, but this was like more than I ever had hoped, because the people, the curators and others were just like, 'Don't do an hour-long film. Like, no one's gonna watch it, people have no attention span.' But, that was not true.

[switches slides] Um, then, um, last summer, uh, I worked on a kind of op-ed opinion piece for the *Times* about Trump raising a fist right after the, his assassination attempt. And it was so, you know, because I had, it came up because I had made that discovery, years back, about a gesture not being used by presidents, and so that also worked into it, so it gave me, it really put my back in an academic mode [switches slides] for the first time in a while. [01:40:12] Where, uh, I looked at the history of, uh, of fist, of fist raising, and, uh, how it's really something that's [switches slides] been recuperated from, uh, from Black power movements, from labor rights movements, uh, and, uh, and it's, you know, becomes this gesture that signifies you are oppressed and fighting back against the power, which is, the President of the United States of America is the antithesis of that. Um, and, I was also, I thought it was worthy of consideration how the reality television actor is like the most athletic, uh, politician, at this point in time, um, because they've been trained in improvisational acting, and have this kind of immediate, uh, reflex, you know, such that it's

almost like a highly trained Navy Seal actor, improvisational actor, who can, even when, um, you're in total shock, you can manage to perform for the camera, specifically.

Um, I wanted to put in, there's these images from right before Hitler, uh, killed himself, where, uh, or not right before, but in the years leading up, or the year leading up, where he is practicing fist raising, and other gestures, um, for his photographer. And so there is this kind of history of, uh, performing for the camera specifically, um, that goes back [switches slides] longer than I thought.

This, um, lead me to go back to working with Cori Kresge on analyzing the gestures during the debates, um, in the debate in, in September, and, um, basically, we, I asked her to develop a sort of somatic practice of, uh, of learning these gestures. And we did as a more low-key, uh, yoga style workshop at Watermill, Robert Wilson's foundation, in, uh, the Hamptons, where I had a version of the mirror installation with moss on the ground, where you could do kind of grounding.

Um, and then we had the chance to do it as part of this series called Offerings that happens in a church, um, near Times Square, and it's kind of like poetry, and performance, um – anyway, I'll play you a little of the stylized, heightened version. And so in this case, it was then two weeks after the election, and so it was like, I'm not gonna specifically say, you know, that the [making an accordion gesture with flat palms] accordion gesture is from Trump, which we were doing in the lead-up, or like, so we had, we analyzed this one from, uh, Kamala that was like, [making a stirring gesture] we called it, like, stirring the, stirring up the stew, the, stirring up something new. Um, there were a lot of blame gestures, that we, uh, in the recent times, that we called the blame game. Anyway, I'll play you a little of that, and this will be the end. [video plays 01:43:23 – 01:43:29] It's I guess sole – uh, oh wait [pauses video] it's like a Soul Cycle meets, uh, fitness class meets, uh, political, oratorical gestures. [video plays 01:43:38 – 01:45:13] And it ended with a [video plays 01:45:15 – 01:46:49] with a political gesture cha-cha. Maybe I'll let it play, but we can turn down the volume, so [applause, cheering, video loses sound] – oh yeah, there was a kind of ritual ending, but we'll just turn the volume way down, and if you have the bandwidth, cause I went way over time, um, do you have any questions? Do you need to go to the bathroom? [laughing] Everybody? Oh wait, no, ah – oh, you're manning the mic, totally misinterpreted. Eh. [laughs] No, no questions, I explained everything – oh.

Audience member: Hi. I, I'm still cooking the question, [lights go up] but I'm gonna ask it. Um, thank you, Liz. Um, there's something [video ends] in the thread, the chronological thread you gave us of, like, working, kind of antagonizing an institution, and then as you kind of grew in your career, working with the institution. And, or getting like thwarted by them, or, like, I don't know, it seems these different relationships. Do you think, or how, how do you think you've kind of held onto that dynamic, that like, it seems like you have, but, um, yeah, how have you kind of held onto that antagonism, or like, um, critical –

Laser: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- practice inside, like working so in tandem with like, like for the TED one, for instance. Or, um, Pompidou.

Laser: Mm.

Audience member: Yeah.

Laser: So I think my kind of defining moment with this was, um, a project that I didn't show, where I did focus, I was the kind of poster child artist for the Armory Show, right like, the second year, when, I think it was gonna be the second year of Frieze, which totally eclipsed the Armory Show. And so I, I said, I'd done a small proj, a small kind of live feed project with a focus group moderator, which the guy from the Armory Show had been to! And I was like, you know, the only way I can do it is we do focus group with your VIPs, and determine everything through that. Um, and he ended up leaving, I really ended up going, it was a project I'm quite proud of, but I really went to war with them, eventually, um, and antagonized them a lot, and I think it probably, or definitely was not good for my career. Cause I was, like, badmouthed them in the press, and everything. Um, and, yeah, and so I don't, I, that's just what comes to mind, I don't know if I have it resolved.

I think then, with TED, that was a positive moment, that was, you know, so the Armory thing was 2013, then the TED Talk one was 2015, and the coup of that project, I forgot to say, was that it started, the first show of it was in LA, at Various Small Fires, and it got reviewed, um, a good bit, and so then TED asked to do their own review and post the video, with their watermark and everything, so it still exists on their blog. Forevermore. And that felt very exciting, where I was like, could I antagonize and, um, enter the platform? I, like, sort of can't, I guess since, because of the pho, the photo art history background, I was like, oh, I'm being like a Dada photo montage artist, like [laughter] critiquing them, the magazine, and then, uh, using the same, uh, platform to reconstitute and spew the critique out there.

So, yeah, I guess I don't have a good answer, but there's, that's how it goes. Yeah.

Audience member: I – hi- I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about infiltrating and re-appropriating the tools of consumer research, maybe in connection also with the digital residency that you did at Tate, about facial movements, and um, and like you seem to work much like an investigator in your research, so, um, yeah.
[01:50:08] If –

Laser: Wait, tell me the beginning of your question again? Cause my mind kind of darted around.

Audience member: How you have been using, infiltrating –

Laser: Yes.

Audience member: -- and re-appropriating tools of consumer research –

Laser: Yes. Um, it's again what I look at as this, um, re, this, um, use and abuse of, of, uh, therapy, which I guess I didn't get to talk about the *Convulsive States* project that much, but I really see it as therapy and the way we handle mental health as, um, a creative practice. That was invented by, Charcot was, supposedly wanted to go to the Beaux-Arts before he went to medicine. Um, and there's a, you know, and he was the teacher of Freud, and Tourette, uh, and really kind of the forefather of modern day psychology, neurology, and, um, to begin with, it's a, it was kind of these radical experimentation that was, that really crossed the line, and was also, uh, um, exploitative, and, um, you know, it's, I don't know if he was on drugs, but Freud definitely was on cocaine, and it's like, this is, it's not so different from the old school stories you hear about, uh, AbEx painters, or, you know, this archetype of the artist who, um, who innovates and, uh, tries, tries these things out, and is kind of culpable, and not, um, not all good, mostly bad, but there's, um, where, their, the impact is undeniable. So it's like, we can, uh, yeah, I felt, I feel like there's a kind of need to look at the social mores of, of the time that these things happened in – but anyhow, so, to begin with, psychology's questionable, and a, and a creative, collaborative, participatory practice. Right? Um, and, um, it's used, from moment one, pretty much to manipulate people.

And, um, yeah, I think this, um, I became interested in, again, these kind of interviews, with consumers, possible consumers, um, in order to, the focus group idea, and market research, to fine tune your, um, output and advertising to, um, maximum effect. You know, it's like, you, I think, I learned, um, earlier this year that the scrolling on our phones came from, was based on slot machines. And it's like, um, that's the kind of detail that gets me fired up, I suppose, the way, um, and it's sort of easy to just be like, that's fucked up, that's bad. It has some effects that we do not like, and that we would maybe like to combat, and they're highly affective, and it is, um, uh, art, it is aesthetics, and art, and performing arts that is being used to control and, um, dominate us in different ways. And, um, and it feels like, I suppose my constant return to this is sort of like, well can't we, as artists, um, we can do this better than they can, so how can we, um, get our hands in the mix more? And I have not solved that yet, but I think I've also sort of – yeah, fancied myself a journ, like an artist journalist slash artist market researcher, I suppose. Yeah.

Audience member: Yeah, since you access, like, a lot of, um, corporate, you know, documents, tools, resources, um, have you found any resistance in accessing these tools? Like, they're usually pretty difficult to come across.

Laser: I think, um, the most diffi – the biggest challenge was probably getting into that hospital, it did take nine months, because I, having a reputable journalist who can say I'm from, you know, *Sept à Huit*, and everyone knows it, they responded right away, the, you know, municipal PR firms that represent this, uh, hospital, responded quickly, but then when she's like, but it's an artist film, and they're just like, 'What are you talking about?' Eh – and so it did, um, that was the most challenging to get access to.

Um, the project you're talking about from last year, that I, this kind of digital residency research project at the Tate, um, that was much easier than I would have

expected, where I, um, cause it was just like a market research firm based in Croatia where it just, you hire, I got the Tate to hire them at a non-profit, uh, level rate, and, um, it basically tracks facial expressions, uh, through your webcam, and determines your emotion moment to moment, emotions moment to moment, so that, uh, advertisers, or producers of goods, can, uh, try to craft their pop-ups and their advertisements just so to get, you know, maximize their emotional, the emotional reaction that they want from you. So it was something that everyone who attended that kind of workshop presentation had to use – not, they didn't have to, but were encouraged to use this software, and kind of animation; I was able to work with a, um, computer science engineer to, um, lift it off of the image of the people, so it became a kind of emotional animation, and we did some eye move, uh, EMDR, I also had an EMDR person. Cause it was kind of, that was really more exploratory, it was like, well, if, is eye movement the next frontier in our navigation of the world wide web? Cause that's what, uh, Apple was claiming with their VR headset. And then I was sort of like, are they, if, if, uh, eye movement can, you know, disa, can undo trauma, uh, can't it also, you know, affect us in other ways? Eh, it, which, I didn't get a satisfactory response, it seemed like, uh, EMDR was the, seemingly the script for it, is just as effective, with or without this so-called bilateral stimulation where you work with the eyes. But it is a very, supposedly very effective, um, therapy, just not specifically because of the eye movement. But, there's still something there for me. And for all of us.

Yeah.

Audience member: Uh, thank you, Liz. I was wondering, how's your relation to the actors and performers you work with, like do you rehearse a lot before, um, do you create the text together, you research together – yeah.

Laser: It, it varies quite a bit. There's usually a collaborative development process, like, the one at the Pompidou, uh, Carisa, we, we did workshops with these two movement therapists, and I asked every, this, there were, since it was going on, the piece was gonna happen six, I think six days a week, for three weeks, I, and it needed three people, we had two teams, and so, um, we developed it through workshops where ev, I asked, um, everyone to work with two of the archetypes, and develop movement, um, in response to these therapy protocols, um, and so that was asking for a lot of, uh, collaboration and contribution for, for everyone involved.

And, and, uh, and then, yeah, sometimes there's not – I think it al, it almost always feels insufficient. Like I remember kind of, um, not arguing, cause I didn't want to argue, but have, debating with them, where I was like, can we just have fewer days of performance and more days of development? And, [laughs] and I remember having this issue where rehearsal, in French, is répétition, which is like repetition, and I was like, 'It's not repetition, if there's nothing to repeat. It [laughing] hasn't been developed yet, so, so your word for this is misleading!' But I, it didn't work. Um, yeah, so I just, I do the best I can with the res, the possibilities, um, and then, yeah, I mean, with that art handling project, that was quite collaborative, and we had a, again, we had a decent bit of rehearsing, but it was, we could never rehearse an eight-hour thing start to finish, so people definitely had to take a big leap

of faith. Cause, oh, we were mic'd the whole time, and, uh, yeah. Kind of purposefully under surveillance.

Daniel Bozhkov: Oh – can – can you? Okay.

Audience member: Um –

Laser: Mmhmm.

Bozhkov: -- thanks for the great lecture, Liz. Uh, I wanted to ask you, uh, you mentioned Artaud, and his critique of European theater was, uh, he was basically saying that theater became psychological literature, and lost its kind of connection to the primal –

Laser: Mmhmm.

Bozhkov: -- uh, connection to life and all that. And I was wondering, can you trace a bit more, um, that heritage, that lineage that kind of filters into your work.
[02:00:18]

Laser: Mmm –

Bozhkov: Um, if you would care –

Laser: Yeah.

Bozhkov: -- to say something more about that.

Laser: Thank you, Daniel, that's a great question. Yeah. Um, Artaud has this idea of the cry that's, um, transmitted from the performer to the audience, and in quite a visceral, embodied way, and I feel like embodiment wasn't on the tip of people's tongue in 2009 as much, so I really used his, his ideas, um, about, um, seeing someone in, receiving expression from, from a performer, that, um, is, um, authentic, is, um, deeply felt, and primal, but so it's a slippery one, cause it's like, what's – there's emotional memory, on the one hand, which I'm kind of citing as, um, um, more manipulative, but that is also deeply felt. Um, in some cases. Uh, so I think there's a rawness to his, his vision of theater, and this kind of, and it kinda harkens back to this more, uh, carnival-esque, uh, participatory model that, you know, even if, even if the spectators don't literally move and start crying – I think, I think, um, probably in his view, that would be the ideal, is that the cry is responded to with, with the cry. And so, yeah. I don't know if that, that answers it, but I think that kind of – yeah, it's something that I, through kind of trying to script it, which didn't quite work, my talk tonight, I was trying to get to the bottom of exactly this, like where the, um, representations of excessive emotionality, um, lands for me, cause I'm, I guess, yeah, I try. I still, even though it's always a spectrum, I still, you know, like that op-ed article, I was trying to make a distinction between something that's more the authentic end of the spectrum and something that's, um, that's a more fraudulent and cynical rendition of passion, of anger, of, um, of distress.

Mmhmm. Thank you so much for bearing with [applause] the long night! [applause, cheering]

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